



**MĀORI  
TELEVISION**

**THE FIRST TEN YEARS**

**JO SMITH**

## A history of the first ten years of Māori Television – its growth, its challenges and its unique contribution to New Zealand media culture.

Established in 2004, Māori Television has had a major impact on the New Zealand broadcasting landscape. But over the past year or so, the politics of Māori Television have been brought to the foreground of public consciousness, with other media outlets tracking Māori Television's search for a new CEO, allegations of editorial intervention and arguments over news reporting approaches to Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust.

Based on a Marsden Grant and three years of interviews with key stakeholders – staff, the Board, other media, politicians, funders and viewers – this is a deep account of Māori Television in its first ten years. Jo Smith argues that today's arguments must be understood within a broader context shaped by non-Māori interests. Can a Māori broadcaster follow both tikanga and the Broadcasting Standards Authority? Is it simply telling the news in Māori, or broadcasting the news with a Māori perspective? How can it support te reo Māori at the same time as appeal to all New Zealand? How does it function as the voice of its Māori stakeholders?

Offering five frameworks to address the challenges of a Māori organisation working within a wider non-Māori context, this is a solidly researched examination of Māori Television's unique contribution to the media cultures of Aotearoa New Zealand.

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## Chapter One

# The Long Struggle for Māori Television

In 1972, Hana Jackson organised a petition to Parliament and it was an obvious place for us to go, to support Māori Language Day and Māori Language Week. As part of that activity, we had lots of discussion about the power of the media and how Māori were not valued, not only Māori language, but Māori people and Māori tikanga. So lots of discussion about the power of the media, and in 1978 we took another petition to Parliament, requesting that a Māori television production unit be established and that it should start producing a twenty-minute *Country Calendar* type programme, which became *Koha*. (C. Dewes, interview, 2012)

One cannot understand the impact and significance of Māori Television without understanding the longer history of Indigenous struggle in this country. Māori have been at the forefront of media activism in Aotearoa New Zealand for more than four decades, with the 1840 Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) the mobilising force. Article II of the Treaty guarantees that the New Zealand government, as one of the two Treaty partners, is responsible for protecting and promoting all things held dear to Māori: ‘taonga’. Media activists have argued that te reo and tikanga Māori constitute important taonga of Māori society and thus are protected under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Given these roots, Māori broadcasting is directly linked to strategies of language and cultural revitalisation, and to issues of equitable Māori representation as a partner to Te Tiriti. As long-standing Māori educator Cathy Dewes (Te Arawa, Ngāti Porou)\* suggests in the quotation above, the power

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\* This book includes iwi affiliations only for those who participated in the research and who agreed to having this information included.

of the media plays a crucial role in shoring up a sense of self and collective identity. If language is the cornerstone of a people's way of being, and if that language is not heard on a daily basis through media outlets and in everyday conversation, how can a people thrive? If the perspectives shown on television, heard on radio and filtered through feature films are resoundingly non-Māori, what does this do to the status of te reo and the many different values, norms and practices embedded in the language that help constitute diverse Māori worlds? Joris de Bres of the Human Rights Commission has argued that 'the right to language is a vital human right, because it goes to the very heart of a person's identity and culture. It is vital for the realisation of people's cultural, civil, political, social and economic rights' (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2011a, p. 21). Many generations of Māori have struggled to make the Crown fulfil its obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These struggles have come at personal and financial cost to Māori, and the struggles continue today.

Cathy Dewes's reflections on political strategies in the 1970s relate to present-day circumstances. According to Dewes, *Koha* (a 30-minute Māori magazine programme that emerged in 1980) was initially devised as a style of television that might appeal to 'heartland New Zealand', in the same way as the long-running television series *Country Calendar*, which covers rural life in Aotearoa. One tactic at the time was to think of how Māori perspectives and language might infiltrate the 'white man's house' and become a normalised and everyday part of the life of the nation. In a single-channel era where channel surfing was not yet an established norm, Dewes describes an incident associated with Māori Language Week activities:

On television, a Pākehā student of Māori language was engaged to provide continuity in Māori during Māori Language Week. We knew that there would be a huge backlash from the Pākehā rednecks so we consciously, deliberately chose a Pākehā in order to show them that this was not just a Māori thing, that Pākehā were convinced of the value of te reo Māori as well. Because that was a huge invasion into their homes, a Māori-speaking person in their sitting rooms. They had nowhere else to go unless they switched it off or muted her, even though she was on for such a short time. (C. Dewes, interview, 2012)

Dewes's comments suggest that stealth tactics were a necessary feature of political strategies at the time, and that dealing with a large non-Māori majority was a crucial factor in attempts to advance Māori causes. Accordingly,

getting non-Māori to engage with the language was an important part of language survival strategies.

Although New Zealand television culture has experienced significant shifts in attitudes towards te reo Māori since the 1970s, as well as technological shifts from a single-channel era to an era of digital plenty, there are interesting parallels between the 1970s strategies suggested by Dewes and the way in which former CEO of Māori Television Jim Mather (Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tūhoe; CEO from 2005–2013) described Māori Television in 2013.

In an article titled ‘From Political Football to Part of the Furniture’, Mather noted that two-thirds of the viewers who watch Māori Television are not Māori (Hubbard, 2013, p. A6).<sup>\*</sup> Mather acknowledged that he was pleased about the broad appeal the broadcaster had garnered. For him, te reo ‘is a treasure belonging to all New Zealanders’ and Māori Television is ‘much more than a language revitalisation channel’. Mather argues for the importance of a large non-Māori majority in advancing the aspirations of Māori, and that by having all New Zealanders value te reo, Māori language and culture might become an everyday factor in the life of the nation, or ‘part of the furniture’. Yet, one could ask, whose house is this furniture in?

When Moana Jackson and Atareta Poananga developed their Ngā Whare Rua or ‘two-house’ model for understanding the struggle for Māori self-determination, they drew on examples from Māori television programming found on national broadcaster TVNZ. This model has become a popular reference point for Māori media scholars:

The TV One programmes *Marae* and *Te Karere* are contained within the mainstream house . . . Both programmes attempt to portray values, language and issues related to the Māori house . . . Within the mainstream house they occupy a ‘room’, but the ‘house’ is not Māori. They are still a minority within the whole industry and have to conform to the policies and practices of the mainstream house. They are probably fortunate that they are there at all, given that many ethnic minorities do not have a presence in the mainstream house. (Te Kawa a Māui Media Research Team, 2005, p. 23 cited in Hokowhitu and Devadas, 2013, p. xxix)

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\* These figures are based on a telephone survey conducted by Research New Zealand on behalf of Māori Television on 2–25 November 2011 and including a sample range of n=1004 respondents aged 15+. In 2014 a Colmar Brunton survey conducted on behalf of NZ On Air found that 50 per cent of Māori Television viewers were Māori. This figure was based on N=1000 telephone and N=400 online interviews conducted on 4 April–4 May 2014 (excluding Easter and Anzac Day) and involving respondents aged 15+.

In the wake of the 2004 launch of Māori Television, the possibilities for Māori control over media have improved. Following Jackson and Poananga's model, Māori Television has significantly increased the amount of Māori media content available when compared to the offerings on other free-to-air networks such as TVNZ and MediaWorks. But does Māori Television constitute a house of its own, run by Māori, for Māori and about Māori? Māori Television constituted a significant shift in terms of offering a greater range of Māori media, on multiple screens, nationally and internationally – and in prime time – and this shift has been achieved by deftly negotiating a range of cultural, technological, institutional and historical factors. Aspects of government policy, the funding climate, and the institutional norms of television have helped to shape Māori Television practices. Yet these policies, funding regimes and television industry norms (how programming should look and sound, as well as the focus on audience share) are practices long embedded in non-Māori ways of doing things. As such, Māori Television offers intriguing insights into how a media entity can contribute to te reo and tikanga Māori, and thus to the betterment of te ao Māori, while working within these existing constraints.

A historical framework for understanding the struggle to establish Māori Television and the diverse expectations placed upon it provides insights. This framework allows us to see how the Māori media sector is connected to larger efforts to have the Crown recognise its obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Māori Television is tied to a larger Tiriti-based politics, at the same time as it is part of a broader media culture dominated by an English-speaking non-Māori majority.

Its history also draws attention to Māori Television's educational role in revitalising a minority language, using a popular form of entertainment media. Educational imperatives bump up against entertainment imperatives, in ways that give rise to persisting tensions between those who think that a Māori media provider should appeal to a broad audience, and those who think the network should be more strictly by Māori, for Māori and about Māori. When Dewes describes the stealth tactics of the 1970s (to infiltrate the 'white man's house' with te reo), her approach resonates with the inclusive strategy championed by Mather in 2013. Both Dewes and Mather underscore the importance of a large non-Māori majority to Māori media initiatives. Yet other Māori Television stakeholders have consistently argued for a more Māori-focused approach to Māori media.

## Chapter Six

# Putting the Five Frameworks to Use

Māori Television faces multiple demands from its various stakeholders, at the same time as it must negotiate the embedded norms of New Zealand media industries, as well as governmental and flax-roots political aspirations, and persisting economic constraints. There is value in understanding these complexities through a range of frameworks, including matters to do with history, tikanga, programming, audiences and the political desires attached to cultural processes. A five-framework approach offers differing angles on Māori Television as a social and cultural phenomenon, and opens up fresh perspectives on matters often taken for granted. It makes space for the diverse voices of, and perspectives from, te ao Māori, as well as for the viewpoints of, and conditions facing, those who work in the Māori media sector.\*

To demonstrate the value of such an approach, brief insights into how the five frameworks might be of use in relation to Māori Television news and current affairs can be obtained by looking at coverage of a pre-eminent peer-language institution, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust. *Native Affairs*' 2013 coverage of the financial affairs of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (TKRNT) and its financial arm, Te Pātaka Ōhanga (TPŌ), generated much conflicting debate within te ao Māori and New Zealand's public sphere more generally. These debates raised questions about culturally appropriate news media practices, and the role of Māori journalism within a democratic society. A brief gloss of how the five frameworks could be deployed to throw light on the complex issues raised by *Native Affairs*' coverage, and on subsequent public discussions,

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\* It is my hope that the five frameworks proposed in this book complement the earlier work of authors such as Carol Archie, whose important text *Pou Kōrero: a journalists' guide to Māori and current affairs* helped to decentre a prevailing non-Māori perspective on New Zealand media.



follows. The *Native Affairs*–TKRNT media event demonstrated the contested expectations underpinning Māori news practices, and the impossibility of speaking of te ao Māori in monolithic terms. More than this, the debates and discussions inspired by the *NA*–TKRNT media event reveal the impoverished nature of New Zealand public-sphere discourses more generally, and prevailing perceptions of Māori news media and Māori institutions.

## Setting the scene

In 2013 *Native Affairs* broadcast two stories (‘A Question of Trust’, which aired on 9 September, and ‘Feathering the Nest’, which aired on 14 October) dealing with the governance and management of language-revitalisation preschool organisation TKRNT, and its financial arm, TPŌ. Both stories investigated the concerns of 51 kōhanga reo members from Mataatua and Tauranga Moana rohe over issues relating to the financial structure of the organisation, lifetime membership practices, and personal loans to staff and board members to the value of \$10,000. The story drew on information about credit-card expenditure given to the *Native Affairs* news team. When approached by *Native Affairs* to make comment on the story, TKRNT declined to engage. As the media event progressed, TKRNT applied for an interim injunction to prevent *Native Affairs* from covering the story; it banned *Native Affairs* staff from a subsequent press conference, and it laid a complaint with the Broadcasting Standards Authority over ‘A Question of Trust’, a complaint that was ultimately not upheld.

The coverage by *Native Affairs* sparked two inquiries. The Ministry of Education commissioned Ernst & Young to conduct an inquiry into the management of public funding by TKRNT, which found no wrongdoing. A subsequent inquiry into TPŌ by the Serious Fraud Office also found no evidence of criminality by TPŌ. While these inquiries took place, TKRNT held a national hui at Ngāruawāhia to address concerns raised by whānau. Meanwhile, ‘Feathering the Nest’ received international recognition as a model of good Indigenous journalism, and the *Native Affairs* team positioned itself as a champion of the flax roots. Many Māori and non-Māori shared opinions via television and radio news media, blogs, tweets and news-feed comments on the importance of holding those in power to account, even esteemed kaumātua. However, other voices from te ao Māori raised questions



Haunui Royal, Carol Hirschfeld and Julian Wilcox at Māori Television. ‘The Little Station That Could’, *Sunday Star-Times*, 23 March 2014. Reproduced with the permission of Lawrence Smith and Fairfax Media NZ and the *Sunday Star-Times*. Ref. 629116922.



Producer Kay Ellmers and camera operator Steve Fisher interview contestant Zayde Taurima from Mohaka Marae for season two of *Marae Kai Masters*. Reproduced with the permission of Tūmanako Productions.



The 2014 *Marae Kai Masters* presenters Te Kohe Tuhaka (left) and Nevak Rogers at Waikare Marae. Photograph by Peter De Graaf. Reproduced with the permission of the *New Zealand Herald*.



*It's in the Bag* hosts Pio Terei (left) and Stacey Morrison (centre) with a contestant. Reproduced with the permission of the *New Zealand Herald*.

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