

# KANOHI KI TE KANOHI – A THING OF THE PAST? EXAMINING THE NOTION OF “VIRTUAL” AHIKĀ AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR KANOHI KI TE KANOHI

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## 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*

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## 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 *Te Wai 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 fore. As part of the Crown reconciliation 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 *kōrero* (words, talk). It is essentially, a typically Māori way of communicating thoughts and perspectives and the *marae* space is where speeches on matters great and small are delivered by skilled orators. The *kōrero* 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, 2003). Both *kanohi ki te kanohi* and *kanohi kitea* are physical forms of interaction, engagement, and communication and are foundational principles for the many processes of *tikanga* Māori (Māori practices).

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 evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of becoming involved. (Cram and Pipi, 2000, p. 14)

Widely known Māori scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai 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), *manaakitanga* (hospitality), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship), and *whanaungatanga* (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 *rohe* 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 strives to do 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 and relationships with 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. 135)

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 co-requirement of all other rights to land” (Asher and Naulls, 1987, p. 22). Tinirau, Gillies, and Tinirau

(Tinirau et al., 2009) state that *whakapapa* qualifies an assertion of *ahikā*, “*Ahikā* (the burning home fires) refers to specific *whakapapa* (genealogical) connections, and active participation in aspects of residency, land ownership and utilization.” *Whakapapa* was important to the assertion of *ahikā*, and combined with physical occupation, productive use (often evidenced in cultivation) and *kaitiaki* (guardianship) responsibilities. Using resources from a specific area also indicated *ahikā* 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 places of remembrance or where customs and rituals were carried out. These processes recognized that *ahikā*, maintained by the inhabitants, was current and ongoing on that *whenua* (Sinclair, 1981; Smith, 1942; Tinirau et al. 2009). Friendly neighbouring *iwi* acknowledged the *ahikā* of those around them, ensuring mutual occupancy and usage rights were respected. If occupation ceased, for whatever reasons, the fire died out and claim to that *whenua* diminished and could be contested or supplanted (Kawharu, 1977).

Customary conceptions of *ahikā* are based around occupation and assertions of *mana whenua* by a *hapū* or *iwi* over generations. However, the establishment of the Native Land Court in 1865 (later renamed the Māori Land Court) imposed colonial practices that altered the concept and meaning of *ahikā*. Erueti (2004) writes that the most distorted redefining of customary practice was where the Courts provided equal allocation of lands to descendants (through *take tūpuna*, ancestral connection) despite them not maintaining *ahikā* on that parent’s inheritance. Thus, *take tūpuna* began to replace the concept of *ahikā* through passing down lands to descendants without a requirement for *ahikā*. This had severe impacts on customary practice and effectively negated the status of *ahikā* in relation to land inheritance.

Post World War II *ahikā* was heavily influenced by Māori urbanization (Tinirau et al., 2009) driven,

among other things, by Māori in search of new beginnings, employment, and education. Currently, 84 percent of Māori reside in urban areas, which often means that they are living away from their *ahikā* and ancestral lands. The separation of Māori from their lands over a number of generations has had devastating effects on the ability to claim identity and belonging to culturally vital ancestral locations.

*Ahikā* continues to resonate with its ancient meanings of use and occupation, but has developed in ways that present challenges to its practice. This is evidenced in many *marae* around the country, which have a small core group of people committed to continuity. *Whānau* and those who have moved away come and go, slotting into various roles when they can, with a resident core group at the centre. *Whānau* living away from home accept and acknowledge the core group as the *ahikā*. Tinirau et al. (2009, p. 14) describe the core group as “bearing the burden” for the rest who are unable to live at home and take on these roles for the betterment and development of their *marae* and *hapū*. A key challenge for those tending the *ahikā* is to bring back *whānau* to take on some of the responsibilities.

#### 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 *Aotearoa* 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, n.p). 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. Urbanization and international diaspora, two main causes for the diminishing occupancy of customary lands, raise concerns around how *ahikā* 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 *ahikā* 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

This paper will explore contemporary notions of *ahikā*, what it means for Māori living abroad in the 21st century, and how they maintain their *ahikā* from afar, with a particular focus on the use of SNS. More broadly, this investigation will theorize 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 networking sites and their impacts on *whānaungatanga* (relationships), *tuakiritanga* (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 (*ahikā* 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.

#### METHOD

This study uses a framework that was specifically developed for my doctoral thesis. The framework encompasses *kaupapa* Māori principles (Māori-based philosophies and values as a way of understanding) which provide a platform for Māori research to be conducted using distinct Māori cultural practices and a Māori world view (see Bishop, 1996; Cram, 1992; Moewaka Barnes, 2008; G.H. Smith, 1997; L.T. Smith, 1999). The framework is complemented by acknowledgment of my tribal upbringing in three Taranaki *iwi* (*Te Ati Awa*, *Ngāti Ruanui*, *Ngaruahine Rangī*) that uniquely contributes two fundamental teachings; *rangimārie* (peace, tranquillity) and *hūmārie* (humility, goodwill). *Te reo Māori me ōna tikanga* (Māori language and practices) constitute a third part of the framework where *te reo* is elevated and used to holistically understand Māori concepts.

The data in this paper comes from an anonymous online survey conducted with 139 Māori who (at the time) had been living abroad for 12 months and who used SNS. A test survey was conducted with fewer than 10 participants to ensure that the formatting of the online survey worked and submission of the completed survey was successful. Once this was completed, dissemination of the survey began. Survey participants were not contacted directly as the survey was anonymous. Instead, a link to the survey was shared through the researchers’ networks, asking friends, family, and colleagues to forward the link to people who might fit the criteria to complete a survey. Criteria included: Māori descent; 18 years or over; a user of SNS; lived outside of *Aotearoa* New Zealand for at least 12 months. The completed submissions involved 48 males and 91 females.

The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data using a combination of multichoice and short answer formats. It was designed to gauge a broader global context of how SNS affect Māori diaspora and their connections back home and to their family and friends. Survey respondents lived throughout the world including Australia, the UK, USA (including Hawai’i), Korea, South America, Norway, Japan, Scotland, United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, and Canada. Survey questions generally

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 impacts of SNS on maintaining *iwi*, *hapū*, and *whānau* relationships. The survey provides a rich data set about how SNS plays integral roles in the lives of Māori living abroad.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Application 11/30) in 2011. Thematic analysis was employed for its inductive orientation (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2012) to the patterns and variations at work in the talk of survey respondents. Some descriptive quantitative analysis is used to give a sense of frequency of response categories.

## ANALYSIS

As discussed earlier, *kanohi ki te kanohi* is an important part of Māori society cultural practice. Respondents were asked to describe what *kanohi ki te kanohi* meant to them. The detailed and rich responses provide this article with insights into how Māori living overseas experience and value *kanohi ki te kanohi*.

These perspectives give light to the importance of *kanohi ki te kanohi* even for those who live at considerable distance from their *haukāinga* (local people of the *marae*, home people). In the following sections, I highlight some of the challenges and successes that SNS provides to Māori living abroad as they seek to maintain *ahikā* from a distance.

Being Māori is physical. It engages all your senses. To feel the warmth of someone's *hongī*. To taste the tears of happiness/sadness and to see *pukana* [dilating the eyes, to stare intensely], hear *mīhi/waiata* [speeches of greetings and songs], smell the *kai* [food] that *ringa wera* [kitchen hands] prepare captures your pride in your identity. (Female; aged 26–35)

Being in the presence of someone else ... seeing their face. (Female; aged 26–35)

Being there means much more, there's no text book on things that you learn from your elders. (Female; aged 26–35)

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* (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, *tauheke* [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 *tauheke* while learning the *wairua*; *aroha* [love], *pono* [belief] and *tika* [true, correct] of *ngā mahi ā 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 older generation who prefer *kanohi ki te kanohi* ... the younger generation not so much. (Female; aged 36–45)

It means my family gets to see my children who were both born in the UK and have never been to NZ. (Female; aged 36–45)

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

## MAINTAINING AHIKĀ FROM AFAR

One respondent provided the following description of *ahikā* “*ahikā* refers to having an active caretaker and/or participator role within your tribal/sub-tribal areas and/or *marae*.” The survey asked for respondent 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 *koha* (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 *rūnanga* [*iwi/hapū* organization] (and other) FB (Facebook) pages. (Female; aged 46–55)

They give you the sense that you're near or close to your *haukāinga*. 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 question. (Female; aged 26–35)

I cannot be there in person; so my input is of value to maintain the communication line. Through this I can monitor and view the participants; observe the body language and oversee the purpose of the meeting. Provide assistance where possible and offer up my contribution and support to the agenda. (Female; aged 46–55)

By knowing what is happening with land issues and meetings, *whānau* from overseas can travel back to meetings and can make the decision to move back to help *whānau* easier when they know what is happening. (Female; aged 46–55)

As described above, respondents saw the communication and connection as enabling mutual responsibilities to be met.

### Having a voice

Respondents described the importance of having a say on issues which they understood would have far-reaching implications for them and their families. However, engaging in decision-making processes at *iwi*, *hapū*, and/or *marae* level can be daunting and challenging, particularly if participants have not maintained a working and healthy relationship with the *haukāinga*. The following respondent comments about the importance of relationships and respect that is necessary when exercising *ahikā*.

It allows you to keep abreast of new happenings and developments in your physical absence, thus providing a platform for you to make suggestions or confirm or decline to support certain issues or events. You have a voice (as long as you are respected), despite not standing on the *paepae* [orator's bench] or *marae*. (Male; 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 setup a FB *roopu* page [Facebook group page] and began fundraising, sent the money back.... The *whānau* at home were able to see what we were doing and how we were progressing. (Male; aged 36–45)

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 *haukāinga*. 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 *ahikā* through virtual methods.

#### Koha

Another way of maintaining virtual *ahikā* 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 *tino pai* [very good]. It’s [SNS] the easiest and fastest way for the *marae* to send out *pānui* [information] and really cost efficient for our *marae*. (Female; aged 26–35)

[We’re] 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 payment 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 *ahikā* and the life of their communities, back home.

I feed my tribe information about how the oil spills in America are affecting the coast shores 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 *ahikā*. (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 *ahikā*. Despite the lack of *kanohi ki te kanohi* 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 36–45)

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

#### MAINTAINING AHIKĀ KANOHI KI TE KANOHI

SNS did not help 20 percent of respondents (52 people) to maintain a virtual sense of *ahikā*. Comments were that *ahikā* cannot be maintained through virtual connections and can only be practised *kanohi ki te kanohi*. 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 *ahikā*.

Personally I feel that the true meaning of *kanohi ki te kanohi* 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 presence 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 love, 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 “*kanohi ki te kanohi*.” (Female; aged 46–55)

Respondents felt that *kanohi ki te kanohi* was irreplaceable and that the value and importance of being physically present should remain a priority for Māori. However, there was an acceptance and acknowledgement that SNS provided 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 (*kanohi ki te kanohi*) was of utmost importance to these respondents.

Everyone will drift apart and never connect if everything is done on site [online] where as *kanohi*

*ki te kanohi* 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 *kanohi ki te kanohi* interactions encompass *wairua* (spirit, spiritual) and *mauri* (life force, life principle) aspects that are experienced in physical contexts. The idea that “*kanohi ki te kanohi* is straight upfront” suggests that there is no hiding behind computer screens and aliases that might otherwise shield you from the physical dimension that *kanohi ki te kanohi* provides. *Kanohi kitea*, or the seen face is indicative of *ahikā*, 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 *ahikā*. For these participants, the idea of *kanohi ki te kanohi* is crucial to being able to maintain some form of *ahikā* and thus, one’s *ahikā* from afar was seen as *not possible* through SNS.

This respondent describes a virtual *hongī*, 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 it’ll do for now until we see them again.... (Male; aged 46–55)

While physical *kanohi ki te kanohi* 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 are experienced when *kanohi ki te kanohi* 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 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 simplistic in nature. I 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 cannot replicate or 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 *ahikā*.

We are spiritual people and without breath and physical presence it compromises our entire belief system. Social networking has its place for Māori up to a point mainly as an information tool. (Female; aged 26–35)

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 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 *ahikā*, 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/marae/iwi*, keeps the *ahikā* burning because I also believe the *ahikā* 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 *ahikā*, which she felt was a part of and connected to her; “the *ahikā* 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 36–45)

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 *ahikā* 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 *haukāinga*. 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, managed, 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 Aussie 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 Mozzie (Māori Australian) is in the corner *ktk* [*kaha 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 in-

clusive 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 closer 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 so 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 *haukāinga* 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 *ahikā* 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 dislocate people from their Māori communities, SNS provides some means of connection to allow people to contribute to the *ahikā* of home. What is abundantly clear in the data is that people are expressing their contribution to *ahikā* 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 *ahikā* 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 re-

placed by virtual means. Being present on the *marae* was discussed as a powerful experience for some respondents who connected to the *wairua* and *mauri* that, 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 *haukāinga*, 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 diaspora would be less well served.

#### RECONCEPTUALIZING *AHIKĀ*

The multiplicity of meanings for *ahikā* and the processes for maintaining *ahikā* are changing and evolving with the use of technology. The redefinition of *ahikā* by Māori living, working, and raising their families outside of Aotearoa New Zealand and away from their *tūrangawaewae* adds complexity to debates about connections to place. *Ahikā* continues to connect people to their *whenua*. These connections are maintained in diverse ways and SNS plays an important, if partial, role in this process. This research could be extended to ascertain what *marae*, *hapū*, and *iwi* communities think about the emergence and effects of virtual *ahikā*.

More importantly, redefining what *ahikā* means may have potential impacts and consequences on issues to do with rights and ownership of resources, assets, lands, and waterways. *Ahikā* as a concept is being redefined and expanded with potential impacts on land claims between *hapū*, *iwi*, and government as well as boundary and resource disputes amongst *iwi*. In ownership and/or rights to land, *ahikā* is an important concept that is considered

and debated when it comes to claims against the Crown. The expansion of the definition of *ahikā* from the Native Land Court had severe impacts on rights to land. Virtual forms of contributing to *ahikā* may also have wide reaching implications. Evidently, definitions of *ahikā* 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 *tūrangawaewae* and away from their *whenua*. 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 *ahikā* are complex, dynamic, and constantly evolving. As Tinirau argues, “the *ahikā*” — 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 *haukāinga*, the *ahikā*. Without *haukāinga* or *ahikā* tending to these duties, the life of the *marae* would be lost, and *tikanga* and values would also be lost. The distinction between being *ahikā* and contributing to *ahikā* can be seen in this example where the *haukāinga* collectively work together to look after and nurture the *marae* (and therefore, the *whenua*). They are considered the *ahikā*. Virtual *ahikā* then, is the contribution and supporting of the *ahikā* (*haukāinga*) at home, by those who are away from their *tūrangawaewae*.

Maintaining *ahikā* in this study is about keeping connected and informed, having a voice at meetings, 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 *ahikā* from afar, requiring a negotiation of how *kanohi ki te kanohi* is considered, applied and practised. However, these methods of *ahikā* maintenance are not possible unless the *haukāinga* and *ahikā* of home endorse these practi-

ces and support those living abroad to find alternative means to contribute back to home.

#### NEGOTIATING *KANOHI KI TE KANOHI* AND SNS

For some, *kanohi ki te kanohi* is irreplaceable and SNS cannot facilitate linkages and connections that *ahikā* 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 cohesion of Māori society. The economic climate and better financial opportunities that exist offshore continue to beckon our people and virtual forms of *ahikā* will inevitably begin to spread and increase as Māori seek ways to stay connected to the source, to the *haukāinga*.

What lies at the heart of this paper is the notion of *kanohi ki te kanohi*, its importance for various Māori communities and how we may practice *kanohi ki te kanohi* in new and innovative ways. Contribution to *ahikā* through virtual pathways, allows participation and support of the *haukāinga* 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 *haukāinga*, 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 *ahikā*. This is a testament to the adaptive flexibility 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 uplifted. The heart of the issue is multidimensional; the yearning and desire to go home are much easier to deal with when virtual connections are satisfying 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 *ahikā* can be augmented from beyond the *marae* by the diaspora means that they can fulfil at least some of their roles of leadership 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 connections 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 maintain the values and practices handed down from our *tūpuna*. The *marae* is the stronghold of tribal identities and knowledge systems, which will always have a place in Māori society, as long as technologies work to facilitate and connect people to the *haukāinga* 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 integrity and potency of our culture, values and practices.

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