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Māori Decolonization Through the Te Tīmatanga Haka¹

I am not a New Zealander, nor a Māori, nor am I even an Indigenous person in my home country of Canada. However, I am a man who has fallen in love with the sport of rugby. As anyone involved with the sport knows, the Māori All Blacks is a legendary rugby team that cannot be ignored by the sporting world. It is important to recognize the distinction between the New Zealand All Blacks and the team being examined in this paper: namely, the Māori All Blacks. The New Zealand All Blacks consists of Pākehā (non-Indigenous New Zealanders), while all players on the Māori All Blacks have Māori lineage (Nairn 248). The Te Tīmatanga Haka that the Māori All Blacks perform is a trademark that differentiates them from any other rugby team. The haka is an iconic part of rugby and demonstrates that the sport means more than just what happens during the eighty minutes of play.

The Indigenous Māori people of New Zealand, which is known to the Māori as Aotearoa, have a complex historical relationship with the sport of rugby. New Zealand and the Māori have been colonized by Europeans since the mid-18th century. Along with other forms of colonization, Europeans brought the sport of rugby to the Polynesian islands. Before each rugby game, the Māori All Blacks perform the Te Tīmatanga Haka in their Indigenous language of Māori. The Te Tīmatanga Haka is significant because it acknowledges Māori indigeneity and the culture represented through this distinctive performance. The Māori All Blacks have created a new identity for Māori people by using the originally English sport of rugby as an expression of Māoriness. In this essay, I will argue that this Māori identity emerges not only through the inclusion of the Te Tīmatanga Haka at the beginning of the Māori All Blacks' rugby games, but also through the telling of the Māori creation story and the cultural genealogy that the words represent.

The Te Tīmatanga Haka contains many elements of the Māori creation story. The incorporation of the creation story into the haka shows the importance of Māori cultural history and ancestors to both the players and to the Māori community. The beginning of the Te Tīmatanga Haka has been translated in the following manner:

<i>I te tīmatanga</i>	<i>In the beginning</i>
<i>Ko te kore</i>	<i>there was nothing</i>
<i>Ko te pō nui</i>	<i>the big darkness</i>
<i>Ko te pō roa</i>	<i>the long darkness ("Tīmatanga")</i>

¹ Thank you to my family, my girlfriend, and Dr. Teresa Hubel, professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Huron University College, for consistently supporting me in completing this paper. Dr. Teresa Hubel has inspired me to not only learn more about Indigenous people in Canada, but also those around the world.

For Māori people, creation starts with a darkness caused by Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother) holding each other tightly (Tau).

The second section of the haka describes the physical separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku from each other, an act which brings light brought into the world:

<i>Wehenga Mātua</i>	<i>The separation of Rangi and Papa</i>
<i>Herenga Tāngata</i>	<i>formed man/people and all living things</i>
<i>He toa Rangatahi</i>	<i>formation of young warriors</i>
<i>He toa Rangatira</i>	<i>formation of young Chiefs (“Timatanga”)</i>

This section fundamentally describes the creation story for the Māori people. After many efforts from Ranginui and Papatūānuku’s children – Rongo-mā-Tāne (god of kūmara), Tangaroa (god of the oceans), Haumia-tiketike (god of uncultivated food) and Tūmataurangi (god of war) – to separate them, only one child could do so, Tāne Māhuta, (god of the forest). Tāne Māhuta is able to separate Ranginui and Papatūānuku by lying on his back and pushing up with the strength of his legs. He pushes Ranginui, his father, high above and leaves Papatūānuku below (Tau). Tāne Māhuta then creates the first woman, Hine-ahu-one (Tau). This is interesting when compared to the Genesis story, in which Adam (a male) is created first. After Adam Eve is created from his rib. Like the Māori creation story, some such stories from the Indigenous peoples of North America contain a maternal creator as well, who is occasionally known as the Sky Women. In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King compares the creation stories of Native North Americans and Christians. He states that the Native North American creation story, with a female creator at its centre, emphasizes cooperation, while Christianity tells the tale of an angry creator God who oppresses, dominates, and punishes his human creations. The Māori creation story has a connection to the Native North American story through the placement of female figures at the beginning and through interrelationships between the beings involved in creation. Within the Native North American story, Sky Women and the animals support each other and fashion the earth through collaboration. Similarly, the Māori story shows the children of the gods helping Ranginui and Papatūānuku to form the earth. Both stories suggest that cooperation, rather than domination, is considered a strength in Native North American and Māori cultures.

Young warriors and chiefs are mentioned at the end of the second section of the haka, demonstrating a larger societal connection to leadership in Māori communities. Remembering and celebrating the past are important activities in Native North American and Māori cultures. However, for these communities, looking to the future is just as meaningful. In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the importance for Māori communities of developing a space for leaders to be shaped. The representation of warriors and chiefs in the Te Timatanga Haka demonstrates Smith’s point. The Māori All Blacks represent a vital symbol in the Māori community, a fact which suggests that this team and this haka are not just about sport, but about something larger regarding Māori activism for equality and respect for the Indigenous people of Aotearoa.

The third section of the haka promotes the achievement of goals and the confronting of challenges:

<i>Whakakī ki te Maunga</i>	<i>If you aim for the mountains</i>
<i>Tae ki te Whenua</i>	<i>you will hit the plains</i>
<i>Hoki ki te Rangi</i>	<i>if you aim for the sky</i>
<i>Tae ki te Pukerunga</i>	<i>you will hit the mountain peaks (“Timatanga”)</i>

The Māori All Blacks team has dealt with many trials over the years: from the bringing together of many different people into one unified team to competing against other national rugby teams, and this is unique as, while they are not New Zealand’s top team, they play against the top teams of other countries. The Māori All Blacks team also has to consistently contest Pākehā societal views and re-establish the significance of Māori expression and culture. A way in which Māori peoples, including the players, connect with their ancestors and stay strong in their Māoriness is through the ancestral *Maunga* (mountain) in Auckland. This is referenced in the haka and represents a symbol from which the players can draw strength (Tau). Furthermore, the desire to rise to the top of the mountain takes on a sacredness because such a desire brings one closer to Ranginui (Tau). We can see, therefore, that the words of the Te Timatanga are not just about the competition or the challenge of a rugby game ahead, but rather function as a beacon for active and retired Māori All Blacks from which they can take strength. This strength will serve to provide guidance in overcoming everyday challenges outside of the sport (“Timatanga”).

The final section of the haka looks to the future as well as to the spiritual growth and knowledge development of Māori players:

<i>Piki ake piki ake</i>	<i>climb up, thrive</i>
<i>Ki te ara poutama</i>	<i>to the pathway of knowledge</i>
<i>Ki ngā taumatatanga e</i>	<i>to achieve excellence</i>
<i>Wairua, Hinengaro, Tinana</i>	<i>spiritually, mentally, physically (“Timatanga”)</i>

The physically grueling sport of rugby is constantly stereotyped by spectators as a sport in which players aimlessly smash into each other. This section of the haka counters that notion, suggesting that achieving spiritual and mental fitness is just as important as physical fitness. The haka seems to be implying that there are always developments to be made to a player’s skill set, by overcoming, for instance, psychological barriers or optimizing physical potential. There is also a crucial step for the Māori All Blacks that connects to core of the team, namely, each player’s whakapapa (genealogy). When players are selected to become part of the Māori All Blacks, each player’s whakapapa is validated by the team kaumātua (tribal elder), and every member of the squad recites their whakapapa to identify his genealogical links and to unite the team (Tau). The recitation of an individual’s whakapapa exposes that player to the whole team in a way that demonstrates trust, acceptance and respect. When these qualities are expressed between teammates and staff, the performance of a team has the potential to grow exponentially. Furthermore, by reciting their whakapapa, the players are bringing the might and antiquity of their ancestors to their games. The whakapapa of each player shows how he has a lineage of strong men and women who support him in his efforts to achieve success. Therefore,

the haka is not simply a performance to get the crowd excited, but rather a deeply rooted and sacred ceremony for the players and their families.

In their article, "Truth, Reconciliation, and the Politics of the Body in Indian Residential School History," Evan J. Habkirk and Janice Forsyth discuss how sport and military drill were used to discipline the bodies of Indigenous children in Canadian residential schools. Specifically, they were methods to give boys structure and to make them not Indian. Habkirk and Forsyth explain that "[sport and military drill] were designed not to instill Aboriginal pride among the students, but rather, to break down their cultural ties and identities by cultivating a new sense of self-awareness structured by Euro-Canadian ideas about how the body should be used..." (Habkirk & Forsyth). The nuns and priests forced the children to play North American sports such as hockey. Specifically, the boys of the residential schools were required to play in tournaments, which were "much more than a sporting competition" since they were used by administrators "to confirm that under the proper conditions and with careful training, residential school students could be assimilated into the public school system" (Habkirk & Forsyth). These tournaments also created an opportune time to make the idea of Indigenous people seem less frightening to white Canadians by presenting these misunderstood peoples playing hockey, a sport with which the vast of Canadians are familiar and comfortable. By taking these Indigenous children out of their home cultures and placing them in typically white Canadian clothes and forcing on them colonial mannerisms and practices, settlers could feel more at ease with them. This colonial disciplining of the body also suggested to the Indigenous children that hockey and military drill were superior to any other physical activity or games they might have played previously. I would further argue that when an Indigenous boy is born and raised in the wilderness of Northern Ontario until he is seven years old, which is the age at which many of these children were taken from their families, he already has had his body disciplined by his own family. He may have been taught how to move for the purposes of hunting or how to dance at powwows. When these bodily disciplines are replaced with others that are imposed by settler institutions, cultural bodily expressions such as the "the Potlatch and Sun Dance ceremonies, which were vital cultural practices for Aboriginal people" are hindered (Habkirk & Forsyth). Taking these young impressionable children away from their families and "dramatically alter[ing] their entire ways of life, from gender relations, to economic transactions and exchange networks, to spirituality" is an all too familiar method of colonizing indigenous people, and not only in Canada (Habkirk & Forsyth). These traditional physical activities are ingrained into the muscle memory of Indigenous children and when they are denied the right to perform them, a negative snowball effect can occur: when these children are grown, they are likely to struggle with re-establishing their cultural practices and identity.

Sadly, New Zealand and Canada share a dark history of mistreating their Indigenous peoples. Similar to Indigenous children in Canada, Māori children were forced into missionary schools around the country as a means of British assimilation. These schools imposed Christianity, English, and an imperialist way of life onto Māori communities through their children (Jenkins & Matthews 86), who were assimilated not only by the imposition of a shift in their views, but also in their actions. Māori children's bodies, particularly girl's bodies, were disciplined through enforced physical behavior. To make Māori girls conform to patriarchal power, "girl pupils...learn[ed] instrumental music and household duties..." (Rawinia and

Meredith). The alteration in their behavior served as a colonization of the body and undermined their cultural roots. Michel Foucault describes the influence that disciplining the body has through his theory about 'biopower'. 'Biopower' refers to "the ways in which power manifests itself in the form of daily practices and routines through which individuals engage in self-surveillance and self-discipline, and thereby subjugate themselves" (Pylypa 21). Foucault's theory can be used to understand the importance of the performance of the Te Tīmatanga Haka before each game. This repetition shows the influence the haka has on the decolonization of the Māori body.

The gestures associated with the Te Tīmatanga Haka are physical movements that overtly oppose the Empire and colonialism. The bodily expression of the haka is a proclamation of Māoriness. Therefore, when the Māori All Blacks use their bodies to perform the Te Tīmatanga Haka, they reassert the ownership they have over their bodies and acknowledge the physical expression of their culture. This resistance to colonial control is even more heightened since the Māori All Blacks perform this haka before a rugby game, which is a colonizer sport that was brought to New Zealand by Europeans. By performing the Te Tīmatanga Haka before each game, the Māori players are involved in an act of decolonization, since they are using a sport that was brought to New Zealand with the Empire, and they are inserting distinctive Māori bodily gestures into it.

Being an outsider to this culture, I have adopted Linda Tuhiwai Smith's concept that we have to approach Indigenous texts with humility and that one of the ways to do this is to acknowledge our subject position since, by doing so, we are admitting that our understanding is necessarily limited by the fact that we aren't Indigenous ourselves. The performance of the Te Tīmatanga Haka is often admired, but the meaning behind the words and actions is commonly misunderstood by those outside Māori communities. When I first saw the haka, I assumed that the gestures indicated that the words were about war and bloodshed. I was surprised when I first read the translation and learned that the Māori creation story was the focal point of the haka. The haka does not contain any violent language at all, which might create some sense of incongruity for many non-Maori people who watch it being performed. The bodily movements and gestures of the Te Tīmatanga Haka do function as a form of intimidation. It is a war haka, as is shown through the body language of the players, particularly when "they aim to psychologically intimidate their opponent with pūkana (dilated eyes) and whētero (protruding tongues)" (Smith, V). The use of pūkana and whētero also shows just how much passion and commitment the Māori All Black players put into the haka. The significance of having an oral and a physical representation of the Te Tīmatanga Haka is that both suggest different aspects of Māori culture. Although there might be some seeming incongruity in the humble meaning of the words while the gestures portray aggression, this incongruity exposes the complexity of the Māori culture. Furthermore, the haka's visual and verbal expressions reveal the importance for non-Māori people of doing the work to discover more about this culture to fully understand its full significance. The media tends to portray the haka as merely a dance that shows the muscularity of these men, but this representation does an injustice to the complexity and cultural connection the Te Tīmatanga Haka has for the Māori people.

Not only is the physical presentation of the Te Tīmatanga Haka significant, but so is its oral expression. The use of Māori language on the rugby field is another way that the Te Tīmatanga and the Māori All Blacks reassert the importance of their culture. Marlene Nourbese

Philip's essay entitled "Caribbean English in The Absence of Writing" shows the weight of language for a colonized people. According to Philip, the African people of the Caribbean were stripped of their language and forced to speak English. To counter this act of colonization, they used African sounds, rhythm, and inflections, turning English into a language that could speak to who they were and about where they originated. The changes they made created a language that "bears the living linguistic legacy of people trying and succeeding in giving voice to their experience" (Philip 49). English is a fundamentally racist language since it is the language of the British colonizer. Philip makes the argument that, in the face of not having a language, the African people of the Caribbean made English into a language that their colonizers did not understand, ultimately making English their own (Philip 49). She asserts that colonized people do not simply receive British imperialist values, language, norms, and institutions, but that they alter them and make them new. Similarly, the oral expression of the haka being inserted into the game of rugby exemplifies the creation of something new from imperialist efforts to destroy an Indigenous culture. Prior to New Zealand's colonization, hakas were typically performed before tribal battles (Jackson & Hokowhitu 128-129). However, by importing the haka onto the rugby field, the Māori All Blacks altered this once-colonizer sport, and, like the speakers of Caribbean English who made the language speak to their own experiences as Africans, transformed it to make it express and celebrate Māori culture.

Rugby was introduced to the Māori people as a tool of colonization, which the Māori then turned into a tool of their resistance to colonization and a tool through which they can showcase their performance art, the Te Tīmatanga Haka, and their cultural values. Ever since Wirihihana, the first Māori to play rugby in 1872, Māori players have faced racism and prejudice ("Māori rugby timeline"). The creation of a Māori rugby team in the late 19th century was a progressive step for Māori people, but soon exposed new forms of discrimination against the Māori people. With the expansion and skill of Māori rugby, it was inevitable that these players would tour and compete with international teams, even though many Pākehā were resistant to this acceptance of Māori rugby players into the Pākehā sporting sphere. Joe Warbrick, a man whose parents were Pākehā and Māori, made the monumental decision that the British rugby tour in 1888 was going to showcase the talent of Māori players. Warbrick put forward an all Māori team to play a touring British team for the first time in New Zealand history. This game gave Warbrick the "idea of 'beating the British at their own game', thereby demonstrating the worth of his *taha Māori* (Māori side)" (Hokowhitu 2317). The movement towards the acceptance of Māori rugby was stalled when it was decided that the team was in need of a couple Pākehā players to increase its skill level, as there were supposedly not enough good Māori players available. This expression of narrow-mindedness by the all Pākehā New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU) was just one example of the prejudice that Māori players would face for many more years to come, as Brendan Hokowhitu explains in his article "Māori Rugby and Subversion: Creativity, Domestication, Oppression and Decolonization."

The systematic racism directed at the Māori All Blacks is evident through the lack of validation they receive from the NZRFU, the governing body of rugby in New Zealand. While support for the Māori All Blacks from the NZRFU has never been strong, a clear example of blatant discrimination against the team was their exclusion from a tour to South Africa. During the mid-1950s, sport in South Africa was racially segregated because of Apartheid. This separation of black and white teams influenced not only the non-white people in South Africa

but all other sporting nations (Calabrò 402). As the Māori All Blacks prepared to tour South Africa and show their rugby flare to the world, their own NZRFU would not stand up for them in defiance of South Africa's Rugby Union's racist views. The solidarity that one might expect from one's own governing organization was nowhere to be found. Instead, the NZRFU accepted South Africa's racial segregation policy. After more than sixty years of having Māori rugby in New Zealand and forty years of Maoris being a part of the NZRFU, the NZRFU disallowed Māori players from touring to play against the South African team. The argument used to justify this racist ban was that the NZRFU did not want to impose New Zealand's egalitarian views upon South Africa's apartheid system (Hokowhitu 2321-2322). The fact that the New Zealand All Blacks, a Pākehā team, were able to play South Africa many times before and after Apartheid with the full support of the NZRFU shows the lack of commitment and solidarity that the NZRFU had for Māori players and culture.

More recently, in 2008, the NZRFU once again showed their refusal to respect the importance of Māori players and Māori culture in New Zealand. The Māori All Blacks were not chosen to assemble in the Pacific Nations Cup in 2009. They were instead replaced by the Junior All Blacks, a Pākehā team, because of a decision from the NZRFU. ("No NZ Māori team for 2009"). Clearly, Māori rugby, which provides a conduit for Māori cultural expression, was not a key priority in the collective thinking of the NZRFU. Yet the impact that Māori rugby has had in the overall success of rugby in New Zealand is enormous. In the most recent 2015 Rugby World Cup, seven Māori, including Codie Taylor, Dane Coles, Aaron Smith, TJ Perenara, Tawera Kerr-Barlow, Nehe Milner-Skudder and Liam Messam, became champions with the New Zealand All Blacks (Tiananga). This achievement by the players is just a glimpse of the kind of proficiency that is developed through the Māori All Blacks and suggests how skillful Māori players are overall.

There is some hope for the rekindling of the relationship between the NZRFU and the Māori All Blacks. In 2010 the NZRFU made the following public statement: "we apologize to the families of those players and to the wider Maori community who were affected...by the decisions taken to not include Maori players for those teams and tours. ...the respect of New Zealand Maori rugby was not upheld and that is deeply regretted" ("NZRU-Statement of Apology"). For many Māori, this statement comes far too late, but is still a step in the right direction. However, the Māori All Blacks are being increasingly acknowledged by Pākehā as well as by the global sporting community. In 2010, a jersey with a visual representation of the Te Tīmatanga was created for the Māori All Blacks team in commemoration of the one-hundredth year of Māori rugby. That same year, the New Zealand Post introduced a postage stamp with the centenary design. The image below shows the front and back of the jersey with numbered areas working to explain the Māori creation story (for example, the separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku is shown at number one). The creation of this centenary jersey is a tangible symbol of the decolonization that the Te Tīmatanga Haka has enacted. Perhaps more importantly, this jersey represents yet another way in which the Māori All Blacks recognize their ancestors.



(Tau)

With the expansion of rugby globally, the advancements in technology, and the excellence of the Māori All Blacks, the haka is growing increasingly well-known. This bodily demonstration of Māoriness has become universalized to the point where it is beginning to represent a more general New Zealandness. Now, instead of Māori bodies needing to learn the colonizer's physical movements, the bodily knowledge of the Māori is spreading to more Pākehās. This education is one of the most effective ways of realizing decolonization and is leading to a greater understanding of the Māori by Pākehās in New Zealand. Furthermore, the performance of the haka does not stop at the borders of New Zealand, but has spread to other Melanesian and Polynesian islands. For example, when the Māori All Blacks toured Fiji in 1938, their haka was performed before the game, causing a situation in which the Fijian team had no unified team response. This moment of curiosity and intrigue caused the Ratu Bola, a team made up entirely of Indigenous Fijians, to create the Cibi (Dewey 160). The creation and performance of the Cibi allowed the Fijian team to use the rugby playing field as a place on which to express their own culture, just as the Māori All Blacks had previously done.

The sport of rugby was brought to New Zealand by European colonizers and used as a tool of oppression, but the Māori people have taken rugby and made into a sport in which they thrive and a vehicle through which they can represent their culture proudly. The future of the Māori All Blacks is strong, as support grows each year not only because of the phenomenal player base but as a result of the unique cultural representation they embody. The Māori All Blacks also set an excellent example for younger Māori youth in New Zealand. For many athletes, high school is a turning point in their development, which is why players like Joe Royal of the Māori All Blacks visit schools such as Tarawera in Kawerau. There is also a pathway to the Māori All Blacks team for Māori players through programs such as E Tu Rangatahi which “keep[s] teens in the game while helping them build on their skills, including life skills, values, nutrition and exercise” (“Surprise Visit for Kawerau Students”). One of the most effective programs is the Under-18 Māori All Blacks team, which was created with the goal of transforming players into Māori All Blacks caliber players. The Te Tīmatanga Haka is a physical and verbal demonstration to Māori youth that Māoriness is something to be celebrated.

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