

Whakapapa: Stories through Time and Space

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All my academic writings and publications have grown out of an emotional engagement with my field of study: the Arawa people. By capturing moments in prose – reflexive ethnography on first approach – I create a layer of narrative continuity that is galvanised through encoded memories. This “whakapapa” is like archaeological stratification: providing genealogically ordered layers of code transmitted through time and space. Decades after writing I can “relive” my embedded memories and recognise the repeating patterns, codes and algorithms that underpin humanity itself from my uniquely Te Arawa informed perspective of the universe.

Today I find myself floating in a transformational space between engaged researcher and reflexive time traveller. My written fixes on the past are like stars: constant waypoints – light years old – given to me by elder mentors from which my academically framed research has been (and still is being) navigated, through a time of uncertainty: a time into which we are all being technologically catapulted (with direct implications on our very survival) beyond our apparent control or direction. Below are samples of my memory triggers—genealogically ordered musings—by which I (re)structure, transition, contextualise and translate one knowledge system into another through a series of past moments associated with the returning home of one particular ancestor, Pūkaki.

For my elders, death framed life, giving colour, meaning and purpose to the fabric of their and our existence. Pūkaki was and is never about the past, but about him living through us now. However, today’s consumption society obfuscates the act of death – the passage of succession – by creating a dystopia of immortality for sale, but at great cost: the decaying soul of humanity. I gaze back intentionally on my very short journey of consciousness, from an ancestrally navigated past into an uncharted future of infinite (im)possibilities: I am hitchhiking through an uncertain universe of opportunities and constraints, framed by imagination and science. Or as my elders used to say: Tirohia nga tohu o mua ki te whakatere i te wa kei te heke mai (look to the past to navigate the unknown/future). Their signposts (tohu) are embedded below.

Prologue

Summer c.1970 Auckland Museum

A child walks into the museum holding his *kūia’s* (grandmother’s) hand. She whispers to her wide-eyed grandson. Although a place of the dead, her quiet stories spark the *taonga* (Māori ancestral treasures, belongings, representations) into life. On exiting she takes a seat: Aren’t museums wonderful? He nods in thoughtful agreement as she passes him a sandwich. But until the dead go home this place will remain a cemetery.

Activation

Autumn 1991. Rotorua Museum: Te Korimako Tangi Ata - The New Dawn

*'Te tangi a te manu e koroingoa
noa nei i te atapouri...'*

'The bellbird (korimako) is first to cry to the approaching dawn...'

*I te timatatanga ko Rangi raua ko Papa
he pouritanga kabore i te pa i te maramatanga
tae noa ki te ra i wehea ai e Tane ona matua*
In the beginning there was Rangi [Skyfather] and Papa [Earthmother]
a darkness into which no light entered
until the day Tane [supreme ancestor of forests and knowledge] pushed his parents apart

*Na Rua i whakaako te iwi ki te banga i to ratou tupuna a Tane
I whakaakotia tatou ki te manaaki i nga
tobutuhunga whakaake o te wananga
a tae noa ki te taenga mai o te iwi Pakeha*
Rua [ancestor of carving] taught the people how to shape
their parent Tane
We learned to embrace the secrets of the wananga [schools of wisdom]
until the great white birds arrived

*Te Ao marama tawhito i mate i te taenga mai
o te kioire, nga pu, me nga mate kino katoa
I tera wa ka whiua atu to tatou atua
ka hoata te korowai mo te mira paraoa
a ka awhi tonu i te Atua
tae noa ki te wai i whanakotia ai o tatou whenua*
A cargo of rats, muskets and disease
conquered the old world of light
So we threw away our atua [supreme ancestors]
exchanged korowai [chiefly garments] for flour mills
and embraced the lord
until we felt the land pulled from beneath us

*Kabore he whenua kabore he tangata
ko te tohu he tino rangatiratanga
Ko me mutunga ko te murunga o te whenua
me te ngoi kore ki te iwi*
Without land there are no people
They promised tino rangatiratanga [sovereign independence]
We received confiscation
and economic isolation

*I hoe ake tatou ki te taone
I homai he pitopito wahanga
ka hokoa hei hoko kai
Ka hoki ki te wa kainga... kabore whenua*

We rode into town
 We received an undivided share
 which we sold for our next meal
 We rode home...landless

*Te pukuriri ka huri ki te whakabe
 Nga tau i tera wa ka whakabemohemo
 i nga mate nunui i te hia kai a
 Ka kitea ake te ivi e hemohemo ana*
 Defiance turned into despair
 The quiet years of rural silence, tuberculosis, poverty
 The painful years
 of a people dying

*Ana na te aba ake ra ka kawe katoa nga tiriti i te koura
 Katabi ka neke aku matua ki te kimi wahanga
 mahana me te matauranga o te ivi Pakeha
 Kia kore ai a ratou tamariki e kite
 i te abua tuarua o enai wa*
 And then the city streets became paved in gold
 My parents packed their bags in search
 of warm floors and Pakeha [white fella] books
 So their children
 may never experience second class dependence

*I roto i nga akonga o te Pakeha ka oho
 ake tatou i te huarahi pakari ka baere
 i te huarahi rangatira
 ara nga huarahi ki Poi-bakenga
 ki Maungawhau nga hikoi mo te whenua
 me te huarahi ki Te Whanganui a Tara
 Ahakoa kei te rongu tonu etahi o tatou
 ki to tatou whaea a Papa e tanga ana*
 Pakeha educated
 we sprang from tar seal to travel the roads
 of identity
 Roads that led to Sydney
 Mt Eden, land marches and Wellington
 But some of us could still hear Papa
 our mother
 crying
*Ana koia i tenei wa
 Ko te whenua e karanga mai ana i te po nui
 I runga i te karanga a o tatou kuia
 kua boki mai nei matou ki te tahe i a koutou i
 Te Korimako Tangi Ata*
 And so it is
 the whenua [placenta of Earthmother] calling through the long night
 upon the karanga [wails] of our kuia [female elders]
 we have returned to share with you
 The New Dawn

Vision

Fall 1992 Auckland Museum: Pūkaki

As his descendants filed past, Pūkaki looked down on them as they carried the four taonga home. The words chanted by the tohunga in the lead were familiar, and so they should be. He had himself used that karakia on occasion when he lived in Rotorua.

To stand again at Ōhinemutu (geothermal community in the heart of Rotorua), surrounded by whanau (relations) and mokopuna (grandchildren). To embrace the curls of steam escaping from the ngawha (hotpools) around the Papa-i-Ōuru (principal marae of Ngāti Whakaue/Te Arawa). It all seemed so long ago.

He could detect the faint odour of sulphur from his descendants. Lucky them, by this evening they'll be back home to their thermal baths, whereas he would be surrounded by concrete walls, vacuum cleaners and strangers. No formal introductions, no sunrises, no sunsets. Just lights on, lights off, and the never ending clicking of cameras. It is time to go home. He can feel this in his bones as the last of the mokopuna leave the museum for Rotorua. The smell, the taste, the memories, all brought alive by his people, are almost too much.

Another tear quietly rolls over his carved cheek, one of a thousand droplets of grief. It is time to go home.

Grief

Summer 1992 Passing of Uncle Bill

The summer heat curled over the golden bleached hills wrapped around Te Paamu pa (community village) and then settled on the iron roof of Te Arawa's ancestor, Tia (a meeting house named in memory of Tia). No more than fifty metres away, I watched my carved ancestor shimmer and dance to the rustling poplars and humming insects, who instinctively crawl, year after year, from the dark cool ground up into the blinding sun, to sing, to reproduce and then to die.

Mission

Winter 1994, Uncle Pateriki

I sit and watch my elder (koro), a knowledge expert (tohunga), go carefully through his notes, some loose, many folded pages in different colours, green ink, blue ink. As he finishes reading each page he licks his finger and carefully turns over yet another old, yellow and foxed corner of my tribal (Te Arawa) past. Page after page, I watch the genealogies (whakapapa) flash by. The rain settles on the roof of the newly finished study. Carefully he pushes the loose pages back into the worn-out ring binder. He sets it aside and picks up another one which he balances in his lap. There is no speaking, but I can see his mind whirring as each time he stops to study a small treasure of the past which is now creating our present.

His croaky voice, barely audible above the background pattering of rain, brings my attention to yet another line of Pūkaki (famous ancestor of Te Arawa). I carefully take the paper and study the whakapapa. I am not even close to finishing when I notice that the koro's active mind is already three pages further on.

Head down, he is scanning a sheet of prayer (karakia), his lips mouthing the words of my ancestors. It is then that I notice his eyebrows have become quite white in recent months. His health has not been so good lately. Last month he had an operation, but the doctors didn't know how successful they had been. As the rain stops, the tohunga has a coughing fit and reaches for some tissue to spit away the phlegm. Putting the tissue away he picks up another very old leaf of paper, covered in more whakapapa, and again his lips start silently moving to the rhythms of the past.

His laboured breathing is now audible and punctuated every so often with a slow nod of the head. For his age and seeming fragility, his hands are very steady.

The last time I saw him was two weeks ago. It was a sunny day. He was glad to see my partner, Merata, and me. We were down at Tukuahua's mourning ceremony (tangihanga) at Ōhinemutu. He gave us each a warm embrace and spoke of his recent encounter with the surgeon's knife. With humour and high-pitched voice, he alerted us to the possibility that the next operation may take away his ability to have children! The old koro (elder male) has always filled us with laughter, but now as I watch him it seems as if it was years, not months, since he last made me smile.

Recently he had been struck down by yet another bout of influenza, and the wet weather was not making his life any easier. Closing his book, the old man pulls himself awkwardly from his chair. 'Getting cold now,' he pronounces. I follow him to the fireside in the living room. He sits down with an old school exercise book and my eyes light up with the treasure the tohunga has put before me.

He has opened the book to a very worn page, shifting it closer so I may examine the ancient karakia, *Takina te kawa*. It is the chant recited by Ngatoro (supreme elder) when he saved our voyaging vessel (from which we take the tribal name: Te Arawa) from destruction on our ancestral voyage from Hawaiki to Aotearoa (26 generations ago). Written in faded blue ink and precisely executed in a Victorian handwriting style, the irony of this treasure did not escape me. The handwriting before me, borrowed from European culture and redeployed to articulate a South-Pacific oral-only language, had provided a vehicle for which our most restricted knowledge could secretly travel through the post-generations of Western contact. For over five generations now, Te Arawa's genealogies, rituals and korero have been carefully secured in the 'whakapapa books' of our elders, and used to educate a select few of each new generation. It is during times of crisis, like tangihanga, that the depths of this knowledge become apparent. Released through oratory upon the marae, such whakapapa, ritual and korero tie the people, land and ancestors into a common identity.

I am warmed with the realisation that the knowledge of our ancestors is alive and well.

Tapping my shoulder, the koro recaptures my attention and I look into his steel blue eyes for the last time. 'You realise this is the most sacred karakia of Te Arawa. It is only to be used when *your* people are in a state of crisis. It is tapu (spiritually restricted) and must be treated accordingly. It was passed on to me from Te Naera Te Houkotuku, an ariki (leader)

of Ngāti Whakaue (senior tribe of Te Arawa confederation) many years ago. I give this karakia to you because of what you are doing for your people. It would be tika (right) to cloak your thesis with it. This will allow your ancestors to protect and assist you in returning Pūkaki back home.’

Execution

Spring 1997. Pūkaki returns home.

Ngā kura pūmahara ki Ōuru
te pungatara, ngā mokopuna
he pūmahara wēnei ka nunumi ki tua pae
kāpō a mata i a tā whakaahua tiripapā
roimata māturuturu pāpāringa

Memories of Ōuru (Ōhinemutu)
sulphur and mokopuna
but distant musings
as cameras blind me
to tears.

Nei te pō te karangahia
Ko Hou anake ka whakautu, he pōhangahanga
Arawa)
rūtaki ana, tangi auē ana ngā hau o
Rangiātea
homeland)
ki waho i taku koroua whare
gaol.

I call to the darkness
but only Hou (great ancestor of Te

replies mournfully as the winds
of Rangiātea (ancient Pacific

buffet and groan outside my Grecian

Mateinu ana tōku wairua ki te tārawa waitī o
ngā hihi o Tamanui-i-te-rā
tēnei te whiti iho nei ki Kaiweka
ki te reo orowaru hoki e ĩere mai ana
i ngā tuinga moana i Ōkūrei –
auē – he manako te koura

How my soul yearns to drink again
the first rays
across Kaiweka (Mokoia Island)
to breath news from
Ōkūrei (Maketū) of ocean encounters
auē – but futile dreams

Mea rawa ake, ka whakawairua mai ia
ko te hā o taputapuātea e kōhimuhimu mai ana:
(Hou) who
‘Hoki atu ki te kainga?’
home?’
mokowhiti ana ko ngā pūmanawa e waru,
tītoretore ana anō he mata
matihere ana te mātai āroharoha a whatu
ki tāku pōtiki matahīapo

Then he appears
‘tis the breath of Taputapuātea

whispers to me ‘ready to return

Āe, whakahokia au ki te kainga

Eight hearts surge,
eyes reopen
and I gaze fondly
upon my pōtiki (daring grandchild)

yes, take me home.

Winter 2013. Rotorua Museum. Pūkaki and his pōtiki**Epilogue**Summer 2017. Auckland Museum

The child now sits outside Auckland Museum alongside his wide eyed *tāmāriki* (children): *Ka pai te wharetaonga ne?* They both nod in agreement as their *pāpā* (father) passes around sandwiches: *Engari, kia mutu noa te hokinga o nga kōiwi ki o ō rātou marae, e kore e ngaro i te pō* – but until the dead complete their journey home they will never rest.

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