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**huka can haka:**  
**Taonga performing tino rangatiratanga**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
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at  
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## Abstract

*huka can haka* is an ongoing body of creative works used to frame the ideas expressed in this thesis. Spoken, 'huka' sounds like 'hooker', he is a performance persona developed to help heal from the bitter-sweet reality of being Māori, genderfluid, same-sex attracted and HIV positive in Aotearoa New Zealand. *huka can haka* refers to an inbetween gendered space of performance where 'huka' translates from Māori to English as the sea-foam that gathers between land and sea, white rain such as snow or hail, the dancing tags that are woven into cloaks, or as the transliteration of sugar. 'Haka' is predominantly perceived as a masculine form of traditional Māori dance and is akin to weaving with the entire body. Haka is highly sexualised and invigorates a sense of connection to Māori genealogies, family, community, language, land and cultural practices. *huka can haka* infers the agency enacted through the intentional performance of an identity between cultures and gender in Aotearoa New Zealand. 'Taonga' translates from Māori to English to represent things people value and treasure – they can be tangible or ephemeral and include shared and individual memories, people, words, actions, the things we make and beautify, as well as the natural environment that sustains us. 'Tino rangatiratanga' is a Māori assertion of the right to determine our lives without the disruptive controls enacted through the New Zealand government by the British Crown. *Taonga performing tino rangatiratanga*, infers the agency present in valuable things – because taonga exist we become aware of reasons to protect them, we create protective processes and we appreciate the value of ourselves as protectors. *huka can haka: Taonga performing tino rangatiratanga* explores how making art heals – it describes the transformations that manifest when creating through Māori knowledge.

Raranga is the framework used to organise and explain my research. Raranga is a traditional process of Māori weaving and through its use as a methodology, I am able to connect my explorations to the relational values that are part of Māori culture. I use raranga as a framework to interpret my own practice which is unique to me – there is no separation between my practice and the ways I live my life which differs from the approaches of other weavers. Within this project I utilise a range of research approaches that are qualitative, autobiographical, subjective, creative and practice-based. Traditional Māori methods of story-telling, pūrākau, are used to communicate this research in digital image, digital video, writing and performance art. Through doing this I describe how contemporary media explorations can be interpreted as forms of raranga and haka, which can help mediate the sometimes oppressive use of text, image, moving image and performance in advancing colonial intents. The primary findings in this research are:

1. that creative practice research can help people to connect sexuality with creativity, to, re-story and re-generate narratives of empowerment;
2. that multimedia approaches to identity knowledge gathering, assists in embodying empowerment;
3. that Kaupapa Māori Theory can challenge dominant perceptions of gendered Māori bodies, and is inclusive of the 'do it yourself' strategies described through Transgender theory;
4. that a raranga methodology can be embodied through performance and performance artefacts, connecting research to the lived experiences of research subjects;
5. that raranga is a powerful tool to interpret sexual trauma, offering connective strategies to release damaging internalised behaviours;
6. that raranga can centre marginal identities as bodies full of hope;
7. that performance of historical trauma as ceremony can offer collective forms of healing, and;
8. that raranga heals, giving direction to multiple and conflicting strands of lived experience.

The thesis makes prominent the generative and progressive nature of raranga and is chronological in design. Theoretical explorations inspire creative works, which then in turn inform avenues for deeper theorisation, leading to new creative works and so on until the thesis conclusion. Through this creative practice research project I assert raranga as a powerful process to interpret the agency that grows between makers, the materials we use and the objects we create. Ultimately, this thesis outlines a way to weave experiences of sexualised and gendered trauma, and affirm the healing present at the intersection between oppositional relationships.

# Acknowledgements

As I think about all the people I need to thank for helping me on this journey, I am surrounded by the stereo sound of *Te Matatini*, our national kapa haka competition finals. My niece Hinemoa-Dawn sits in front of me helping to feed her cousin Te Moana, my younger brother's son. My mum is tending to the unending pile of laundry and I can hear my big sister's teenage sons making jokes with their hoard of friends who are always in their company. The village is peaceful and Lake Rotorua, with Mokoia Island in the middle, sparkles in the mid-morning sun. I thank my home and my ancestors who have kept this space for me to exist.

I have to thank the creator for blessing me with a loving whānau. Things would have been very different for me had my parents not uplifted me from foster-uncare and asked my aunty Yonnine who worked for social welfare to sort it all out for them. I thank my mother Dawn – I really really thank my mother Dawn. She is like a princess angel who has always given me and my siblings so much love. I wish we hadn't lost my father Elliott who passed away a few weeks after I turned 21, because both mum and dad were amazing parents together. They both are people who never birthed their own children but have given unconditional love to all the kids in my village through now three generations.

My big sister Lani has always supported me with her aroha and nurturing spirit and my younger sister Karla has always been there for me to talk to and share ideas. My younger brother Rob is a good person, and even though his own life journey has been difficult he has the biggest heart. We are all adopted and only distantly related, all being from different tribes, but we live in the centre of our tribe Te Arawa and we try to make a positive difference for all our relations. Thank you Lani, Karla and Rob.

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**Origins and pathways**



I didn't know where to start, but in my heart I felt where I wanted to be.

Be... one of those funny words where you're supposed to just exist without thinking

If only

See, that's where my head is always at,

Mixed in with the waves of the sea,

Always at unrest, green and blue, calm and violent

It's kinda lonely out here

## Introduction to main concepts and thesis structure

There has always been a sense of loss, a hurt, a scar, a something bad that hides  
beneath the skin in the pitch shadows that blindly follow me around, although  
sometimes I too am the follower.

Study is the pathway I have chosen to live as more than a hopeless stereotype; I don't  
want to continue life as a slave to globalised economy where my body makes money for  
some rich white guy in an alternate reality. A focus on knowledge helps me find solace,  
giving hope through cerebral concoctions.

When I learned how to weave, it made me feel like I wanted to stay, becoming  
grounded in a different sense, one that made realities easier to manage.

This creative practice research project is a detailed exploration of the raranga process; the traditions of Māori under and over weaving conveyed through the weaving together of different voices, patterning of poetic, descriptive and analytical modes of writing, historical/contemporary references, and in photographic, textual and videographic design. I explore raranga as a form of empowerment, where deep knowledges about the world as described by Māori ancestors begin to surface, where thoughts and bodies become woven together in grounding ways. Through the highly adaptive process of raranga, Māori people explored the utility of many natural fibres, both abundant and scarce, from which mundane things like clothes, mats, rope, baskets, nets, as well as sacred objects were woven. Raranga traditions have helped Māori survive. As Māori have migrated throughout Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, or the great ocean of the ancient explorer Kiwa, raranga has helped us maintain connections between places, people and knowledge traditions, as well as promoted ways to sustain and transform our identities as we discover new spaces. Through this thesis, I emphasise these connections through the use of the term 'Moana' instead of 'Pacific', rather than affirm the West's desire to pacify us.

Raranga helps us to be still and fluid, as we navigate the many waters between distant islands, firm in the network of knowledge relationships that connect us to the earth and sky as well as the many energies that shift between these realms of existence. I use raranga because it liberates an ability to decipher myself, work through loss and allow myself to 'be'. Raranga saved my life at a time when I most wanted to self-destruct and thus, I am passionate about articulating the ways it can transform. In this research I investigate raranga through *digital image, digital video, writing and performance*, positioning raranga as an Indigenous methodology that can help to balance the destructive impacts of colonisation upon sexual expression and binarised notions of gender. I articulate raranga as a type of creative practice that is embedded with relational knowledge, and because of this, is able to significantly add to understandings of relational art and aesthetics. Through articulating my creative practice project in the context of relational aesthetics, I empower Indigenous aesthetics.

My research into raranga intends to explain and give back life to  
experiences that feel like death.

I explain how a very personal creative journey can give back love, so that I am alive as  
an Indi-genie, and am not just his-story.

I want my art to have voice, so I can practice like those many other Indi-genies who  
work tirelessly to help heal the collective hurts in our communities. I articulate  
something similar to, and yet not 'relational aesthetics', because beyond fine arts and  
beyond contemporary creative arts practices, relating heals the pain trapped within the  
sinew and flesh of our bodies.

The works that I have created for this project inclusive of this thesis, are all self-portraits – I believe that artists create self-portraits to express their embodiment or disembodiment. In this project I assert ways this type of internal and personal creative investigation can benefit networks of relationships across many social contexts. The thesis is a positioning of ideas, where the autobiographical and creative practice elements describe the nature of the investigation, its approach and methodology. Practice-based scholar Welby Ings (2011) describes the positive potentials of autobiographical inquiries as

“... operat[ing] on three levels. First they are a contribution to the academy through a demonstration of scholarship. Second, they are artistic works that seek to advance human understanding by linking the self with social contexts and third, they are a politically positioned form of intellectual activism” (p.6).

A subjective enquiry gains meaning and significance once its findings are in conversations with the ideas of others – as Ings suggests when he writes, “[c]reative autobiographic research can produce very rich texts that create highly distinctive relationships between the narration of personal experience and broader societal concerns” (Ings, 2011, pp. 3-6). Through this project I raranga strands of myself, as a way to interpret and empower my connections with others. At times in this thesis I describe personal engagements with friends and people I have a great deal of respect for. To mitigate any ethical concerns, I have sought permission to include discussions about particular people and to use their names and images of their works where appropriate.

Raranga has been nurtured through the relationship Māori have created and maintain with te pā harakeke, a plant community that grows abundantly in the soil of our island nation Aotearoa. The sturdy leaves of te pā harakeke are woven through raranga and whatu; where raranga involves weaving the outside of the leaf, and whatu, the fibre inside. Te pā harakeke has become a constant reminder that whānau, or family structures, are the most important relationships for shared nurturing within a total environment that connects past present and future (Marsden, 1992) – “[p]ā harakeke means that while mama and papa are the nearest to the rito, to the child, there are others, grandparents, then out to other whanaunga from other fans in that harakeke who are there to step in and care for the rito” (Hohepa, 2014, p.5). Huhana Smith (Ngāti Tukorehe/Ngāti Raukawa) (2007) writes about the harakeke plant as a “rehabilitator” (p.211) and about the ways it “stabilises” (p.213) in environmental contexts.

In recent times, the importance of te pā harakeke has been investigated and sometimes co-opted by New Zealand governance structures, in attempts to address Māori inequity (Auckland Uni Services, 2005; Ministry of Health, 2003; Ministry of Health, 2007; Tibble and Ussher, 2012). I question the ability for this to have good results for Māori because Māori knowledge embedded in Western governance structures has been shown to quickly dilute when separated from the lived culture that imparts meaning and value. Governance structures that have consistently erased Māori capacities need to address historical injustices – otherwise the use of Māori concepts will continue to serve only Crown interests (Auckland Uni Services, 2005). One of the strands of this project asserts inclusion for Māori people often left out of te pā harakeke when concretised through governance process. Through this project I find ways to encourage the healing things that are part of te pā harakeke. In particular, aspects of this project investigate the use of te pā harakeke and raranga within sexual and reproductive health settings. Te pā harakeke knowledge comes about through doing, rather than only thinking about doing – I explore good practices that can emerge in governance and policy spaces if raranga processes are used to inspire te pā harakeke outcomes.

Grow me some good green, so I can weave myself back into the Earth,  
the stars and the start of where things all went terribly wrong.  
Te pā harakeke, in the ground shooting me up and making me feel high.

Te pā harakeke conveys simple truths about shared communal values where all leaves are vital to the health of the plant; the plant is vital to whānau health, and; healthy whānau participate in thriving communities. Rituals that embody Māori theory are practiced through raranga, where systematic ways to organise, explain, understand and analyse the world happens between thought and action. Raranga enables embodied praxis, like Polanyi's *tacit knowing*, where a sense of hidden-knowing emerges through communal action in motion (Polanyi, 1959). Similarly through raranga, weavers solve problems as they untangle and organise through thinking fingers; answers and ideas emerge in relationships between kairaranga and the forms we weave – as we learn new skills, we share them with others, extending the continuum of matauranga, the adaptive and growing body of Māori knowledge. Raranga offers its own unique journey to knowing and thus I have re-woven a traditional thesis structure into something more reflective of the ways I raranga. I follow Maureen Lander, Jo Diamond, Lesley Rameka, Jani Wilson, Donna Campbell, Gloria Taituha, Aroha Mitchell, Hinekura Smith, Elizabeth Kerekere and Kahutoi Te Kanawa, all weavers who have applied Māori weaving processes as research.

This introductory chapter outlines the structure through which I explain my investigation. Raranga, although particularly linear, is curiously fluid and cyclical, but for the purposes of this thesis, I describe it as a series of stages and explain relevant decision making processes in relation to each of the following sections: *moemoeā; karakia tīmatanga; kohikohi; whakariterite; whakapapa; mahi raranga; whakatutuki; karakia whakamutunga, and; moemoeā ano.*

I make for the sake of sanity. It all looks a mess, disconnected bits of flotsam and  
jettison me away through my creative imagination.

These are my makings to take apart the communicative capital of today's world.

Let me put it all back so I can track some sense in it all.

I have organised the raranga stages in relation to four themes:

1. The media portrayal of Māori and Indigenous cultures;
2. Genderfluid identities and the medicalisation of our bodies;
3. Sexual expressions denied through colonialism
4. Indigenous creative processes that transform communities.

To articulate these themes, I describe some the works created in this project. Throughout, there is a constant shift between theory and practice, where both evolve as flowering parts, offering their own unique seeds of idea from which unexpected research trajectories have flourished. In this, I describe the ways relationships and patterns of behaviour can be empowered through raranga as a creative practice – it is *practice based*; explained by Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Ruanui kairaranga and scholar Donna Campbell, as where theory is situated in the fluid cycles of making (D. Campbell, personal communication, November 10, 2015). Practice based research is distinctive in that it “... is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice” (Candy, 2006, p.3). This differs from *practice led* research where new operational knowledge pertinent to a creative practice is explored (Candy, 2006; Haseman, 2006; Mäkelä, 2007; Nimkulrat, 2007). I engage with intent and describe how personal artistic inquiries can ripple outward, engendering powerful ways to communicate across broader societal structures and practices.

The chapters and themes of this research are organised in the following ways –

**Part 1. *The media portrayal of Māori and Indigenous cultures:***

**Chapters:**

1. Moemoeā
2. Karakia tīmatanga

**Part 2. *Genderfluid identities and the medicalisation of our bodies***

**Chapters:**

3. Kohikohi
4. Whakariterite

**Part 3. *Sexual expressions denied through colonialism***

**Chapters:**

5. Whakapapa
6. Mahi raranga

**Part 4. *Indigenous creative processes that transform communities***

**Chapters:**

7. Whakatutuki
8. Karakia whakamutunga
9. Moemoeā ano

Each chapter begins with pūrākau, a Māori method of storytelling. I story a pathway toward empowerment by abstracting traditional Māori narratives that focus on an ancestral hero Māui – here, transformed into *huka*, the persona I perform for this research project. Throughout, I use images of mokomoko – they are symbolic of Māui who in some accounts, shapeshifted into a lizard to challenge the processes of life and death (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984; Reed, 2004), or; tipua, described by Kerekere (2015) as genderfluid supernatural beings, or; mokopikirākau, lizards able to shapeshift through colour and used as a measure for performance analysis by Wilson (2016).

My inspiration for this project are my tūpuna. They include Ngātoro-i-rangi and Hoturoa, the great tōhunga navigators who navigated Ngāti Ohomairangi people across a vast ocean to Aotearoa; Tūtānekai who embodied a beautiful means to consider intimate relationships of oneness between people with similarly gendered bodies; and, Tene Waitere, regarded as one of the most prolific and innovative Māori carvers of his time (Grant, 2012; Neich, 2001; Thomas, 2012) – I am empowered by Tene because although very knowledgeable in traditional Māori carved forms, he challenged them as a way to help describe the changing nineteenth century world around him. Finally, in this research I celebrate Makarēti Papakura, the first Māori woman to attend Oxford University. Through her thesis *Old Time Maori*, Makarēti challenged the male dominated Western Academy – articulating Māori knowledge from her elders in ways that questioned Colonial practices and assumptions about Māori (Diamond, 2007). My ancestors have given me life, and through my research I hope to give life to my own relations and descendants.

The overarching question at the heart of this project asks:

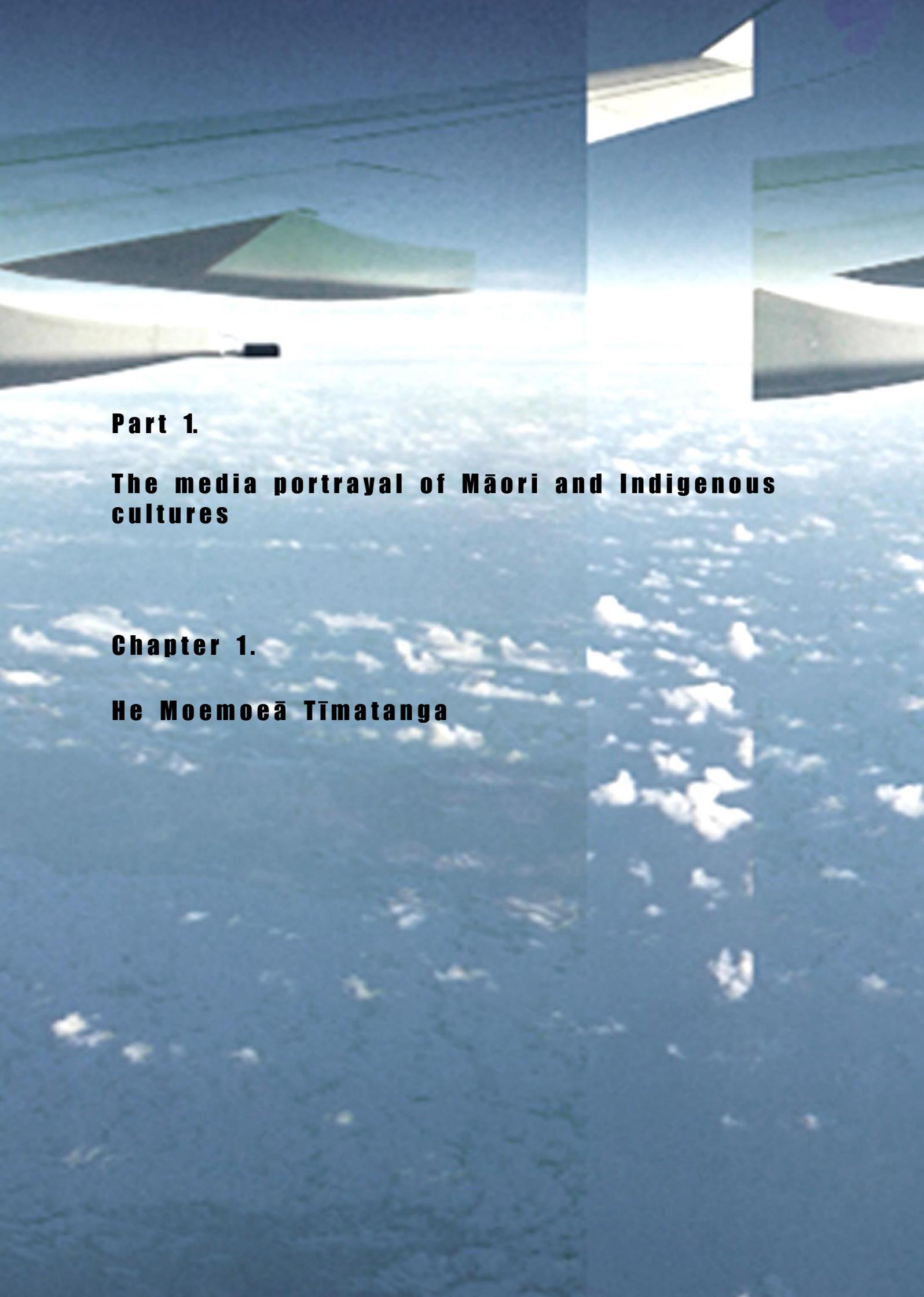
*In what ways can raranga practice inform contemporary understandings of healing from gender binarism and sexual trauma?*

I am Māori. I am non-binary gender expression. I am HIV, for nearly two decades thinking about dying for everyone's sexual sins. At the intersection, infection stigmas, discriminate and medicate my sometimes violent traumas.

I am happy. I am positive. I hide.







**Part 1.**

**The media portrayal of Māori and Indigenous cultures**

**Chapter 1.**

**He Moemoeā Tīmatanga**

A person's legs in blue jeans and white sneakers are visible on the right side of the frame, walking on a blue-tinted surface. The background is a bright, hazy blue sky with some faint clouds. The overall scene is a close-up of the person's lower body and feet.

The day warms green, and huka awaits an unending lifespan.

He has emerged from the womb again and again, so often and so many a-time that no longer is he his ancient self. The Māui who thirsted for change has died and lived so many times that his skin has turned to silicone circuitry. He has melded into the dark void of creation – the womb of his ancestress, and now a cyborg tranny stands in his place.

Before his feet had caressed the cliffs of Hine-nui-te-pō-te-ao, the curves of her calves and the highs and lows of her thighs, to reach the pathway nestled nicely between them, he wondered; “can I change death?”

The birds sent their feathers from the sky, their prayers like metal on the tarmac or collision debris in the rain – “she’s a gift for you, she’s life then black then life then blue then life then red then life then green pink yellow and purple”. In calcified memory, huka felt the blackness of those dark glass teeth, their volcanic edges, razoring him into seed.

Eternity happens.

Walking, waking and sometimes running into the orange glow of nothing, Māui gets a life.

## Weaving up new words

The introductory pūrākau is based upon another recounted by Ngāti Kahungunu and Tuhoe elder Dr. Rangimarie Turuki Pere. In Pere's narration, the Demigod Māui, upon entering the vagina of his ancestress Hine-nui-te-pō, is transformed between her thighs into the very first menstrual cycle (Murphy, 2014). The Māui cycle of stories are understood as precedents for morality within a Māori worldview, with his provocations a challenge to existing ways of thinking and doing (Edwards, 2009; Hudson, 2004; Ka'ai Mahuta, 2010; Mahuika, 2009; Rameka, 2012; Walker, 2004). In his encounter with Hine-nui-te-pō Māui tests the finite nature of boundaries by engaging the Goddess of Darkness to find immortality for humans. The aspirations of Māui in this narrative result in a cessation that allows something else to persist, signalling an ultimate end that is also a beginning. In the form of *huka* I am an imagined aspect of Māui. I perform *huka* as the most empowered version of myself, able to trick me out of slumbering unconsciousness, and able to help me fulfil the outcomes of this creative practice led PhD project. Rangimarie Turuki Pere's pūrākau provides a precedent, a place for me to stand and perform myself on a journey toward empowerment. In most popular versions of the pūrākau, the end of Māui is final and his cycle complete. However, within this thesis, I claim a continuous circle of events. Through Māui and *huka*, I centre my identity in spaces where femininity and masculinity meld.

This first chapter is divided into five sections, followed by a conclusion. The initial section discusses story and pūrākau, investigating the relationships between Māori cosmology, power and mainstream media. Following this is a section that deals more specifically with representation, and the ways that the vision Indigenous people have for self-determination can become real through asserting control of the images used to describe us and the spaces we live in. Creativity is described in terms of sexual expression, and in the third section of this chapter, a range of perspectives are used to articulate how making processes can transform experiences of death, loss and the prospect of extinction towards regeneration and life. The fourth section of this chapter explores creative practice research as agentive, describing three particular examples as living bodies of knowledge that offer potentiality – where text and image combine and provide pathways to reposition from colonial norms. The final section before concluding details more specifically the design layout of this thesis, contextualising it as an aspect of *huka can haka* and the entire research project.

## Seeing is be-weaving – technology mediating dreams

Exclude me, excuse you, this national belonging makes for an ugly mess. Stress, the long-term impact of recent settlers, defining an Aotearoa identity, set with such deep fissures it gets hard to breathe a sense of belonging inside the cracks.

Normal you, abnormal me, settler culture you formalise me as the antithesis. WTF is this displacement where I seek out ways to belong and fit at home?

I'll tell on you, storying myself again, let me gain, let my relations gain "... a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves" (Smith, 1997, p.145).

Seeing reifies thoughts toward story – it is a type of weaving, where vision creates projections for future spaces. Weaving helps the body slow down, find pace, sort and organise what eyes observe. Amongst the mess of visual cultures today, weaving can elicit agentive clarity – giving us ways to narrate and consider our connections to each other, as well as connections to our cosmological origins. In this first section I discuss ways Māori people and people of Indigenous cultures have been, and continue to be constructed through the imaginations of Western cultures, I describe how this manifests in racist social practices. As a counterpoint, I explain emancipatory research and theory that has been put into practice by Māori and Indigenous scholars – ways that consider research and academic inquiry from our own perspectives. Chapter 2 closely explains the ways I interpret these theories to create works developed in the first year of my research project, articulating my decision-making process and analysing ways raranga can emphasise Indigenous transformative praxis. The thesis will progress in a manner where the insights of theory chapters are followed by chapters describing the making process. The process chapters are detailed because careful attention to methods and numbers are crucial towards excellent weaving. I have written like this to emphasise connections between the sacred and non-sacred and to add dimension that constantly changes the pace of my writing as it progresses.

Pūrākau is the core method of this research project; used to articulate lived stories that help me describe raranga as theory. Pūrākau is a narrative practice that allows Māori worldviews to flourish and blossom. Ngāti Māhuta and Chinese educational theorist Jenny Lee, explains the value of pūrākau in a research context, where storytelling can help weave problem-solving strategies; pūrākau decolonises research “... to create knowledge outside the production and control of the powerful and elite, a different sort of narrative that aims to contribute to the social transformation of Indigenous groups” (Lee, 2009, p.8). Pūrākau creates tension within the evidence based context of Western research because it seems less fixed than quantitative methods; story contextualises research in relatively open ways that add meaning beyond finite definitions (Kovach, 2012; Lee, 2009; Wilson, 2008). To communicate my research in a way that is akin to pūrākau, I have created a performance persona huka. Huka is a virtual identity intended to interrogate stories about Māori that are reified through dominant practices in Aotearoa. He guerrilla performs as a calm and articulate translator of raranga knowledge, to question New Zealand national identity fables, where Māori stand in for violence, suspicion, and terror when represented through contemporary media. Stories remind us of who we are and the places where we belong. Stories are gifts that hold within them knowledges and simultaneously signify relationships of reciprocity (Kovach, 2012; Sousanis, 2014; Wall Kimmerer, 2013; Wilson, 2008).

Vijay Devadas (2013) investigates the interface of media-culture and society, and explains this as Foucault’s *biopower*, where nation-states control stories about minority populations to promote particular beliefs impacting on economic production and social cohesion (Devadas, 2013; Hokowhitu & Page, MCGloin & Carlson, 2013). Māori are narrated as problematic within contexts of national identity (Lee, 2009; Peters & Marshall, 1996; Smith, 1999). We are mythologised to incite fear, anger, repulsion and romantic ideas about the past - our present realities as existing beyond colonial constructs interrupt the foundation of theft and dispossession underlying New Zealand’s sense of national identity. Stereotypes help justify social protocols that systematise suppression and silence, where, Māori become puppets of emerging power technologies (Devadas, 2013; Moewaka Barnes, Taiapa, Borell, McCreanor, 2013; Smith, 1999); assisting the nation-state to authorise its control over valuable stolen resources. In a society highly saturated by various forms of concrete and ephemeral communicative media, the ability for nation-states to control our biopower through racist emphasis, is increased.

Western images drive us toward thinking about reality in competitive and compartmentalised ways. Stereotypical racial assumptions reduce historical and cultural experiences to essentialised differences – constructing reality through looking and deciding to see difference rather than similarity (Hall & Sealy, 2001; Raumati-Hook, 2009; Richardson, 2012; Said, 1978; Smith, 1999). In a globalised society where distance between the West and all others is reduced, opportunities to view and make judgements about how people appear exponentially increases the adoption of what is determined ‘normal’. Diversity as a normal and healthy way of being global is impacted upon by digital virtuality because no longer are ideas grounded in reality, but in multiple replications of what might once have been real (Baudrillard, 2003). Ways of thinking about the world are cemented in non-existent external spaces – designed, monitored and compartmentalised by web designers who perpetuate existing power structures (Manovich, 2001; Mrizoeff, 2016; Tanczer, 2015; Wemigwans, 2008). “Our physical world, cityscapes and natural settings, as well as our inner mental landscapes are all colonised today by the image industry” (Pallasmaa, 2010, p.15).

Witness the scope of whitewash, mainstreaming mechanisms of mediocrity. The TV landscape is jest escapism, a schism of solitary solidarity, scratching the surface of the faceless scene – screening me outside my insides.

The boundaries between the real and the mass media constructed world have dissolved, which creates a future bound by global capitalism. Images of the mainstream West are transposed exponentially through television and other media, where boundaries between the real world and the mass media constructed world dissolve, creating futures bound by the hegemony of global capitalism (Ang, 2004; Baudrillard, 2003; Devadas, 2013). With the Western media at the driving centre of globalisation, Indigenous people are marginalised by the mass-culture of the West – a perspective elucidated by Ulf Hannerz (1991), a Norwegian based social anthropologist. Hannerz (1991) explains that global culture is significantly shaped by the centre/periphery structures of the West. The entrenchment of Western cultural knowledge and practice through mass-media informed portrayals of history, essentially serve to validate Western cultural pre-eminence.

I watched a film where Indian women shaved their heads, sacrificing their desires and attachments to ego – gifting their vanity to Gods.

In the same story American businessmen buy natural hair-weaves brought in suitcases across the ocean – straight, long, beautifully thick hair collected by Indian priests so that they can help Black American women feel white and less ugly.

It's hard to believe that a 'hair economy' can be derived from such twisted and confused intents, but Jeff Stilson's film *Good Hair* (2009) evidences the power of representations to reconfigure reality on a global scale. In *Good Hair*, marginalised groups of women at opposite ends of the Earth are entrapped through a perceived vanity debt – on a personal level they feel deficient; making amends through public transactions where beauty is transformed into economic capital. This is an image-based imperative that conveys economic power as a primary norm, rather than reflecting human agency and desires for equity (Baudrillard, 2003; Fox, 2001; Ralston-Saul, 2005). Indian physicist and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (2005), likens this type of global status quo to “a war against people, especially the ever increasing numbers of the poor” (p.61). Similarly, Jia-Ching Chen (2001), an American based social activist, interprets the global reality of centralised power as being “the story of the growth of capitalism and the blood of exploitation and genocide that has been essential to that growth” (p.131). In the following section I explore visual sovereignty as a means to move beyond the singular story and finite direction of global capitalism for Indigenous people.

I live in a world where image is king, the ruler of all envisioned hopes.

The fear is disabling.

On the surface, images presented to me as aspirational seem open and globally expansive, but really they are limiting frameworks for me to abide by, conform to and normalise into someone else's expectations. I resist this, my bliss is not present in mass-produced imaginings where even my skin colour is denied.

## Vague vistas - envisioning beyond vision

I express raranga as self-empowerment.

I weave to create socially transformative theory – it's seems pretty fairy but it's actually quite logical.

My intent is simple, through raranga I enable a means to interpret the contortion and control of image industries. I want to live beyond their definitions of identity.

For Indigenous people to have autonomy, we must first have ways to emancipate our image – to re-determine our vision.

Michelle Raheja (2011), a Seneca academic who specialises in Native American literature, writes about the power colonisation has to determine the identities of those who are colonised. Raheja (2011) discusses this in terms of 'visual sovereignty', arguing that primacy for Native people over how we are presented and represented does two things; it "... addresses the settler population by creating self-representations that interact with older stereotypes" (p.19), and; it realigns visual media to connect with larger authentic practices of Indigenous cultures. Similarly, Taskigi and Diné artist and scholar Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (2009) describes visual sovereignty as "a particular type of consciousness rooted in confidence which is exhibited as a strength in cultural and visual presence", one that "... does not ask permission to exist, but . . . require[s] responsibility to continue" (pp.10-11). Perhaps the most exciting innovations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can allow an ability for Indigenous peoples to subvert Western spaces of representation towards visual sovereignty, particularly those that are virtual in nature?

Visual culture theorist Nicolas Mirzoeff (2016), writes about ways Native American protests against the *Dakota Access Pipeline* in 2016, have occupied mainstream virtual territories and amassed allies to support their protection for the Earth, “constitut[ing] a space of appearance in which it has been newly possible to engage ‘outside’ the settler state while being encircled by it” (para. 17). Mirzoeff (2016) writes:

“... reconfiguration of public and private space to acknowledge the Native presence allows us to see differently. It opens the possibility of breaking down the exclusionary borders of the space of representation and creating anew the space of appearance by remembering whose land it really is.” (para. 3)

This is my vision – the hope for freedom from oppressive forms of governance. Visual assertions of Indigenous culture then, must surely need to be considered as a primary strategy toward self-determination. I assert that raranga enables a clever pathway towards moemoeā; a word that carries the intent of both noun and verb, describing envisioning or dreaming (*Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary*, 2013-2017). Moemoeā is expressed in the *English-Māori dictionary* by Hori M. Ngata (1993) through the sentiment “Ka waiho e au ki a koutou he moemoeā, he mea piri poho nāku me ōku hoa tokomaha i roto i nga tau”, which translates as “I leave you a dream that I and my many friends have treasured through the years” (p.113). Through raranga I bring together accumulated pathways of imagination toward being.

The vision the state for me has not always been the best, my jest interests are not at its heartless core – rather it sustains feelings of, anxiety, hopelessness and despair.

I don’t want to be a person who doubts their deservedness anymore.

I enjoy mahi raranga – it is calming, where through repeated and remembered actions I am able to process the materials I use to weave. I repeat with my hands, conversations where my body finds ways to relate to my thoughts – enabling me to sort, weave and unweave many things simultaneously.

When I raranga I feel connected and central in my network of relationships.

There have been a number of papers published that examine media instances describing Māori in ways that contribute to negative national sentiment about us – where we are constructed as a threat to idea of a cohesive New Zealand (Barnett, Hodgetts, Nikora, Chamberlain & Karapu 2007; Crombie, Manaaki, Rolleston & Te Kanawa 2002; Coxhead, 2005; Gregory, Borell, McCreanor, Moewaka Barnes, Nairn, Rankine, Abel, Taiapa & Kaiwai, 2007; Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004; Nairn, Mc Creanor, Moewaka Barnes, Borell, Rankine & Gregory, 2012). Where Māori cultural practices are scrutinised and rendered amongst news stories about crime or violence, mainstream New Zealand authenticates its perceptions of our lives as primal and aggressive. Māori are portrayed at the peripheries of desirable social behaviour, at first through composed representations and then in practice; “[i]t follows, when the predominant representation of a particular group is negative that becomes the reality for most media consumers” (Nairn et al., 2012, p.47). These juxtapositions are intentional – they are designed portrayals that maintain a balance of power suiting most New Zealanders, and on a broad scale disadvantaging Māori and our life outcomes. The State imposes representations upon Māori through labels, categories and emotive descriptors like ‘radical’ or as against ‘everyday New Zealanders’ with the result we collectively struggle in our right to flourish. My intent is to explore raranga with different types of media, using what I create as powerful signifiers to help me stand on my own terms – and in the long-run, describe creative practice strategies that others can enact as embodied autonomous visioning.

In his PhD thesis, Ngāti Porou, Ngai Tahu, Ngāti Apa and Ngāti Kahungunu educational philosopher and theorist Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1997) describes a utopian vision for Māori praxis, a meld of theory and practice that is driven “by its emancipatory vision of striving for ‘tino rangatiratanga’ (self-determination, autonomy, independence)” (p.69). Similarly in her PhD thesis, Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Māhanga and Ngāti Māhanga ā Tairi activist and social theorist Leonie Pihama (2001) articulates this further by stating;

“Tino rangatiratanga links us directly to a right to define and control what it means to be Māori in Aotearoa. Tino rangatiratanga is expressed in Te Tiriti o Waitangi in relationship to the notion ‘kawangatanga’ which is referred to in Article one and translated by Hugh Kawharu as ‘government’ and which others refer to as ‘governorship’”. (p.127)

Although contemporary Māori aspirations for tino rangatiratanga have emerged through our relationship with the Crown, they are not new; Māori “have been enacting such assertions for generations, the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is in itself an example of the belief that Māori have always held rangatiratanga over all things Māori” (Pihama, 2001, p.129). Arguments that rationalise against tino rangatiratanga for Māori have been expressed by Pākehā, non-Māori, including Rata (Jan 29, 2013) and Hope (2006), however these opinions are fear and ignorance-based – Māori aspirations drive our efforts toward tino rangatiratanga and it is shameful that anyone should attempt to diminish the positive desires for autonomy held by others.

I argue that part of the reason Māori have not yet achieved collective rangatiratanga, is because we are saturated with confusing ideas that depict us in affective ways. The bias within representations about Māori are exclusionary, storying us from outsider viewpoints – with significant chunks left out. In a very fundamental way, Pākehā identity is included as part of a Māori network of relationships, with the term Pākehā being a Māori word to describe those who are not Māori (Ranford, n.d), however, Māori as an important relationship for Pākehā has only been a relatively new development in how New Zealand society is designed. For the most part, Māori have been excluded from notions of what it is to be a New Zealander (Cormack & Robson, 2010; Drurie, 1997; Gilbertson, 2002; Lee, 2005), resulting in the state being unable to adequately interpret Māori people and our culture, nor our hopes and dreams. I interpret my desire for tino rangatiratanga, particularly through art, as moving me towards new experiences that can extricate my network of relations from State control. There is no need for me to be an ‘other’ within the spaces my ancestors have nurtured, especially if I have ways to narrate my own existence. To me, creative practices like raranga help Māori conceptualise what it is like to be narrated out of nationhood, and yet resist this through reweaving ourselves – raranga connects us to the primordial origins of te pā harakeke.

Sometimes ... often ... I want to walk into the ocean to never return. In my imagination of swimming forever without breath in the depths of heavy cold, I feel the waking death of trying to live beyond expectations. My mind cannot escape the histories of violence.

In the end I only see futures of nothingness ... but I feel like I am alive.

Is this life?

## **Sleeping with the enemy – love and textile**

My approach through self-portraiture can bring to light how it feels to be left out and perceived as a valueless contribution in my own country, but also find ways to remake that perception – as a means to rebirth from the negativity exclusion causes. Artistic making is like sexual expression, because within creative contexts, artists negotiate a desire to make relationships tangible, in turn birthing things previously non-existent. Unfortunately though, as a kairaranga living with HIV, sexual acts are often reminders of death as much as they are life affirming – when I make art I am surviving but also trying to live beyond always thinking of death. At times, making art can feel like an internal war between being and not being. Amelia Jones (2002) writes about being and not being in the context of visuality, in particular through self-portraiture and ways life and death mingle between artists, objects and viewers. “The self-portrait photograph... becomes a kind of technology of embodiment, and yet one that paradoxically points to our tenuousness and incoherence as living, embodied subject” (Jones, 2002, p.950). According to Jones (2002), people begin to map out their desires through a sublime engagement with image and form, where actual presence becomes uncertain and real life becomes like death – she writes:

“ ... I want to counter the dominant, repressive modes of visual interpretation that privilege closure over productive instability in relation to both subjectivity (of the artist, of ourselves) and meaning. Such acts of closure are motivated by our desire to defend ourselves against incoherence by projecting otherness outward. I want to offer a new way of reading pictures, then, that involves deliciously relinquishing our power as viewing subjects and revelling in our own otherness” (p.952).

For me, the relevance of Jones’ statement, is that to live fully, I should embrace any uncertainty and strangeness symbolised within the objects I create to depict myself. My perceived ‘mistakes’, ‘flaws’ and ‘imperfections’ become creative tenuous anxieties; extending the boundaries and limitations I may impose on myself. I acknowledge raranga as affirming presence in the space between life and death; where in absence, the space to dream new pathways transforms toward potential.

Sexuality and creativity can be considered through Māori narratives describing the relationship between an atua Tāne, the energy of life, and the atua Hine who is transformed through evolving manifestations of consciousness. In this pūrākau, Tāne transforms an aspect of Papatūānuku, our Earth mother, into the human life principle Hineahuone, from whom Hinetītama the dawn of humanity is birthed (Emery, Cookson-Cox, Raerino, 2015; Gabel, 2013; Mikaere, 2005; Mikaere, 2011; Walker, 2004). The pūrākau highlights themes of sexual acts, responsibility and the balance attained through creative knowledge, where Hinetītama visions her own important role and safe space in efforts to determine her uncertain origins. On being asked who her father is, Tāne responds to her in vague, abstract and difficult to understand ways, eventually uttering “Uia ki ngā pou o te whare . . . Ask the posts of your house” (Addis, Higgins, R. & Higgins, T., 2011, p.451). I posit that similarly in today’s world, we should look to the stability of our foundations to really interpret how we come to know ourselves.

With the discovery by Hinetītama that her husband is her father, she renders him powerless to follow her into Rarohenga, the underworld where she remains for eternity. Through the transformation of Hinetītama, Tāne too is transformed, his energy becoming eternally accountable to nurturing humankind whom Hinetītama and Tāne created to live with and help care for Papatūānuku (Mikaere, 2005). Through knowledge about creation and sexuality, Hinetītama transforms herself into the atua Hine-nui-te-pō, an atua of protection in the darkened realms between human life and death (Emery, Cookson-Cox, Raerino, 2015; Gabel, 2013; Mikaere, 2011). Hine-nui-te-pō represents an enlightened moral consciousness who demarcates boundaries and provides clarity – ensuring balanced patterns of transformative continuance. I gain knowledge from interpreting this pūrākau as I have, to formulate my own boundaries of existence – making artworks to test out the markers of my embodied experience.

Raranga helps affirm life-cycles, through the working of natural fibres that are at first alive, but which die to become part of raranga objects. It seems that this should be a finite and linear process, but it is not because raranga transforms materials with new life and energy. Between weavers and the things we weave, knowledge grows that helps us come to terms with our surroundings and also ways we can sustainably enhance and live as part of them.

On the one hand transformation is practical because woven forms become useful as functional objects. On the other hand, the transformation that takes place is more symbolic, where tūpuna rau, or older leaves used for weaving become like taonga, or special and valuable objects. This process is expressed by expert weaver Kahutoi Te Kanawa (Ngāti Kinohaku, Maniapoto, Koroki, Tuwharetoa me Rarua) (2008), where weaving becomes gifted knowledge that is cared for as it passed from ancestors to subsequent generations. When I teach raranga with harakeke, learners always comment on the separation of the leaves as they are cut away, because they feel bad for what they perceive as damage and loss. However, these actions help the plant to grow through increased aeration and nutrients for new shoots. I liken this to the loss of grandparents and elders where through the pain experienced, their memories and lessons are strengthened as stories that we hold on to, shape and gift to our children. As repositories of knowledge, our elders empower our ability to navigate the world and in the following section, I describe creative practice research precedents that similarly offer positive potentials for growth.

Through raranga, ends and beginnings meld as finite and infinite theory and practice.

Raranga combines living and dying, theory and practice but here it is just academic text,

sad sex waiting for boundless finesse.



## Artwarfare – territories of art research

In her PhD thesis, Tongan graphic artist and scholar Talita Toluta'u (2015), envisions her academic text in the boundary between traditional Tongan practices of gifting and traditional western academic forms; she expresses her thesis as a me'a'ofa through luva – the living object in the process of gifting (Toluta'u, 2015). She asks readers to imagine a thesis as a living body, which exists in environments created between individuals – inferring her research as communal, where her thesis 'lives' beyond herself amongst a growing continuum of knowledge (Toluta'u, 2015). As a creative object, Toluta'u's thesis combines a range of creative expressions; firstly a veitalatala – a poetic feminine conversation with research participants that she documents through film, and secondly; large ngatu prints of layered images – created through a difficult process devised by Toluta'u, enabling photographic transfers to beaten Tongan bark cloth (Toluta'u, 2015).



Toluta'u, T. (2015) Toluta'u standing in front of a composition of Senolita Vauvei [photographic inkjet print on ngatu] 1500mm x 2000mm & composition of Talesia Afeaki Tonga being inkjet printed [photographic inkjet print on ngatu] 1500mm x 2000mm

For the thesis component, Toluta'u (2015) describes her approach, which imbues Tongan forms and patterned expressions, as a poetic conveyance where thinking speaks; she has carefully "...designed nuanced treatments of typography and layout so a poetic balancing of image, text and space offsets the density of the thinking" (p.108). Toluta'u writes about the veitalatala filmic work, "... as something that might reach beyond the limitations of the spoken or written word" and conceptualises her thesis and works as traversing thresholds within academia; that "when considered as part of the construct of luva ... may also become a living body that offers its thinking into realms of knowing and understanding that were the source of its genesis" (pp.109-110). Through Toluta'u's practice-based research, a communicative space is bridged between an academic system and an Indigenous community that has often been excluded by it.

Recent challenges have begun to be made in Aotearoa that are determining new ways to demonstrate academic inquiry. Ngāti Porou, Ruawaipū, Te Aitanga a Hauiti and Rongowhakaata scholar Moana Nepia's practice-led PhD thesis – *Te Kore – Exploring the Māori concept of void* (2012), provides a context for tino rangatiratanga through "... resist[ance] of assimilationist practices and institutionalised forms of cultural oppression" (p.109).

A painter, dancer and writer, his thesis considers the Māori concept of Te Kore – The Void, through poetry, creative writing, dance and visuality, as well as explorations of creative works by others. In doing this, Nepia address the dearth of Māori visual and performance-based doctoral research. As with Toluta'u, Nepia (2012) affirms the lived and living qualities of research founded through Indigenous being, where the "[d]esign and layout of the exegesis in three volumes and the final practical presentation, further explore the spaces between ideas, words and gestures as nuanced realms of potentiality through which we might move and return to reposition ourselves ..." (p.37). Nepia's (2012) perspective on the use of English for Māori expression helps to ground his research so that it can live beyond suppressive constructs. He writes,

"English is one of our languages, and certainly part of a contemporary Māori reality. The confusion about how to 'locate' Māori writers of their writing may result from not understanding what a Māori 'world sense' entails. This state of confusion needn't confine or concern Māori writers." (p.109)

The English language has shaped our contemporary understanding of who we are as Māori. My use of the English language throughout this project is a form of mimesis – I am replicating English language forms and re-appropriating them through Māori processes to shift their inflexibility. Carlson, Berglund, Harris & Poata-Smith (2014) write about the ways language has been used to re-produce the marginalisation of Indigenous communities. I argue that kaupapa Māori creative processes can shift the rigid power relations embedded in the English language. The poetic nature of kaupapa Māori knowledges allow myriad perspectives for understanding ourselves. For Nepia (2012), text includes movement in time and space to assist with ways of interpreting meaning, writing; "... as a dancer I regard my choreographic work as form of writing in space and time with the body, and my writing as a form of physical activity" (p.86). For me, text contributes to form – language becomes like a creative media. I use English language text to challenge perceptions of readers in academic spaces, the same ways I would use art to challenge viewer perceptions in a gallery space.

Our bodies exist through many concrete and ephemeral communicative texts, which is highlighted in the thesis of Educationalist, art critic and cartoonist Nick Sousanis. Sousanis creates an abstract thesis about the limitations of traditional thought, weaving multiple ways of knowing together as a new form of academic text. He writes,

"From the fragments of what came before, these loose threads, we begin to play, to dance and weave together new from old.

The single thread has become many connecting entangling all in its web. Transformed by our prowess in weaving stories, we become a race of spinners.

No longer at the mercy of unseen and unseeing fates nor subservient to someone else's story, we weave our own narratives together.

In relaxing our search for certainty (letting our hair down so to speak), we braid a ladder to our ancestors.

Past feeds present in a helical cycle. That is, what goes around, comes around - changed.

As Heraclitus said: you can not step twice into the same river." We find ourselves at home in multiple worlds - amphibious.

When what we'd long sealed away was finally released from its box, chaos did indeed ensue which in its uncertainly and unpredictability turns out to be rather beautiful." (Sousanis, 2014, p.4)

To present this as a quote denies the senses awoken through Sousanis' visual writings because in reading his text juxtaposed words, I am afforded a non-linear means to interpret what he conveys – a Western description similar to the collective and eternal experience of raranga. In 2014, Sousanis was awarded a doctorate for his graphic novel thesis; challenging the dominance of words over visuality by giving both equal status within his research about education. Sousanis (2012) writes, "Through a dissertation created entirely in comic book form, I seek to expand the boundaries of what comics can achieve while radically reimagining what scholarship can look like" (p.1). He argues that 'flatness', where human perception is constrained by one dimensional thought, limits the potential to perceive through multiple dimensions. "This emphasis on one-mode of thinking sacrifices a nimbleness of the mind – a multiplicity of approaches to how we learn – for an educational system ordered around a limited notion of intelligence" (Sousanis, 2012, p.2). Through his research Sousanis (2012) explores knowledge as existing within interplay, through "visual-verbal weaving" (p.6) and in this way, he creates a thesis that interconnects theory with ways to organise, gather and describe knowledge.





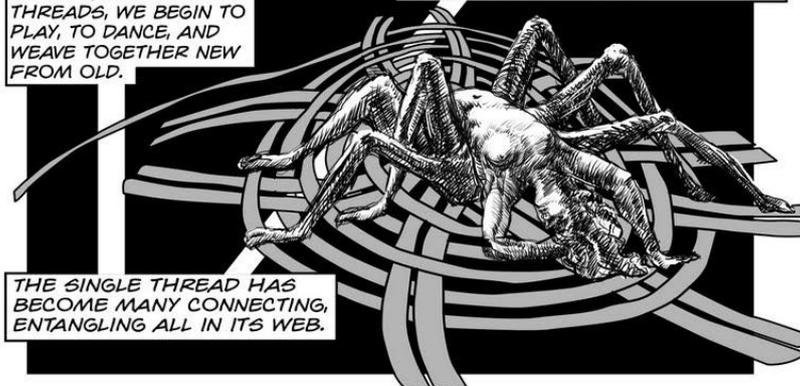
EVEN WITH THE EFFORTS OF ALL THE HORSE-MEN, THINGS COULDN'T BE PIECED BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. BUT NEITHER THEIR FAILURE NOR THEIR PRESENCE SPELLED THE END.

RATHER A BEGINNING.

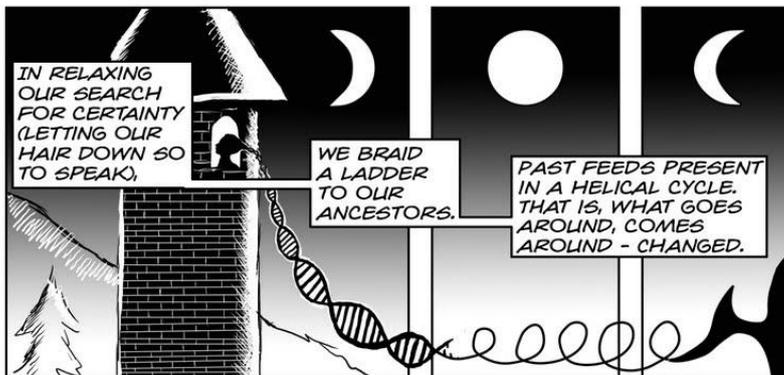
FROM THE FRAGMENTS OF WHAT CAME BEFORE, THESE LOOSE THREADS, WE BEGIN TO PLAY, TO DANCE, AND WEAVE TOGETHER NEW FROM OLD.

TRANSFORMED BY OUR PROWESS IN WEAVING STORIES, WE BECOME A RACE OF SPINNERS.

NO LONGER AT THE MERCY OF UNSEEN AND UNSEEING FATES NOR SUBSERVIENT TO SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY, WE WEAVE OUR OWN NARRATIVES, TOGETHER.



THE SINGLE THREAD HAS BECOME MANY CONNECTING, ENTANGLING ALL IN ITS WEB.



IN RELAXING OUR SEARCH FOR CERTAINTY (LETTING OUR HAIR DOWN SO TO SPEAK),

WE BRAID A LADDER TO OUR ANCESTORS.

PAST FEEDS PRESENT IN A HELICAL CYCLE. THAT IS, WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND - CHANGED.



AS HERACLITUS SAID: "YOU CAN NOT STEP TWICE INTO THE SAME RIVER."

WE FIND OURSELVES AT HOME IN MULTIPLE WORLDS - AMPHIBIOUS.

WHEN WHAT WE'D LONG SEALED AWAY WAS FINALLY RELEASED FROM ITS BOX, CHAOS DID INDEED ENSUE...



...WHICH IN ITS UNCERTAINTY AND UNPREDICTABILITY...

...TURNS OUT TO BE RATHER BEAUTIFUL.

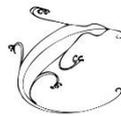
**Threads**  
A spinning fable  
by  
NICK SOLISANIS

Sousanis, N. (2015). Threads A spinning fable Journal of curriculum and pedagogy 11(2) (p.106) Used with permission

In my research and through my thesis I want to challenge the physicality of a traditional thesis to find out how much more I can experience as a creative practice academic, but at the same time offer a form that can empower other Indigenous knowledge-producers constrained by the formality of non-creative practice research. I want to position my research exactly at the boundary between creative practice research which I feel can sometimes have too much focus on surface aesthetics, and traditional academic forms that ignore the elements and principals of design as valuable ways to organise text. I believe there should be pathways for all Indigenous scholars to embed the aesthetic knowledge of their ancestors within their theses. In this, I have chosen to maintain a standard A4 page size and have created my thesis as a *Word* document – because I want to demonstrate how enacting a Māori process can transform what is ‘normal’ and taken for granted. Although its contents differ from a standard PhD thesis in terms of formatting, it remains in a simple black cover with embossed titling. This thesis mimics an accepted authoritative voice, although similar to the intent of Cheyenne-Arapaho artist Edgar Heap of Birds in his making of public signage works (Rushing III, 2005), I subvert the institution’s form. For me, to commit to a place right at the borderline of art object and thesis object helps me be accountable to my network of relations.

There is an important aspect of raranga that is connective; although kairaranga often mahi alone, we gather knowledge and draw shared experiences into our creations – sustained focus brings thoughts of relationships into our conscious and unconscious minds. I focus my practice and writing through an autobiographical lens and write or make art about me in the middle of many relationships happening at once, active amidst a shifting global mass – I envision myself as part of a collective. I prioritise my own story, connecting it to Māui as an ancestral hero from many millennia ago with whom I have merged to transform into a persona named huka. I explore my own story as if it is that of another, to find out if it can allow a critical lens into things that I cannot accept when I look into the mirror. Perhaps performing another version of myself, one more closely connected to an ancient hero-trickster ancestor, can help me re-pattern from dominant forms of exclusion and reignite passion, vitality and ultimately hope. Raranga helps weavers tell a collection of stories in modes that are interwoven, multi-media, cosmological and current – it is a way to show how simple actions can symbolise powerful exchanges of value - where patterns and knowledge about making promote strategies to keep Te Pā Harakeke and whānau Māori healthy and strong. In the next section, I discuss the ways my thesis design helps me interweave the many ideas present in this body of knowledge. I give an outline of the pattern used and my rationale for laying my research out as I have done.

I fell in love once, forever, and it burned my heart. I didn't know where I ended and the person I loved began – it confused me not to know myself anymore.



I wanted to cover my head in the pillows and only  
see the blackness of my shortcomings.  
Where is the gift of continuance when you can't see any beginning nor any end?

## Story me elsewhere – telling tales and learning lives

This thesis takes the form of an autobiographical book, it is part of a vision to relocate myself at the centre of stories between deficit and abundance – I draw strands from every available direction to fill many gaps. The practical works that inform this research intends to describe the performance of a trickster identity, pretending to be one thing whilst being another – the autobiographical element is similar to a case study where subjective components offer insight into the quality and nature of experiences, events and phenomena investigated. There are then compared to the observations and writings of others. I have kept production costs to a minimum because I like to be able to find out what value a material can have – raranga will always help me embed value in whatever I weave. The materials used to shape this thesis are all standardised, with paper, cover and images similar to other PhD theses, it is meant to look humble and at ease with its surrounds – it emphasises all theory as forms of storytelling. I have borrowed from a 2011 performance version of *Te wharenuī o te Whakawahine Diva Weaver*, an ongoing guerrilla performance artwork that began in 2008, to include a pouch of stickers for readers to decorate my thesis pages. I attempt to challenge readers towards physical and personal engagement, in the hope they can move past apprehensions that keep art on their walls or in cabinets rather than in close connection to bodies. By engaging in a personal way with this thesis, I hope readers can create physical connections with the ideas I express.

When I was young, my sisters and I always decorated our favourite posters with the stickers we were gifted, received by chance or found in business reception lounges. For three young Māori children living in an urban environment it was a colourful sparkly combining of the things we loved, to happily determine our own measures for value.



Nopera, T. (2010). Te wharenuī o te Whakawahine Diva Weaver – Tawhanga Nopera as Meiking Florez Feilgudagen Aroha Festival February 2010 [digital performance still gathered by Claire Schultz]  
Unset dimensions

I create art objects that for the most part are not high-art but are more domestic. To me these things are taonga because they are transcendent, offering me ways connect with multiple pasts and futures. Huhana Smith and Arapata Hakiwai (Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Porou and Ngāi Tahu) (2008) describe taonga as being filled with the values, thoughts, emotions and narratives of Māori people – they have lives of their own. “A Maori worldview around taonga ... actively considers a whole-of-person, and a whole-of-system theory of knowing in direct relation to the taonga” (Smith, 2009). I regard my research as taonga, with a life of its own beyond what I put into it. I have communicated my research in language that can be easily read, interpreted and shared between readers. I like words as much as I like the colour, texture, movement and sound. Words and language help us clarify emotions and interpret their depth – emotions can be so dizzying and confronting that often we cannot process what we are feeling. Good art should be hard to put into words and good ignition for deductive conversation. I want words to be liberated from harsh constructions and I want to use words to empower myself and others.

To escape some of the ways that language becomes overloaded in academia, I have changed the ways they appear in this thesis. I have made slight changes to the ways that my words might be read – the typographical layout is designed to give space and breath to ideas, and to distinguish different voices within the writing on the page. As well, I have right-justified some threads of text, giving those words even more space through double spacing. The right-justified text will always be personal, non-formal and poetic – separating these to give readers gentle spaces for contemplation. I have thought about ways punctuation can help with breath and processing ideas, and have organised paragraphs so they never carry across pages because in raranga, patterns are contained in predetermined spaces which cannot be interpreted fully until a final object is resolved. I have used three simple sans-serif fonts; for chapter titles; section headings, and; body text – to foreshadow patterns for readers. Between chapters, I have used images to guide readers between pūrākau and ‘research’ – as an attempt to ‘blur’ how readers might interpret their understanding of research.

This thesis structure progresses through each stage of a raranga process by chapter, with each chapter separated by an image close-up, spread over four pages – I discuss the development of these images in chapter 8 as they emerged in the final stages of my project. In academic traditions, following front-matter, abstract and contents page, research generally progresses through an introduction, a literature review, a description of methods, a methodology that describing the theory underpinning the methods, an analysis of the data collected and then final conclusions. However, this is not effective in organising raranga which is a way to organise strands into patters that grow – the pattern of this thesis is akin to a pouhine or poutama, representing the ascent of a person through life towards the heavens. A pouhine or poutama is like a staircase pattern where an advance in overcoming a barrier, leads to a plateau for contemplation. In my thesis, the literature review is conveyed through chapters 1, 3, 5 and 7; descriptions of methods, methodology and analysis are interwoven in chapters 2, 4, 6 and 8. Raranga as praxis involves consistent problem-solving, where each moment, different layers of obstacle are revealed, contended with and overcome. Through raranga, both questions and answers arise together – the theory chapters offers insight into issues which are resolved through practice descriptions; likewise, the practice chapters too offer insight into process issues that are then resolved through theory chapters. For kaupapa Māori theorists and researchers this can be of particular help, because for it is in transformative actions that our values enable the hopes of our ancestors and relations. By creating a thesis as raranga, I actively seek out ways for theory to have utilitarian outcomes – I weave myself and my relations some dreams. In raranga, form is function and function is embedded in form.

It is almost impossible to deny that Māori material culture encourages an environmentally attuned social way of being. Raranga is a process that strengthens Māori people, enhances the places we live and patterns our social behaviours in positive ways. Jean Baudrillard (1968) describes a bleak dystopic future when he writes:

“[w]hile the barriers of morality, of stereotypes, and of language collapse, new barriers and new exclusions are erected in the field of objects...” (p.20).

I challenge this, arguing that to only imagine further exclusions and barriers from the collapse of extant social practices, ignores that many Indigenous cultures narrate positive growth and potential from collapse and nothingness.

Indigenous creative practices not only resist and critique these types of colonial apparitions, but present us with firmly grounded foundations to reset from colonialism. I feel good about raranga allowing me pathways to engage deeply within my social reality so that I can push back against the hopelessness presented by colonial damage. I was born between the bleakness of post-Thatcherism, and Reganism that impacted heavily on New Zealand’s political economy through Rogernomics, and the heavy greyscale newspaper image of Māori resistance against all three, this thesis is intended to offer the vision of hope held precariously through an explosion of reform and resistance. Cree/Dene digital media producer, organizer, and hip-hop artist Jarret Martineau (2015) writes:

“Decolonizing art-making disrupts the pacifying effects of normative enclosure, where indigeneity remains a force for survival. In order to effectuate the decolonial becoming of indigeneity, then, we must work toward proliferating our resurgence struggles across all available forms of art and media” (p.283).

In essence, this thesis describes raranga as akin to what Martineau describes, a way to interpret convergent technologies that operate between harm and healing, offering explanations of how marginalisations can intersect, suppress and then liberate unexpectedly.

## **Weaving change – raranga transforming text**

Through this chapter I have described raranga as a Māori technology I use to consider transient, fluid and ephemeral space. Its ability to do so is activated by its source in Aotearoa – te pā harakeke, which grounds relationships. It focuses on the core nurturing within whānau, which then extends to include community and increasingly diverse circles of personal exchange. Through raranga, knowledge about ways to relate become integrated with bodies, in practices and rituals that extend beyond raranga itself – rituals that become habits of communal action in motion, empowering our ways to live. In this chapter I describe the things that have shaped my reality, with the hope of living out another, beyond things I often have no control over. Raranga starts with a good moemoeā.

Pūrākau narrates theory – it stories space, bodies and actions. For Māori today, pūrākau connects us to continuums of knowledge – it is a method activating Māori to help each other decolonise and move beyond exclusive colonial controls. I outline embodied ways to perform; ways of working with media to liberate beyond disruptive stereotypes. Mass-media methods of describing the world proffer many untruths, which can appear viscerally real when viewed from the insular distance of a domestic television screen or a newspaper in a cafe. Imaginary representations of how to behave and appear, are imposed upon non-conforming groups of people by those with power. I offer raranga as a moemoeā, as a way to connect visuality with actuality – weaving together visual sovereignty and lived sovereignty.

The journey towards sovereignty is infused with Indigenous lives; it is a biopolitical activity (Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013, p.17) that applies Indigenous traditions and solutions to achieve “cultural sovereignty” (Singer, 2001, p.2). “[P]hotographic sovereignty” is an act of resistance and resilience, asserting responsibility for viewing images of Indigenous people with an accountable heart and mind (Tsinhnahjinnie, 2003, pp. 40-52). However, ‘sovereignty’ is not without problem as the exclusive domain of colonial rhetoric, legitimacy and hierarchies that can only ever be mimicked to achieve something that appears as freedom (Barker, 2005; Byrd, 2011; Deloria, 1988; Morris, 2017). This research allows me to explore ra-ranga as a process to promote tino ranga-tiratanga (Morris, 2017), rather than any form of ‘sovereignty’ in my life – it is something I bind to myself and communicate through written words, images, moving image, digital spaces, sound and performance.

My moemoeā is a range of day to day creative strategies toward tino rangatiratanga – using them to bypass institutionalised thoughts and patterns of being. With mainstream media and its investors as the power behind dehumanising depictions of Māori, it is important for us to take control of our image and the ways we are represented. It's not enough anymore to talk and write about tino rangatiratanga, because the proliferation of disempowering text that impacts upon our lives is omnipresent. In this chapter, I introduced readers to ways Kaupapa Māori theorists describe tino rangatiratanga as praxis, and our right as Māori to determine our own lives. Tino rangatiratanga can only come about through actions – through practices where we apprehend our daily tools and re-vision our surrounds. I narrate creative potentials within artmaking through discussions about life, death and sexuality – making connections between Hine-nui-te-pō, Tāne and sexual expressions between living non-living energies.

Finally within this chapter, I have described examples of practice-based research that help me consider my own thesis design – these research examples have empowered the moemoeā I have for this project. The research of both Moana Nepia and Talita Toluta'u, ground me with examples of Aotearoa precedents for thesis design, both placing emphasis on spatial concerns, text and ways to include combinations of text and image. Nick Sousanis, who creates theory woven between juxtapositions of text and drawn image, innovatively empowers through aesthetics that allow a rethinking of research. Through investigating these research practices, I am afforded lenses from which to imagine my own vision for research – I am provided visual and performance templates to design the dreams I have for an autonomous future where modes for art as research enables transformative praxis. The primary finding in this chapter is that creative practice research can help people to connect sexuality with creativity, to, re-story and re-generate visions of empowerment.

I practice research. I raranga to organise thinking.

For my whole life I was dead, an image of someone else's imagining.

Raranga embodies beyond fixed boundaries of thought, empowering lived ways to 'be'.

Weaving, fixed positions begin to slowly move, morph and take on new shapes.

Raranga heals exclusion and creates envisioned hopes and dreams.

I am rethinking research to allow growth from what seem like empty voids.







## **Chapter 2.**

### **Karakia – prayers of coming and going**



Throw the baby out with the bathwater, try to forget and start again fresh.

When I was a newly-born baby, my mother wrapped me up in bubble-wrap, and crying with a life of loss, she gifted me to the sea. She wasn't allowed to keep me because it was the 70s and people had strange ideas about babies.

Tangaroa, my expansive ancestor of molten air, he kept me warm in his waves goodbye to the land. The water was ice and there was so much salt from my mother's tears that I began to turn into a fish. My scaly skin itched and I cried an ocean of crocodile tears.

Sharks tried to eat me alive.

There was a handsome man, with a princess for a wife, and they too had been crying because they couldn't have children of their own. By the time they found me I had become fostered by jellyfish who had enmeshed me within a floating garbage-Gaia – a plastic island for lost babies without love, homes or hope.

The man was a pre-franchise Warrior, and appalled by the waste he wrestled me from the garbage so that I could breathe. The princess took me to her husband's mother and together they bathed me in a mix of sulphur and steam, an elixir of the Earth's energy, till eventually the scales fell away and the itching stopped. They raised me as their son, even though my fish-self was a maiden, but in the end it didn't really matter too much.

I will always be a mermaiden beneath my skin, although lately I have been growing feathers too.

I think I am some kind of weird creature.

## Making mirror love – used up reflections

Social expectations explicate boundaries that often leave individuals feeling excluded  
and alone.

I will never know the hurt my birth mother experienced in unwillingly giving me up, and  
only as an adult have I begun to manage a deeply felt sense of abandonment.  
My experience of life has often felt like one of disconnect, where although I am present  
a deep part of me avoids becoming too attached to others – it is a fear of loss and a  
resistance to aroha. It seems almost absurd within an era of unprecedented population  
growth and interconnectivity, that I should be so  
bound to solitude.

However, with global ways of thinking that encourage individualism, competition,  
discrimination and massive faceless networks of economic expansionism, maybe  
loneliness is the norm?

With this in mind, I explore isolation and togetherness, and the ways that raranga can  
balance these binaries; I focus on karakia, the second stage of a raranga process.

Karakia are described as “... incantation, ritual chant, chant, intoned incantation, charm, spell - a set form of words to state or make effective a ritual activity ... recited rapidly using traditional language, symbols and structures ... images used in karakia are from traditional narratives” (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2013-2017). Karakia function as “spiritual ‘chants’ ... to protect knowledge and to open a discussion about sacred things” (Smith, 1999, p. 88). Cleve Barlow (2010), describes karakia as “the sacred heart which is instilled into the mind and thought of an individual or things (for example, a carved house) and through which the essence of life and the influence and the power of the gods might be manifested” (p.37). He explains karakia as binding a person reciting the karakia “and the spiritual dimension, or source of power” (Barlow, 2010, p.37). “Karakia are probably best described as a formula of words that were chanted to obtain benefit or avert trouble” with differing levels of use by children to experts, with increasing levels of importance and function (Reed, 2002, p. 97).

Ngāi Tūhoe expert knowledge keeper Hohepa Kereopa, explains listening as important in karakia, where the intention for a karakia is inspired by listening for what is needed (Kereopa in Moon, 2003). For Kereopa, connecting to the intentional energy behind a karakia is what gives it power – describing this as mauri, stating “...karakia have their own mauri ... The mauri gives karakia its impact. Because if I just say the words of the karakia without any mauri, then it has no impact” (Hohepa in Moon, 2003, p.93). Various forms of karakia are described by Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Manawa and Te Arawa scholar Poia Rewi, as having origins in Māori cosmologies, and “...can be interpreted as prayers, incantations, spells, charms, offertories, ritual words, rites, pleas, invocations and recitations” (2010, p.15). He explains further that “[a]s a propitiatory practice among Māori, offertory karakia are a means by which the resources under the auspices of a particular Māori god are acquired” (Rewi, 2010, p.17) – a person should be accountable to the energies and intents they encourage through karakia. In this, karakia create relationships between a people and their esoteric and physical worlds, enabling them with ways to manifest desires.

In this chapter I explore karakia, describing creative works made in the lead up to, and during 2012, the first year of this research project. I investigate karakia as means of sowing intent, similar to that intended by pedagogy where learning helps ritualise patterns. However, as well as projecting future desires, karakia allows insight into ritualised patterns already in existence. In the first section of this chapter I describe the process to create the performance persona *huka*. Following this, I then detail the processes used to layer digital images toward self-portraits created for this project – the second section explores the use of images gathered by myself and images gathered by others.

The section that follows articulates the initial process explored to create moving images, in this case producing short animated videos. Finally, the remaining section describes the development of a hosted blogsite, in which I write about the personal experience of my PhD journey through a creative written voice. The creative explorations outlined in this chapter form the foundation for all creative works described through this thesis.

The works that begin this research are a means to analyse what habits are already part of my being – using these to decipher their sources and finding ways to grow from those that are limiting. I assert Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire’s perspective that “[f]unctionally, oppression is domesticating” (Freire, 2005, p.51), and so I search within personal realms to determine where I might hurt. Freire writes;

“[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry”. (Freire, 2005, p. 72)

My karakia is a challenge to habits that become patterns, limiting foundational learnings that can be realigned through raranga. When karakia are offered, intended gains and potential losses are acknowledged. To enact this project I did karakia to imagine a persona, my intended gain to balance a learned and lived history.



huka

This is huka, a genderfluid torment – powerfully howling powerless, burdened by the  
never-ending weight of it all.

I dreamed huka in Alaska, braving rolling sea storms of black – Egegik summer living,  
Sockeye Salmon fisher-tran.

I prayed for huka, as I ran the coastline searching for pearls – the wise dome burning in  
the no-ozone sun, bare feet massaging the sea-foam frothing in the fore-shore  
stolen by the government.

*huka* (2011) was the first image I created immediately after a ceremony I attended on the grounds of Pilchuk *Glass School* in Stanwood, Northern Washington State – I had attended with my close friend Anna Hoover, an Unangaġ (Aleut) artist, documentary film-maker and community activator. My prayer for the ceremony was very internal and single and when I traced the simplest way to articulate all the prayers I had in my head – to love myself was the constant prayer that came. Before I could raranga my moemoeā, it was vital to honestly acknowledge my past and future aspirations – as a way to centre and locate myself as conscious, alive and present.

*huka* as an image was difficult to look at and was immediately put aside – *huka* was like a ghost howling at the moon and was unsettling to sit with. The performance to make *huka* had been somewhat unconscious and improvised. I had smoked pot and began to dress up as a way to connect myself to a performance persona, taking photos of myself using a *Sony Powershot* portable digital camera to record what arose. This habitual self-storying practice had become part of my process. Although smoking pot had become a means to uncover deeply embodied trauma, collecting stories and treasures to pūrākau myself was also a way for me to address addictive patterns. Personal resources became things I used to interpret and image the types of bio-power described by Devadas (2013), which were negatively affecting my life. In this I created a mythology of myself, imagining my interactions as a story to decipher how my body internalised the opposing value systems of colonial consumption and Māori resource protection – I attempted to explore the convergence between popular culture, every day pass-times and Indigenous traditions, highlighted by Harris and Carlson (2016) as a research area needing more consideration.

I assembled objects I had collected on my haerenga, or journey through South Western Alaska, fashioning them into an outfit and jewellery. I generally travel light, so there wasn't a lot to choose from – magpie feathers and grass that I bound onto a pair of silver earrings; the seatbelt I cut out of a crashed Cessna Anna Hoover and I and I had stumbled across in an abandoned cannery in Ugashik; an American flag; left-over pegs and cordage from an installation of Anna's 2011 show *fashionSTATEMENT* – which I had work in and helped to install in Anchorage; a Tino Rangatiratanga flag wristband I had fashioned from a worn out t-shirt, and; a cowrie shell lei, gifted to me by a friend from Aitutaki – made by her Nana.



Nopera, T. (2011) huka (model Tāwhanga Nopera) [digital image performance stills] Unset dimensions

This was an intimate performance for me alone, but through it I was able to gather approximately 45 images, which were layered at on top of each other at varying opacities in *Photoshop*. By remaking images in this way, I gave value to whatever I had to work with – storying the importance of the objects in my life so that they operated as regenerative capital. Creating in this manner helped form a karakia where I could accurately account for and ‘balance’ what I had around me, and begin a PhD journey that could reformulate my life anew. In the following section I describe in more detail, the process I use to create digital images.

In analysing *huka* and the process used to create this image, I became aware of my relationship to myself and the images I was making. I align this to theories discussed in Chapter 1, where storytelling as research can create meaningful ways to analyse beyond the finite definitions of quantitative methods (Kovach, 2012; Lee, 2009; Wilson, 2008). In the creation of *huka*, I began to be able to make connections to Māori pūrākau, in this case I could see close connections between *huka* and Maui. This enabled a way for me to envision myself beyond a contemporary mythologised Māori masculine figure, where in reality my biopower performed for the benefit of the State (Devadas, 2013; Hokowhitu & Page, 2011; MCGloin & Carlson, 2013; Moewaka Barnes, Taiapa, Borell, McCreanor, 2013; Smith, 1999) – in the image of *huka* I could see a person without agency furiously aware of being entrapped by the structures of a colonising government. Conversely, by connecting myself to my own genealogy through Maui, *huka* became a persona able to trick the false identity and systems of dominance I felt bound to. Making the unsettling self-image of *huka* helped me resist the imperative of economic power ‘norms’, affirmed through the mass-production of stereotypes (Baudrillard, 2003; Fox, 2001; Ralston-Saul, 2005). This helped me reflect a need for my own agency and a hope for equitable empowerment. Doing this in digital media began a process whereby I could critique structures of conformity embedded in every aspect of my lived environment, even those that are virtual in nature (Manovich, 2001; Mrizoeff, 2016; Pallasmaa, 2010; Tanczer, 2015; Wemigwans, 2008). For the images discussed in the next section, my approach was different – I modelled for a photographer and ensured that I was not under the influence of drugs or alcohol in collaborating to gather images.



## Difference and defiance – castrated catastrophes

When using images to create a digital composite, I adjust the amount of light within each photo and also the vibrancy of colours. I always sharpen the contrast as well, to acknowledge the high-contrast light that is distinctive to Aotearoa. It is a foundation for the ways I interpret the world regardless of where I am. *Adobe Photoshop CS5.5*, as with most versions of *Photoshop*, has a tool that allows images that have been layered on top of each other to be blended in many ways. With light, colour and blending adjustments I assert a sense of haptic visuality (Marks, 2000), where I keep adjusting until the surface of the image ‘feels’ right. Haptic visuality is distinct from optical visuality because rather than attempting to deduce form, the eyes move over the surface of an image to discern texture (Marks, 2000). Working in this way with image is very individually intuitive. The adjustment process infuses within images the haptic essentials that make me feel at ease so that I can identify my own safe spaces. I instinctively negotiate every image I use so that I am comfortable with the way the world within it ‘looks’ and ‘feels’ before using it toward an artwork. The world is often portrayed as a dangerous and unsafe place and so I need a process to balance between these portrayals and my own experience of how to find security. This has parallels with the intentional aspects of *karakia*, because even though person will have a notion of what they desire to *raranga*, an intention grows from intuition.

My process when working with images is to regulate the things I do, making only a few adjustments to each image used before layering them onto a single canvas. It is through assembling many or even a few images together that they begin to help me recognise both familiar and unfamiliar aspects of myself. The things that are difficult to ignore at first are media-based, when the images used do not quite blend together to create surfaces that are harmonious. By blending images and imbuing image surfaces with harmony I give myself space to interpret and problem-solve my internal feelings of disharmony. When this happens, I will often paste translucent layers of colour or image on top of what does not seem to work, adjusting opacity or working with erasers to make things begin to merge. With *huka* this was the case, because in all the 45 self-images gathered I was not able to get both arms into the frame the way I wanted them whilst also taking the photos. This meant bringing both imaged halves of the figure together within the software, and adding an additional layer as a cover. I focussed on the central area where I had joined all images, then gesturally erased to blend layers and disrupt the surface. The emotion present on the face of *huka* directly signalled the surface treatment and I carried this through to roughly sketch outlines upon the garments *huka* wore. Finally I named *huka*.

In the white reign of today's world, I could see connections between Venus and *huka* – both personas who emerged from the sea-foam to embody sexualised and exotic notions of humanness. Previous to *huka*, the personas I created had been feminine and I was surprised that *huka* appeared quite masculine. I realised that for me, the impact of colonisation's torrent of imagery since WWII had meant that as a person between genders, many parts of my identity were being denied – perhaps explaining the suppressed emotions I perceived on the face of *huka*. New Zealand educationalists Vicki Carpenter and Debora Lee (2010) describe New Zealanders as being heavily impacted upon by a hidden curriculum of heteronormativity within teacher education and practice in Aotearoa. My *karakia* through *huka* became a journey to acknowledge all spaces within my own gender spectrum and begin to assert forms of agency over the publically gendered person I had previously portrayed. In 2012, still in the preliminary approval stage of my PhD project, I collaborated with Rotorua-based artist Riley Claxton. Riley gathered photographs for his own work, which I used to make digital self-portraits.

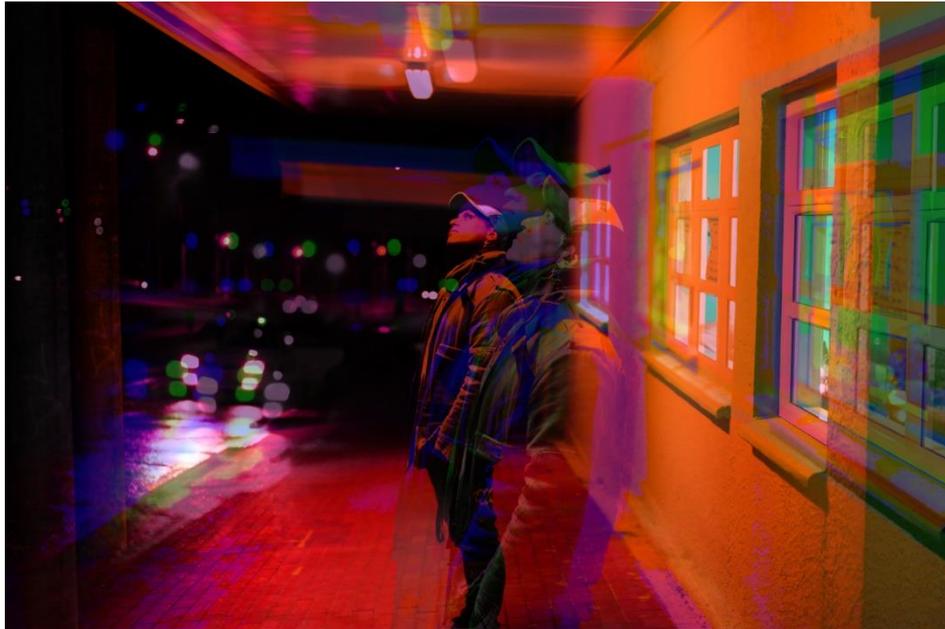


Nopera, T. (2012) *Workpix & Shiva me Shiva* (model Tāwhanga Nopera) [digital images gathered by Riley Claxton] *Unset dimensions*

To create *Shiva me Shiva* (2012) and *Workpix* (2012), I used the same process used to assemble *huka*. These digital works and others created at the same time, allowed me opportunities to practice making with images gathered by others – I didn't direct Riley, he simply gathered images while we talked or hung out which allowed me to interpret differences in the ways I might appear in images. I wanted to make sure my processes matched for both Riley's gifted images of me and those I gathered myself. They weren't made to be exhibited but were akin to sketches, works that helped me explore differences in self-perception and the perception of others. The source images for *Shiva me Shiva* and *Workpix* were photographed during teaching breaks at two different academic institutions where I was contracted to instruct. For *21* (2012) and *Moth to the flame* (2012), Riley and I stopped to gather images outside the local pub at the top of the hill overlooking my village. Between the four images there is a split between spaces that are personal and familiar as well as those that are impersonal and formal.



Nopera, T. (2012) *21* (model Tāwhanga Nopera) [digital image gathered by Riley Claxton] Unset dimensions



Nopera, T. (2012) Moth to the flame (model Tāwhanga Nopera) [digital image gathered by Riley Claxton] Unset dimensions

Working with images that a fellow artist and friend gathered of me was helpful, because in analysing the digital works created it was easy to see that from his perspective I did not appear as the image persona *huka*. Even though through making *huka*, I am enacting the visual sovereignty discussed by Raheja (2011) and Tsinhnaahjinnie (2009), there are aspects of myself that I find hard to have agency over – and possibly, those are the best parts, which when burdened by internalised stereotypes I often cannot accept. There is a notion that Māori are disruptive to the cohesiveness of a New Zealand society (Barnett, Hodgetts, Nikora, Chamberlain & Karapu 2007; Crombie, Manaaki, Rolleston & Te Kanawa 2002; Coxhead, 2005; Gregory, Borell, McCreanor, Moewaka Barnes, Nairn, Rankine, Abel, Taiapa & Kaiwai, 2007; Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004; Nairn, Mc Creanor, Moewaka Barnes, Borell, Rankine & Gregory, 2012) – collaboration offers ways to dispel those myths. I see *huka*, an aspect of myself, as primal and aggressive, but through images that others gather of me I am able to have distance from the immediacy of my self-perception. Image-making enables me *tino rangatiratanga*, it allows me the utopian vision of what it is to be Māori as expressed by Smith (1997), whilst also asserting what Pihama (2001) affirms as my ancestral right to do so. However, I have no lived experience of belonging within the invading nation that has formed around me – in collaborative processes I have multiple lenses through which to question the New Zealand identity that excludes Māori, described by Cormack & Robson, 2010, Drurie, 1997, Gilbertson, 2002 and Lee, 2005. By doing this I create a space for potential from nothingness.

Ngāti Porou and Clan Donnachaidh photographer Natalie Robertson describes how the practice of image creation can be understood through a Māori cosmological lens, explaining;

“... creation is a journey that commences with *Te Kore*, where we exist in a state of energy and potential. Photography is an act that moves through the states of creation, from *Te Kore* to *Te Po*, where ideas and images take form through to *Te Ao-marama* where photographs emerge into the world of light ... As we come to understand the critical contexts in which we establish our practice, we pass through *Te Po-namunamu-ki-taiao*, the passage of darkness, into the world of light ... it is worth remembering the *mauri* can't be untangled or separated from the image just because the photographer takes it far away from its source. Maori visual iconography has been shaped by Maori culture, when images emerge into the world of light Maori value systems are embedded in them.” (Robertson, 2012, p.103)

From this, I decided it would be important, as part of my *karakia*, to bring into the light, and to life, those aspects of myself that were incongruous with my self-perception – a knowing which for the most part was stigmatised and uncertain. *huka* was to have two specific features – one highly affected by colonial assertions of Māori people, full of unrelenting emotion – the other, quiet, reflective and genteel, an articulate composite designed to refute negative constructions. Blurring as a dominant feature within these works, made me consider ways digital image could be multiplied and shifted within a frames so they appeared to move. I began to create video works as a way to ‘stretch’ digital images, to search for a mediator between the two extremes of *huka*.

I hope I never, I hope I never, I hope I never have to believe in nothing again.

It's so bleak, week after week, meekly wreaking havoc on my propensity to have not.

I plot and plan, grand schemes to get past the pastiche of poverty and poor results.

Pity the fool.

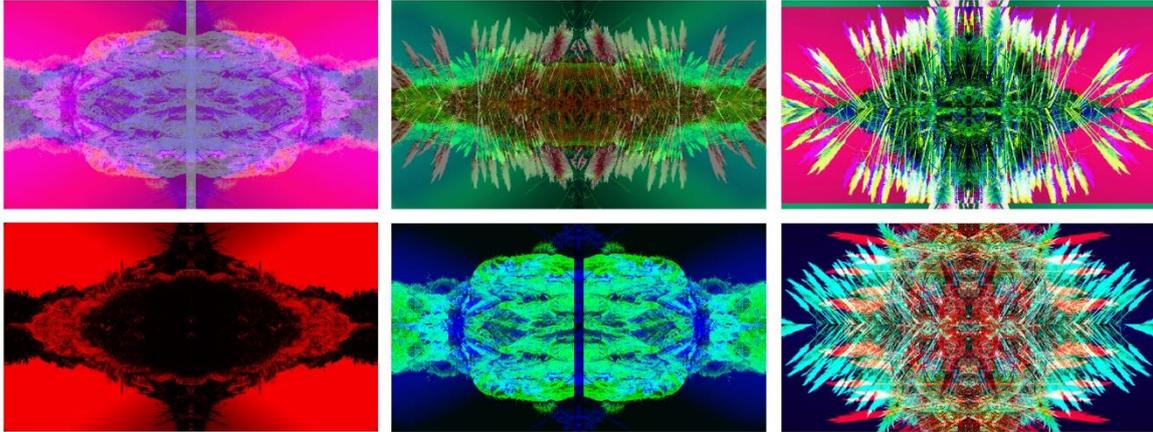
Pity me.



A few days before the shoot, Adrienne and I met to find out about each other and the creations we make; discussing things we are most passionate about to help determine a process for our photoshoot. We decided that we would both contribute items to the shoot that could focus our intent through the lens of 'stereotype', deciding to dress each other on the day of the photoshoot. Adrienne dressed me in clothing from her label as well a large partially woven whāriki, or harakeke mat, I wove in 2006. I too dressed Adrienne in clothes she had designed, along with a pair of my kickboxing gloves and my 8 inch platform stilettos. The photographs were shot in December 2012 in Elim Gallery, which used to be a church space in central Rotorua. At the time there was an installation in place by Coromandel-based German artist Daniel M. Kirsch, which provides the background for the images. Between Riley, Adrienne, Daniel and myself were a huge range of personal intents, all mixed in together. In giving the images up to a raranga process, this helped collectivise a vision. I could then balance my own intent amongst the other artists involved.

For the digital video titled *fightclubbing* (2012), (Appendix A) I again used the process of layering images on top of each other in *Photoshop*. The twelve images selected had been individually prepared, with light levels, contrast and vibrancy all altered to maximise the ways each one appeared. Once the images were layered as transparencies I applied automated filters that randomly changed the contrast and the blending options between each layer. This generated 127 still images. As part of the automated batch editing, it was important to also alter the dimensions of each still, so that rather than the original photographic dimensions, each still generated would be sized 1280 x 720 pixels. These dimensions are those most commonly used for high-definition web videos.

The final part of the process to create the artwork was to import all still images into *Adobe Premier Pro CS5.5*, where they were ordered in sequence as frames for an animation. I worked with the frame-rate of 24 frames per second and once all frames were used, I then looped the completed segment of video to achieve a 22 second video clip. To extend my explorations, I gradually enlarged frames from around the 15 second mark, shifting each to the left of the video screen. This created a zoom effect which was repeated four times. The final work is very non-linear and jarring, with awkward movements conveyed by the figures in the frame. For me, the work infers notions of puppetry, passive habituation and conflict.



Nopera, T. (2012) *Kōwhaiwhai* [digital video still composite source images gathered by Anna Hoover]  
1280px x 720px

I wanted to explore the jarring that appeared in the video work further, wondering what constituted the awkwardness of the moving images. I needed to test if it was a feature of the animated process I used; the subjects in the frame; the highly saturated flashing colours, or; combinations of all three. To this end I began to make work toward the 2.38 minute video *Kōwhaiwhai* (2012) (Appendix B). *Kōwhaiwhai* was made using the same process as discussed in the previous sections – light levels, vibrancy and contrast were altered before the application of *Photoshop* blending options. The video loops through 276 animated slides – batch edited to produce multiple renditions of a layered digital image. The digital composite used 11 images of harakeke and toetoe that had been gifted by Anna Hoover, gathered on a visit to Te Rarawa in the Taitokerau rohe of Aotearoa. I was surprised at her privileging of these resources because often they have a tendency to blend in with environmental colours and texture, many people don't notice the abundance of these plants. It wasn't until I learned how to mahi raranga that I began to see how much available resource surrounded me. My karakia in this work acknowledges how plentiful my life is when I can see beyond the artifice of a colonial buy and sell economy.

On completing *Kōwhaiwhai*, the jarring was still present in the shifting colour combinations and a solid block line that divided the image frame in the final seconds of the loop. As a way to compensate, I established another batch editing sequence in *Photoshop*, which I applied to all 276 frames. In this, I used *Photoshop's* animation settings to create a further three frames between each of the original 276 to create a total of 1144 frames. Doing this helped generate smoother transitions between individual images in this animated work, resolving the final artwork.

*Kōwhaiwhai* featured as a largescale wall projection in *Ngā Kura a Hine-Te-Iwaiwa* (2014), an exhibition of traditional and contemporary Māori weaving curated by Donna Campbell, held 14 – 27 May 2014 at Creative Waikato in Hamilton, Aotearoa. The exhibition was a creative output of the *Tiakina Te Pā Harakeke* research project, which focused upon Māori models of wellbeing for whānau. As well, *Kōwhaiwhai* is part of the permanent collection at the C.N. Gorman Museum at UC Davis in California. It was exhibited there in a show titled *A Decade Later: Recent Acquisitions of the C.N. Gorman Museum* between June and December 2015, and also as part of *Patterns of Endurance* – a group show of works by creative practice PhD students from the University of Waikato, exhibited between September and December 2016. Exhibiting *Kōwhaiwhai* allowed for the kinds of accountability expressed by Poia Rewi (2010) where a karakia involves a reconciling exchange so that desires toward moemoeā can come about.

I consider *Kōwhaiwhai* to represent the emergence of new life from a womb-like space, where the ‘birthing’ arises from a karakia to transform from tension and confusion. I conceptualise *Kōwhaiwhai* in a similar manner to notions expressed by Jones (2002), where through creating an abstracted self-portrait from environmental images gathered by another Indigenous artist, I exist in a tenuous and uncertain life-death continuum. In making *Kōwhaiwhai*, I connect the incoherence I feel as an HIV positive Māori person in Aotearoa New Zealand, to pūrākau about Tāne in the creation of the human principle (Emery, Cookson-Cox, Raerino, 2015; Gabel, 2013; Mikaere, 2005; Mikaere, 2011; Walker, 2004) – evident in my use of plant images to create a womb-like space. However, *Kōwhaiwhai* and the works described in the previous sections remained silent as visual artworks. To give them ‘voice’ I created a blog, a space in which my visual artworks could occupy and be present amongst the intent of words. In the following section I describe the rationale for my blog and the process used to develop it over the duration of my project.

*huka* sailed down on eagle wings to the sea and spun a whirlpool of stars – flashing  
fashionable fireworks that sugar-coated the ocean with a gleaming wash and spay in the  
chill night-time air.

Not a care in the world but really, it’s all caring these days

## Writing worlds – making sense but no dollars

The images and short video works that I had been creating were part of other works I was invested in at the outset of my PhD, towards a final performance. It had been suggested that I needed to document my process and reflect on the success of artworks created. I wanted to find out how I embodied raranga which is tricky, because unless I lived with a camera documenting my every move, my every conversation and my every thought – there was no concrete way to determine this. Documentation of process, however, validated the intent of this project because it enabled a means to honestly acknowledge both the things I had already, and the things I needed to enact this project.

The suggestion was made that I write an online journal, which is something I had done in the past. The Fine Arts graduate program I had been supervising on at Whitecliffe College of Art and Design in Auckland, had shifted the requirements for students – no longer requiring that they submit dissertations and instead asking students to track their research through *Wordpress* blogging. I decided that although I wouldn't document my research by annotating it and organising it through a hosted blog site, I would use *Wordpress* to record my thoughts. I began to write poetically on *hukacanhaka.com* (Appendix C), articulating things that were on my mind which I would post most days. I felt that by doing this I could concretise the ways I approached my project.

I write stream of consciousness, because similar to karakia unpredicted things always bubble to the surface through 'listening' and being receptive to the immediate context and environment to convey an appropriate intent. Similar to the ways I make images, some things are regulated – I always write in English, providing hyperlinks to translations for Māori words that I use. I literally write the first thing that comes to mind once I open my *Wordpress* page. I commit to writing whatever words emerge and once the entire post is written, I allow the written words to provoke new words through the rhyming techniques of alliteration and assonance. More often than not, however, the blog is complete on the first writing. When a context for the writing I am doing begins to be foreshadowed, I always ensure I conclude with those same foreshadowed notions to allow a sense of closure.

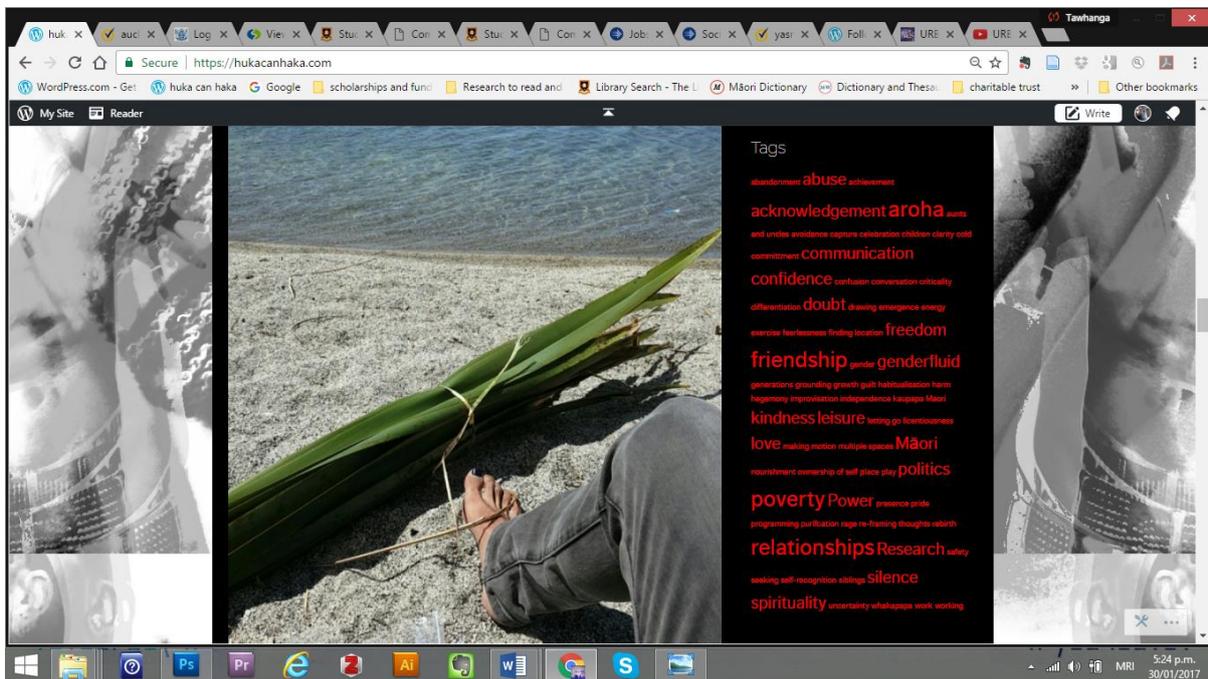
The blogging I do is intended for a public space, but I do not write my entries for any audience other than myself – I need to have voice and talk so that I can ‘listen’ to myself. As noted by Hohepa Kereopa (Moon, 2003), listening allows responsivity towards the intent of a *karakia* – and I definitely could not weave anything without being attuned to the ‘voices’ of my environment. I put my words into a public space, most definitely, as a way to move beyond self-censorship. If I can be honest with myself in public spaces then surely I can find ways to acknowledge and affirm things in a private space. I have open public settings for my blog, use searchable tags to identify themes, and there is a link to the website at the bottom of my emails – others can read it if they choose to. However, for me that’s about a viewer’s needs. I put my words and art out there because I have a need – I need to see how I appear in public so I can be accountable to my prayers. It is the public, or outward expression of inner dialogue that to me, is like *karakia*. A person can desire many things in life, but public articulation of these helps a person to be accountable to their beliefs. To me, saying things in a public space isn’t about seeking the approval of others, but is a way to have confidence in myself and my beliefs about the world. Bronwyn Carlson (2013; 2016), an Aboriginal scholar who also has Māori ancestry, writes that Aboriginal users of *Facebook* are likely to assert their cultural identities online and closely resemble offline realities. Similarly, I try to be honest about my reality as a Māori transgender person who lives with HIV.

Tino rangatiratanga necessitates voice, because whilst it is good to think about transformation, until those aspirations are voiced, they remain as threads of idea. Paulo Freire (2005) writes about dialogue as activating change, and I think this is applicable to self-talk too; he explains,

“If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.” (pp.88-89)

At first, blogging became a way to describe *huka*, because to develop a persona for *huka* from just an image and a few words was not enough to carry the weight of a four and a half year PhD research project. I wanted to interrogate every aspect of the life of *huka* and find out the things that made *huka* happy, sad, angry, passionate and numb – I wanted to know about the places *huka* frequented, where *huka* travelled and how *huka* felt during the many experiences documented. I cannot deny that I am *huka*, but I allow *huka* to do and say things that I normally would feel reserved about, so to document in this way enabled me perform my days with less fear.

I use a premium service on *Wordpress* which gives me control over how my blog appears and what kind of content I am able to post whether it be video, image or just text. For each post I affixed 'tags', summarising each post into plain words. In this, I was able to affix a word cloud to my *Wordpress*; allowing me to see what I wrote about most. Even though I wrote for myself, I made my blog public, and people commented that they felt voyeuristic reading my candid blogs. However, it was the intense degree of openness I allowed myself, that assisted me in making decisions about the direction of my project as it progressed. The blog helped me to identify major themes in this research.



Nopera, T. (2012) hukacanhaka.com [website screenshot showing wordcloud and blog layout]

... what was the karakia I had in mind but could not voice beyond asking for the ability  
to love myself?

Writing about the performance of *huka* helped me to find clarity in my research. I was able to link the prominent words that appeared in my word cloud, to the research I had been exposed to and had been reading through the first year of my project. Analysis of my blog helped me determine that what I was really exploring through my PhD was *raranga* as methodology – it made sense that each chapter reflected the step by step process that *kairaranga* use to create. After the first year of blogging, I took my blog offline and summarised every post, allocating a prominent term from the word cloud – this was an efficient way to determine the themes of my research. I spent time creating a visual map of my blog posts, writing the title and main theme on post-its to map out on a wall – enabling a pathway to construct my thesis. I put the terms and newly categorised blog posts in an order that reflected where I thought *huka* might have come from and where I thought *huka* might want to transform to, and then re-blogged every post in a new order. Reading through these helped me to visualise how the narrative of transformation was developing. Although the thesis structure has evolved since then, I organised my research through the foundation of my blog wordcloud – each chapter in this thesis begins as poetry about the themes that emerged from my blog, which over time I edited into academic text. During the first year of my research in 2012, my blog became the tool I used most to interpret and clarify my research intent – it provided a good means to ensure connections between all aspects of my project.

Similar to the creative research project of Talita Toluta'u (2015), my blog is an aspect of my thesis and research that is living – it has continually grown, morphed and evolved as the days of this project have added to the wrinkles in my smile. Like Toluta'u, in blogging I have created a space for the feelings in my research to exist beyond the density of thinking that is part of academic research (Toluta'u, 2015) – doing this has helped me feel connected to reality whilst doing such conceptual work. Researching in a way that has utilised an ongoing text in a virtual realm, has enabled the living qualities of research, affirming my unique existence as a Māori person, akin to Nepia's (2012) intent through the layout of his exegesis in three volumes – it allows the research to move in space and time (Nepia, 2012). Finally, through blogging as part of my research, I extended the boundaries of academic inquiry. Like Sousanis (2012), I challenged the flatness of a two dimensional thesis object and the computer screen by placing my research in multiple physical and virtual realms.

## Owning up – on being realness

As part of a raranga process, karakia opens a strategic pathway forward because it helps kairaranga to reconnect with the lived realities of a contemporary Māori existence. Karakia helps to habitualise daily rituals that enable kairaranga to sow intents, analyse their multiple accountabilities and internalise critical thought processes.

I know that I am impacted upon by mass-mediated images of what Māori women and Māori men should look and act like. They are for the most part confusing – dazed replications of inaccurate historical renderings. I want to understand how the taking and reshaping of Māori lives has led to feelings of loss, abandonment, disconnection and isolation and how this impacts on our collective perception. I describe this process to create *huka* (2012) in relation to karakia, as means to bring to the surface the depth of feeling I have repressed through gender denial – as a way to see how I have been unsettled, irritated and tormented. At the same time, I have also interrogated ways that I appear to others. Through digital processes I have looked for ways to identify things unseen when I look at my own image. This has been transformative, because between what I think I look like and what others see, I am able to gauge a comparative distance. Through looking at myself and creating self-portraits in this way I am able to weave parts of myself together again.

Image making provides potentiality, but ultimately this potential remains static. Still artefacts convey ideas but what are the things that can be done to begin practicing these ideas within daily rituals? To address this I began making animated videos from still images during the first year of my project – the images I was making already inferred movement. I extended upon the processes already being used to generate multiple frames intended for animation. Animation can appear staggered because of the number of frames it takes to create a fluid movement – it was near impossible to make a fluid animation in this way using the handful of images I had to work with. For the artwork that followed, I combined two separate *Adobe* software platforms to resolve this issue, adding extra layers to resolve *Kōwhaiwhai*, a final work that was exhibited both in Aotearoa and also in America.

However, the image and video works were not adequate for me to gain a full understanding of the performance persona I was designing for this research project. I had a *karakia* to perform the range of emotions he offered, but in this *karakia* I realised that I did not know *huka* well enough to be able to embody him through a sustained lived performance. It was because of this that I began to blog, documenting my daily experiences in poetic language. Blogging offered me a way to write candidly in a public space – although writing in *Wordpress* allows a high degree of anonymity. For the most part it became easy to write knowing that I would unlikely encounter people who read my words. In this space I wrote stream of consciousness, using a limited number of linguistic devices to help reveal hidden aspects of *huka* – enabling me to discover a multifaceted performance persona.

Documenting experiences in this fashion assisted in generating a lot of material that I used to frame my research themes. By blogging I was relating my research through lived experiences – making connections between the theory I read and the life I lived. Within this chapter I explained how after a year of blogging, the blog itself became a tool I could use, where a word cloud ‘widget’ identified themes most commonly written about. The creative writing I had been doing, allowed me abstract type of lens that helped me organise the chapters of my thesis – ensuring that what I was theorising corresponded with the transforming practices of my daily routines. It was important that the project have ways for me to do this, with *pūrākau* as the primary method, I needed some way to be able to story my research – to give emphasis to differing intents traversed through this project.

In analysing how successful these works may have been, I have had varying responses. People have commented that the images are quite beautiful, emotive and that they elicit a desire to know more about them. Apart from *huka*, which at first disturbed me, I enjoyed the other visual works created and discussed in this chapter because I felt they made me look beautiful – I always believed myself to be completely ugly. With the image works and the video works, I enjoyed that I could streamline digital processes to create art and in doing so, generate a lot of material. For the video works, I did encounter difficulties in reducing the stagger between animated still frames, although working with various effects I was able to either counter or exacerbate this. Comments on both works have been very positive – viewers have enjoyed the non-linear progression as well as not quite being able to decipher where the loops begin and end until after having watched multiple times. The blog is still a work in progress, and although people don’t often comment on the writing, the *Wordpress* analytics indicate a lot of traffic and views from all over the world. I enjoy that I have a lot of control over its content.

In this chapter I have outlined the initial creative investigations that were the foundations of my thesis research. The creative works detailed are the ways I made sense of the theory discussed in chapter 1 *He Moemoeā Tīmatanga*. Exploring through making, I sought out at the beginning of this project, pathways to visual sovereignty. These pathways inspired new provocations and in the following chapter I discuss the theoretical investigations that emerged from these – delving deeper into understanding the persona I created for this research and articulating the ways *huka* has empowered me towards kaupapa Māori praxis. The primary finding in this chapter is that multimedia approaches to identity knowledge gathering, assists in embodying empowerment.







A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sky transitions from a pale blue on the left to a bright yellow and orange on the right. In the foreground, the water is dark with some whitecaps. A white boat is visible on the left side of the water. In the distance, a dark, forested island or headland is silhouetted against the sunset. The word "God" is overlaid in a large, black, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

God

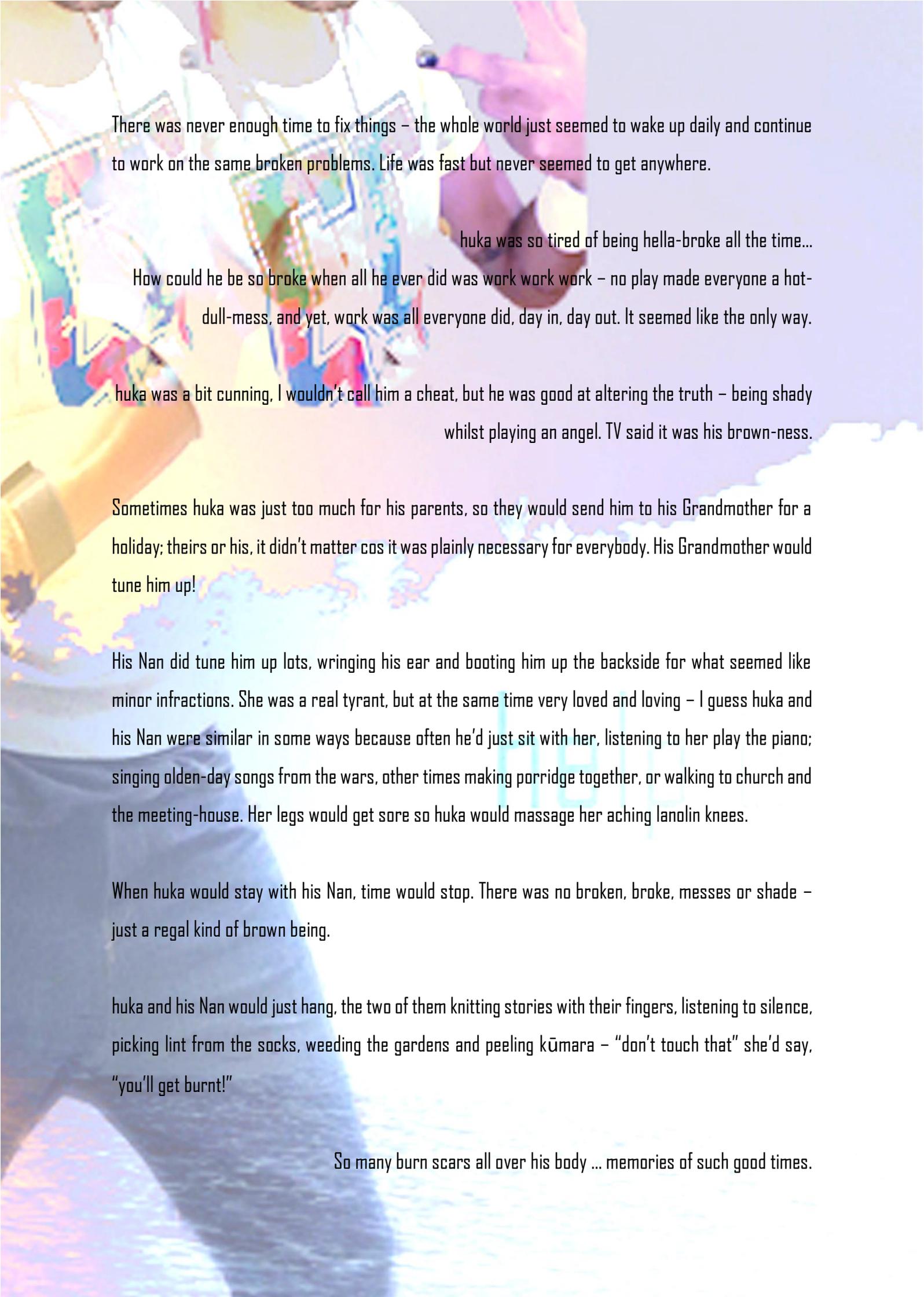


**Part 2.**

**Genderfluid identities and the medicalisation  
of our bodies**

**Chapter 3.**

**Kohikohi – gathering all our broken bits**



There was never enough time to fix things – the whole world just seemed to wake up daily and continue to work on the same broken problems. Life was fast but never seemed to get anywhere.

huka was so tired of being hella-broke all the time...

How could he be so broke when all he ever did was work work work – no play made everyone a hot-dull-mess, and yet, work was all everyone did, day in, day out. It seemed like the only way.

huka was a bit cunning, I wouldn't call him a cheat, but he was good at altering the truth – being shady whilst playing an angel. TV said it was his brown-ness.

Sometimes huka was just too much for his parents, so they would send him to his Grandmother for a holiday; theirs or his, it didn't matter cos it was plainly necessary for everybody. His Grandmother would tune him up!

His Nan did tune him up lots, wringing his ear and booting him up the backside for what seemed like minor infractions. She was a real tyrant, but at the same time very loved and loving – I guess huka and his Nan were similar in some ways because often he'd just sit with her, listening to her play the piano; singing olden-day songs from the wars, other times making porridge together, or walking to church and the meeting-house. Her legs would get sore so huka would massage her aching lanolin knees.

When huka would stay with his Nan, time would stop. There was no broken, broke, messes or shade – just a regal kind of brown being.

huka and his Nan would just hang, the two of them knitting stories with their fingers, listening to silence, picking lint from the socks, weeding the gardens and peeling kūmara – “don't touch that” she'd say, “you'll get burnt!”

So many burn scars all over his body ... memories of such good times.

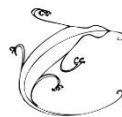
As a teenager I would spend hours and hours drawing myself – I was always getting told “you better watch yourself” and being a smart-arse I would do just that.

I always hated how I looked and when I drew I could change how I thought I looked.

Slowing down through drawing helped me a lot, I was always going fast and this was confirmed by the speech therapists who said I stuttered because my mind moved faster than my mouth. I was always running ... away mostly, I never listened and I was a tutu, but for some reason my Grandmother Moana Rangi-Tai-Ari Kereopa (Rika) kept a special place for me, maybe she worried that one day I would actually trip over my juju lips.

This chapter explores kohikohi, which *Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary* describes as a process of gathering or collecting (2003-2017). Or, “**Kohi** (i), **kohikohi** ... **1. Collect, gather together.** Ka kohia ke te tapaki nga kai ... **2. Collect** the thoughts. Ka kohi au i aku tini mahara...” (Williams, 2005, p.125). And, “**Kohikohi** collection, gather ...” (Ryan, 2001, p.113). After making acknowledgements about available and non-available resources, I gather and collect the things I need to create. I discuss theories that I began to kohikohi, or gather – after the initial phase of my research had signalled new avenues to interrogate. Here, I ‘gather’ research and materials, emphasising Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine and Ngai Tu artist Lisa Reihana’s position from her 1992 exhibition *Take* where “[i]n English, 'take' means to lay hold of, to grasp, seize, or capture [and] in te reo Maori, 'take' (pronounced tah/kay) can perhaps be translated as an issue, or foundation” (Reihana in McDougal Art Annex, 1992, p.2) Investigations into kaupapa Māori theory made me consider how much I ‘take’ on board to perform gender – specifically outlining transgender theory as a ‘take’ I can consider through a kaupapa Māori lens. From this position I discuss haka, where Māori fully express our emotions – I describe haka as a type of gender performance toward embodied liberation. When I write about kohikohi in this section, I assert aspects of Reihana’s perspective – where conscious gathering instead of taking, can clarify foundations that have informed the artwork created through this research.

In particular, this chapter focuses on the kohikohi I engaged in to advance my research – it involved gathering seemingly disconnected strands. In the initial section I discuss Kaupapa Māori Theory, which has been developed by Māori knowledge keepers to assert Māori knowledge as an antidote to oppressive colonising norms. In the following section, I then give insight into the ways contemporary Māori masculinity is asserted – I seek ways to challenge gendered systems of dominance that have infiltrated our Māori worldview. To do this I explore Transgender Theory in the third section of this chapter, because it has evolved to allow space for people who experience multiple and intersecting marginalisations. The fourth section of this chapter discusses the ‘do it yourself’ approach enacted by transgender people who use digital spaces to story their journeys of transition and in this way, empower their ability to transform their bodies beyond the medical pathways they often encounter as barriers. I describe the art of Micha Cárdenas in the section that follows – Cárdenas created a virtual avatar to explore the disjuncture between her desires to transition her body, and those informed by antiquated perceptions of transgender people as ‘monstrous’. The final section of this chapter before concluding discusses haka, which is a Māori performative practice that informs my own journey of gender transition.



## Stabilising Māori knowing – finding balance amidst the angst

Make things right for me, write words that can change how I feel and desire.  
Forget the blackness of undoing, screwing with my mind and spewing forth and back, to  
the way it was and the way it should be in days to come.  
I just want to live unspun, free from the spin. Grin at me and tell me it's okay  
– I'll believe you, just let me gather my senses.

During the past three decades, Māori academics have developed kaupapa Māori theory, explained by kaupapa Māori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith as a way toward “rewriting and rerihting our position in history ... to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes” (Smith, 1999, p. 28). My worldview is impacted upon by the stance of many Māori who similarly assert;

“[w]e will no longer tolerate policies which take no account of our language, customs and lifestyle, nor will we continue to accept being governed or administered by anyone who does not understand the way we think or appreciate our values ... We will master our own affairs, we must command our own destiny ...” (Matiu Rata in Walker, 2004, pp.227-228).

Using raranga, my aim is to fulfil the intent of kaupapa Māori theory, which arises through Māori political struggle as “... a theoretical movement that has its foundation in Māori community developments” (Pihama, 2010, p.11). This is because it embeds the principles that are foundational to Māori cultural values. These include tino rangatiratanga – the right for Māori to be autonomous; taonga tuku iho – the value of Māori language and knowledge passed through many generations; kia pike ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga – mediating domestic inequity caused by socio-economic factors; ako Māori – the educative philosophies and practices we develop to enhance and ensure our culture; whānau – the extensive familial relationships that bind us to each other; and, kaupapa – the collective visions driving us toward shared goals (Smith, 1991; Smith, 1997).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the treaty made between the British Crown and Māori tribes, is essential to kaupapa Māori theory because it affirms our right to challenge the deficiencies and abuses of the State (Pihama, 2001). As well, whakapapa is crucial, where an individual is affirmed through infinite relationships to land, people, knowledge, our cosmological origins and the eons of Māori experience that will shape our stories yet to come (Pihama, 2001). Taina Pohatu (2005) asserts āta, which focuses the intention of kaupapa Māori theory toward respectful relationships. What is central to kaupapa Māori theory is that it is controlled and owned by Māori communities as a means to positively transform (L. Pihama, personal communication, 30 June, 2014).

There is an active discussion by Māori communities and Māori scholars who question the potential and life-span of kaupapa Māori theory, or who seek out ways to advance it for generations of future Māori and non-Māori alike. Waikato/Ngāti Maniapoto academic Anaru Eketone, argues that an emphasis on transformation from colonialism is limiting because it draws focus to non-Māori structures rather than enabling Māoritanga (Eketone, 2008) – it positions us in a binary relationship to an oppressive State. He argues that the resistance inherent to kaupapa Māori theory is incidental to its real purpose which is to empower Māori knowledge, values and processes (Eketone, 2008), a view also expressed by Ngāti Rangiwewehi tribal governance scholar Rangimarie Mahuika (2008), when she writes;

“The illusion of an uncomplicated and homogenous Māori people is a common criticism of kaupapa Māori. While this totalizing narrative of ‘Māoriness’ makes claims for legitimacy and authenticity more authoritative, it binds us into the dichotomy of Māori/Pākehā, or insider/outsider. Such binaries not only fail to problematize notions of insider and outsider, Māori and Pākehā, but they prevent us from truly articulating ourselves, of sharing our ways of knowing and being and experiencing the world, with all their inherent contradictions.” (p.16)

Although Mahuika counters this, explaining the ultimate goal of kaupapa Māori theory is to challenge not just the structures of Western culture but all processes of knowledge production as we come to know them (Mahuika, 2008) – she privileges Māori ways to research toward an evolving continuum of knowledge.

Nepia Mahuika (Ngāti Porou and Waikato/Ngāti Maniapoto), offers hope through his evaluation of kaupapa Māori theory and research. He suggests that kaupapa Māori theory as we understand it will only take us so far, but that it is leading us to more tribally specific ways of advancing knowledge (Mahuika, 2011). When gathering ideas and materials within the context of my home and the places I visit, I advance knowledge that isn't tribally specific, but is specific to a raranga process that always transforms. When I raranga I enact mana motuhake, or autonomy, solidarity and independence or transformation in practice. Similar to tino rangatiratanga which encompasses transformative aspirations, mana motuhake empowers because it is active enough to always be political, regardless of the state of affairs (Awekotuku, 2007; Durie, 1998). In this light, even though my practice generates art through colonial technologies and media, knowing that whatever I create is made through raranga transforms these things into emancipatory tools. Leonie Pihama (2001) states;

“[m]ana motuhake ... does not stem from Te Tiriti rather it is grounded in our Indigenous position in Aotearoa” (p.128).

When I raranga I embed the principles of kaupapa Māori theory in relation to Te Tiriti, the State and the Crown – and at the same time am always grounding my right to be Māori in Aotearoa, even in the future when colonialism is no more. In the next section I describe how the imposition of Western cultures has impacted on the mana motuhake of Māori gender portrayals.

I find my place to stand – my position an unflinching political body.

Between genders I make research art.

This is my expertise, my unique standing amongst my network of relations.

How did I get to a place between femme and masc – who gave me shame?

Rewriting, I make new words – I adopt a new frame.

## **The thin line between love and hate – gender and what comes inbetween**

In an era of uprising and resistance, I have somehow become a beast of burden, broken through repetitive themes of violence, abuse and criminality conveyed about my identity as a masculine Māori body (Devadas, 2013; Hokowhitu, 2014a; Hokowhitu, 2014b; Hokowhitu, 2008; Hokowhitu, 2004; Rankine et al. 2007; Raumati-Hook, 2009; Rua, 2015). I have been shaped by the knowledge and insecurities of Pākehā New Zealand, which through mediating particular messages about masculine and feminine identity, has repressed a healthy sense of sexuality. In tandem, the erasure of Māori traditions of embodiment and sexuality has done damage, because knowledge about bonding and closeness have been replaced by separation and isolation. This can be witnessed in contemporary movies about colonial settlement; for instance, in Jane Campion's *The Piano*, where social expectations of proper behaviour between men and women manifest as a twisted form of sexual dominance and abuse (Mikaere, 1994). Ngāti Pikiao and Ngāti Makino activist and lawyer Annette Sykes makes comparisons between Māori and the Colonising State, and the characters Jake and Beth Heke from *Once Were Warriors*, where "the union that was created has become a very one sided relationship determined at the whim of just one of the partners. In this relationship, one partner makes all the decisions" (Sykes, 2012, pp.3-4). It is difficult terrain to express in concrete terms what masculinity or femininity might look like, because to do so will only ever formalise social expectations, which are ultimately based on stereotypes.

Ngāti Pūkenga scholar Brendan Hokowhitu questions the 'truths' that have become embedded in ideas about Māori masculinity, explaining "that no representations of Māori culture are inherently truthful; that no forms of Māori masculinity are more authentic than others" (Hokowhitu, 2008, p.133). He states that for Māori, "[t]he challenge is to "direct" and produce our own knowledge and to be critical of the knowledge produced for us and by us" (Hokowhitu, 2008, p.134). Similarly, Ngāi Te Rangi and Ngāti Pikiao academic Patricia Johnston and Leonie Pihama express how "... for many Maori women there is an ongoing struggle to centre ourselves, to deconstruct colonial representations and to reconstruct and reclaim knowledge about ourselves" and that to do so "... we must provide forms of analysis that ensure that issues of race and gender are incorporated and their intersection engaged with" (Johnston & Pihama, 1994 p.173). I argue that both Māori men and women are subordinated in gendered ways, where the State appears as 'the man', imaged through governance branding that regulates social relations (Devadas & Nicholls, 2012; Sykes, 2012).

Nationally, this manifests in the manner of a dysfunctional Western family – where always being visioned as the powerful, the dominant, the aggressor, the successful, the decision-maker and the boss, the state regulates Pākehā people as the compliant wives of New Zealand, and Maori as the fiery conniving mistresses. Rather than emphasise the aesthetics of gender expectations, I kohikohi through questioning – seeking to escape expected gender behaviours that only serve to increase modes of capitalist production.

For much of my life I lived as a boy and then a guy, although always uncomfortable with the idea of being a man. In this project I make sense of my body so that I can live.

I am whakawahine, which I translates from Māori as being a man who is being like a woman – I prefer this as a description because it doesn't impose value, it neither privileges tāne or wahine, men or women, but tells me I can be both at once if I choose. Being whakawahine helps me gather many ways to view the world because I am at the centre between the two primary ways of relating – in the middle of feminine and masculine learned behaviours. Raranga too offers a means to be central in a similar practical sense, because kairaranga are always at the centre of many different strands – all coming together between the spaces from which they are gathered, but also the spaces raranga forms are intended for once woven.

A genderfluid raranga perspective can offer a really inclusive way to gather information and problem-solve – it is a good means to balance between how things appear and how they are constructed. I use the terms 'genderfluid' and 'transgender' interchangeably – with 'trans'-gender referring to a gender experience that is at some point or continually fluid. I agree with Rangimarie Mahuika's (2008) notion that kaupapa Māori theory is binarising, because a binarised culture is the reality Māori live with in Aotearoa. However, even when we are not talking about Māori and Pākehā we are still stuck with unaddressed notions about women and men – ultimately, we have been surrounded by a wholly binarised world. My work in this project can have an empowering outcome because I know raranga is a powerful means to gather dichotomous strands and shape them toward harmonious future spaces.

In my artwork, it has become particularly important to challenge gender systems of dominance, and allow not only transgender perspectives to flourish, but also Māori ways of knowing. I want new social patterns to emerge, and change or erase those that are limiting – I want to be responsible at the very least, for the structures I create. Kairaranga know the ideas and logic of raranga, this helps their bodies to be confident and relaxed so that their practice of theory can manifest in calm and thoughtful ways.

In the next section I discuss transgender theory, which attempts to give standing room for gender identities that are not fixed but are fluid. In terms of Western theory, it is a perfect place to help ground bodies that are marginalised by feminist theories, gender theories and queer theories alike – it is strange to me that all those bodies of theory from marginalised perspectives, would so clearly demarcate boundaries that they have resulted in marginalising me. What both transgender theory and raranga share, are their intersectional ways to organise thinking; helping to resolve problematic intersections in myriad ways. Transgender theory gives presence to spaces where many layers of oppression meet, collide, conflict and shift – and although limited because it is only a theory, it offers a political means to re-think the experiences of transgender people. Primarily I discuss it as part of an exploration of raranga, to replant the identities of genderfluid people as a vital aspect of te pā harakeke.



## Transcendence – trans bodies sent into dance

In the introduction to *Transgender Experience*, the editors write,

“[e]ver since Jacques Lacan, the father of French psychoanalysis, declared in a 1971 seminar that transsexuals confuse the sexual organ with the signifier, a generation of psychoanalysts and psychiatrists beginning with Catherine Millot, the author of *Horsexe* (1983; translated into English in 1991), produced a series of texts arguing that transsexuals were in fact very ill.” (Zabus & Coad, 2013, p.1)

Katrina Roen, a sexuality and gender theorist from New Zealand argues the term transsexual originated with Hirschfeld in 1923, but “... became prominent in the 1950's when transsexuality was differentiated from transvestism as a medical syndrome” by Cauldwell (1949), who like Millot argued transsexuality as “... both caused by, and indicative of, mental ill-health” (Roen, 2001, p.25). At that time, colonial insecurities around sexuality intermingled with understandings about gender – this continued a long history of institutionalising genderfluid identities through theory and diagnosis. Over the decades since, new ways of perceiving trans identities have evolved, distinguishing transsexuals in the process of shifting from one binary gender of either masculine or feminine to the other, and transgender people as expressing gender identities that are not heteronormative – with varying degrees of gender fluidity (Clarkson, 2011; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010; Roen, 2001; Stryker; 2008; Veale, Clarke & Lomax, 2010).

A definition put forward by Susan Stryker, a transgender filmmaker, author and proponent of transgender theory, explains that “... it is *the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place* – rather than any particular destination or mode of transition – that best characterizes the concept of “transgender” ...” (Stryker, 2008, p.12).

Constantly shifting between gender presentations, my gender identity is wholly fluid.

The ways I enact gender from moment to moment has become normalised through Western social practices and expectations, but also those that have been expressed more locally within my whānau and through tribal narratives.

Some days I feel freer to express than others, although always it seems, I exist as an embodied site of struggle against intersecting social exclusions and oppression.

In contemporary times, a transgender experience is contingent upon a binary way of being where we are identified by our genitalia as either one gender or another, but deeply feel a contradictory or fluid sense of gender. Although marginalised, what binds us in commonality "... is the struggle to come to terms with who [we] are, to have others accept [us] and to be able to live fulfilled lives in the sex [we] know [our]selves to be" (Noonan & Liddicoat, in Human Rights Commission, 2007, p.1). Often, assertions about our fluid gender identities 'other', exclude or conversely exoticise us, to the extent that we feel forced to seek out safe spaces to be, work and live; or at the common extreme, cause us to medically alter our bodies through surgery and hormones (Human Rights Commission, 2007).

Physically, there is often little wrong with most transgender people's bodies, however, ideas about dress, behaviour, sexuality and conformity can cause dysphoria, confusion and sensations of loss – with assistance through social or medical institutions often demanding "... normalization ... uphold[ing] the bi-gender system that constructs trans bodies as either normal or deviant (read: sick)" (Vipond, 2015, p.22). Transgender people's lives are oppressed through social mechanisms that impact upon collective ways of being. To be a blend of masculine and feminine, where gender is embodied along a continuum that contradicts accepted gender binaries, distinguishes a person as transgender. Any deficit perception of 'genderfluid' or 'transgender' identities needs to be challenged and defined anew, because to be able to shift in gender is a beautiful way to negotiate relationships in the world.

In the colonial worldview, ideas about gender are “enforced through the naturalization of the bi-gender system, which relies on a set of rules that are accepted as irrefutable and unchangeable” (Vipond, 2015, p.23). To be something else can elicit feelings of repulsion and fear, as described by Susan Stryker (1994) where she writes,

“[t]he transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.” (p. 84)

I know the source of my rage. It is embedded in academic theories about gender that reveal a telling insecurity threaded through Western research, which articulates the “... strangeness of all gendered bodies, not just the transsexualized ones ...” (Halberstam, 1994, p.226). Transgender Theory attempts to address ideas about the alien, monster or demonised gendered ‘other’. However, Roen (2001) challenges the assumption of Transgender Theory as all inclusive, describing the emphasis on the medicalisation of trans-bodies, as excluding the potentiality of Indigenous genderfluid realities. She writes, “[t]he notion that trans identities are “... a discrete and bounded phenomenon, defined by the sense of being "trapped in the wrong body", permeates psycho-medical, sexological, sociological, and anthropological literatures” (Roen, 2001, p.28). How can trans people live as ‘either/or’ femme and masc, and as ‘both/neither’? “... [H]ow might transgender theorising be enhanced by a more eclectic politics rather than reinforcing an "us and them" hierarchy” (Roen, 2001, p.194)? There is a desperate need for multiple ways, particularly from Indigenous viewpoints, for expressions of gender liminality to come to the fore – to critique the limitations and labels forced upon transgendered bodies and our ways of being.



To this end, performances described in this thesis test ways to reframe colonial gender encounters – they express fluid Māori futures by asserting what Rangimarie Mahuika (2008) describes as “fundamentally different ways of seeing and thinking about the world” where “Māori are striving to articulate their own reality and experience, their own personal truth as an alternative to the homogenization and silence that is required of them within mainstream New Zealand society” (p. 4). Using raranga as a Māori way to consider and live inbetween genders, I offer an alternative to colonial traumas through a focus on Indigenous experience of voiciferous wellness. The next section describes the improvisational strategies employed by some transgender people to empower their ability to be well in the face of conflicting and inadequate medical health practices.



## **Traditions of shifting shape – transgression and transformation**

Raranga helps me kohikohi appropriate resources to transform myself, irrespective of the way others might identify me or describe my gender, so I can make connections between abusive self-behaviours and internalised transgender-shame. Through raranga I give myself ways to think through the many facets of my issues. As an art form, raranga has also been morphed by colonialism, stereotypes about Māori have extended to our art forms. However, today kairaranga practice in ways that affirm and enhance raranga traditions. Raranga is special and is acknowledged as such. When I raranga, I acknowledge these things and consider a wide range of accountabilities that become enmeshed within the art I create.

When I engage with harakeke plants in their natural environments, the work is often rugged, dirty and at times injury inducing and strenuous. At the same time I am thinking about relationships that nurture – I think about taking leaves from a plant which can leave it vulnerable. Doing the physical dirty work whilst thinking nurturing thoughts might confuse colonial ideas of what women do and what men do. However, by engaging in raranga rituals, I connect my actions with possible outcomes – rather than worrying about gender roles I focus on making and getting things done. In all instances I am a person performing whatever domestic patterns are necessary to sustain continued ways of life, thus I kohikohi the necessary components.

Tobias Raun, a Danish transgender theorist who researches affect in new media, explores do-it-yourself approaches enacted by transgender people. Raun (2012) writes about ways genderfluid people have been gathering resources they can use to centre their experiences of transition – his writing about video blogs emphasising my own thoughts about blogging:

“The DIY aspect of the trans vlogs involves sharing experiences, giving and taking advice about how to cope with your life situation as trans. They function as self-help how-to manuals that can make life easier and less expensive for trans people. The trans people are speaking on their own behalf and being experts on their own ‘condition’ and of various bodily altering techniques and products. Power relations are blurred and positions are fluid and reciprocal.” (p.171)



## The empty vessel – buck the police

First Nations Coast Salish author, writer and critic Lee Maracle writes –

“People are extremely disinclined toward celibacy: “the spirit is strong, but the flesh is weak” -- so says Jesus. In contrast, we believe that the human spirit and the body agree: to be passionate is to be alive. We cannot erase passion from the spirit of people. At times people can harness their passionate energy and transform it, putting it to work at endeavours other than sexual expression. But to delete passion from our lives leads to a weird kind of sociopathy -- a heartlessness” (Maracle, 1994, para.7).

Maracle’s statement is particularly apt, because for me, a gender mis-match between spirit and body has caused an erasure of passion, where sexual acts, intimacy and emotional engagement have become strands of separateness. As already noted, at the outset of this project I began a new blog hosted by *Wordpress.com*, titled *hukacanhaka.com*. Although I considered video blogging rather than writing, it was too fast and I was unable to synch my thoughts and spoken words. I felt self-conscious about my voice and the ways I looked when viewed back. I found writing a very affective means to document how a creative project can revive a lost sense of passion. When I write I am easily able to use word juxtapositions to switch between utilitarian and poetic language and exchange between my poetic and formal selves.

When I write, I think about what I am doing in terms of Marx’s concept of economic capital, where my passion drives me to accumulate (Marx, 1976). But I consider what I am doing as going further because my description of emotions only gathers potency through exchange and circulation. For me, my passion is not to accumulate things, but rather to accumulate a use value for the processes I use, where

“... emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation. I am using “the economic” to suggest that emotions circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field.” (Ahmed, 2004, p.120).

Rather than being bound within words, or even within speakers, emotions generate meaning through their conveyance. Ahmed's assertion contrasts with Marx's theory too, where capital is driven by passion as a means to accrue something in a sustained manner, offering "... a theory of passion not as the drive to accumulate (whether it be value, power, or meaning), but as that which is accumulated over time" (Ahmed, 2004, p.120). *hukacanhaka.com* has become a time-based means for me to assess the ways I negotiate gender fluidity. It gives me the ability to externalise my thoughts and store them somewhere so that I can analyse the value in my journey of becoming.

In a collaboration between Christopher Head, Elle Mehrmand, Kael Greco, Ben Lotan, Anna Storelli and transgender theorist and digital artist Micha Cárdenas, Cárdenas performs *Becoming Dragon* (2008). *Becoming Dragon* is a 365 hour virtual performance where Cárdenas lives as her second reality avatar 'Dragon'. In this 2008 performance, Cárdenas seeks to question a US requirement where people who wish to transition between genders must first live as their desired gender for 365 days. Cárdenas explains:

"One line of investigation which drove *Becoming Dragon* was the consideration of various technologies for their usefulness in a process of becoming. This thinking was motivated by my own desire to initiate a transgender transformation in my own life and body. Following this desire, I began to explore the possibilities of experimentation that I had access to. I found that both virtual worlds and biotechnology, specifically medical technologies which are used for gender changes, such as surgery and hormones, offer a promise of becoming something else, of having a new body and a new life." (Cárdenas, 2010, para.8)

For Cárdenas, digital and virtual technologies enable her to explore both 'becoming' and also "... the mixing of realities and the mixing of gendered physical attributes ..." where both new approaches to identity highlight "... the dysfunctionality of the new arrangement in a system already presupposing clear distinctions" (Cárdenas, 2010, para.6).

Cárdenas finds hope within virtual spaces because they provide ways to design strategies for political empowerment from lived oppressions, stating; “I start from experiences of violence or marginalisation and then use those experiences to design speculative prototypes for alternative futures or to try to design technologies that might change those situations” (Cárdenas in Tanczer, 2015, para.27). Through her art and research, Cárdenas uses a transgender lens to consider how technology can empower lived realities, providing a precedent from which I can consider my own practice-based research. The difference for me is that I mix concepts conveyed through the ancient technological processes of raranga, with contemporary digital technologies – finding ways to become as gender fluid as necessary to feel at ease in the world.

Cárdenas’ performance of *Dragon* is a strategy to experiment with the possibilities of desired identity destinations and similarly, *hukacanhaka.com* helps me imagine a persona who can bridge a gap between a fractured reality and an integrated body and spirit experience. *huka* is wholly an online persona who allows a potential to transgress boundaries within real-life social situations. I allow *huka* freedom to express feelings – he often uses coarse language to communicate ideas and political intents that challenge perceived social norms and behaviours. Beginning in late 2015, *huka* also began to occupy two other virtual social spaces; *Facebook* and *Instagram* – as a way to further bridge the gap between my day-to-day life and my desired identity destination. However, by October 2016 I had begun to realise how fragmenting it was to perform identity in so many colonial spaces and I deleted all social media beyond *hukacanhaka.com*. In the final section of this chapter before concluding, I write about haka, a Māori performative practice, and the ways it has helped empower my ability to engage with my culture but also as a means to reconsider contemporary Māori gender portrayals.



## Peak performance – haka freaks

When I learned how to weave, the tohunga kairaranga, or expert raranga teacher, asked me if my tūpuna were weavers – a question I really couldn't answer because before then I had never thought long about who my ancestors actually were.

Media portrayals of Māori are authorised to exert power over Maori realities, to the extent they are pervasive, normal and for the most part unquestioned as appropriate State directed messaging. When Māori are portrayed, we are muted or constructed in stereotypical ways, as in a short documentary made at the onset of television, *The Maori Today* (Hughan, 1960) which imagines Māori in colonial servitude. In this, statuesque tāne mimic lone hard working men and wahine – passive, prim, proper and petite, enact submissive domesticity. The ongoing intent of colonisation has been to match Māori people with the market-driven desires of the State. This mix and matching turns our lives, land and resources into viable forms of economic and social capital that benefits alien modes of production.

The histories of Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Wāhiao, Ngāti Tūhourangi and Ngāti Tarawhai – my tribes, are well documented through colonial historical image, with many of my ancestors photographed weaving, doing haka or carving whakairo. It is important as a maker of things to consider how documenting the raranga I perform, can extend beyond weaving fibres. How does making and documenting enhance my ability to interpret the creative knowledge I explore? Raranga has helped my body invigorate memories of unexplored relationships, so if a process affirms a raranga sensibility then I will want to explore it. This is why I use haka within this project, because it seems somewhat like raranga – I want to find out what happens when I weave with my entire body, although I want to find out what can manifest in the simplest form of performance, where all that is necessitated is for one person to move through an empty space while another observes (Brook, 1968). Even though this is a reductive explanation of performance, I am interested in how many layers of performative expression manifest through simply being human in the world.

Although through the lens of traditional practice this type of performance looks nothing like raranga nor haka, when I describe it as such, it helps translate important ideas about both. Learning about both raranga and haka helps me shift toward a more empowered version of 'Me'. Learning these cultural practices assists in seeing beyond stereotypes of Māori masculinity. Biased and inaccurate research, stages Māori men as antisocial and aggressive or as limited by our instinctive and primal "warrior genes" (Chapman 2006; AAP, 2006). Our humanity through the lens of others limits us to a type of internalised identity performance. To counter this, I explore 'weaving' with our bodies as a means to empower Māori gender performance. As a Māori person with a manly body who struggles to feel comfortable with masculinity, I challenge these stereotypical and competitive mentalities that Jenkins & Morris Matthews (1998) posit capture Māori men.

The word 'haka' is a term that describes many different forms of Māori 'dance', though today it has been narrowed through the lens of popular culture to describe a 'war dance', rather than the celebration of life that it actually is (Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002; Ka'ai Mahuta, 2010; Kāretu, 1993; Mathews, 2004; Murray, 2000; Simon, 2015). The performance of haka is both physical and spiritual. Within Māori culture is valued through its ability to impart *ihi* (authority, charisma, awe-inspiring, psychic power), *wehi* (fear, awe, respect) and *wana* (thrill, fear, excitement, awe-inspiring) (Matthews, 2004). Māori Marsden explains *ihi* and *wehi* further, by noting that *ihi* stems from the ability to mentally convey will, decisiveness and confidence; whilst *wehi* "is the sense of awe or fear generated by the mysterious and numinal forces that emanate from a person ..." (Marsden, 2003, p.41). In a translation of Wharehuia Milroy from *Kia Rōnaki The Māori Performing Arts* by Waikato-Maniapoto, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Whakaue and Czech performance scholar Te Rita Bernadette Papesch, *wana* is described as what a person feels; it is "all the varying emotions one can feel inside as a result of what one does" (Papesch, 2015, p.130).

Māori performance expert Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal, explains the origins of haka through a narrative about Tānerore, the son of Hineraumati and Tama-nui-te-rā, where during Hineraumati, summer, the sun, Tama-nui-te-rā causes Tānerore to dance as a mirage through the air (Royal, 2005); or through a pūrākau about Hineruhi as the sparkling of morning dew, the "light that brings about the dawn" (Royal, 2005, p.8).

Within haka workshops, Royal uses these haka origin stories as ways to prepare for haka, as warm up exercises to focus and ground creative projects (Royal, 2008). This energises performers with an awareness of the thoughts their bodies might want to express, where thinking lies beyond the head and instead inhabits every cellular aspect of a total human whole (Pallasmaa, 2009). In traditional haka, the body is used to emphasise the narrative, utilising “[t]he entire body of the performer ... from the eyes to the feet. The more able the performer is at using their entire body, the better the performance and in turn, the more likely its message is to be understood and considered” (Matthews, 2004, p.14). The ultimate goal of haka is to transmit important messages.

The crucial aspect that connects me to a desire to consider haka within this project, is the way it has become gendered through colonialism. In the 1920s when haka was revived, it became physical education in schools, with strict parameters dividing boys from girls. The pre-contact genderfluid aspects of haka became binarised – “... the androgynous “poi” ball ... the domain of women because of its aesthetic nature, while the virulent haka came to be dominated by men” (Hokowhitu, 2014b). In a 2014 scoping project *Ngā hua a Tāne Rore: The benefits of kapa haka* (Pihama, Tipene & Skipper, 2014) revealed the many positive outcomes of kapa haka. Whether a group haka performance, an individual performance or as national identity strengthening haka connects people to Māori culture (Pihama, Tipene & Skipper, 2014). Social cohesion; connectedness to family and friends; the revitalisation of Māori language and practices; positive role modelling; innovation and creativity all contribute to improvements in health and wellbeing for performers and their families (Pihama, Tipene & Skipper, 2014). As well, Pihama, Tipene and Skipper (2014) describe how the colonial history of undervaluing kapa haka in Aotearoa is being reformulated through greater access, provided for by social media and technology.

The parallels between the benefits of haka and raranga are significant to the extent that I offer a quote to rationalise my kohikohi of haka in this project, as a way to embody social and cultural transformation;

“... how has haka come to be naturalised as an activity to be performed on stage? Why is it not just an everyday bodily practice? Haka is an ideal avenue for embodied sovereignty because of its disciplined passion, evocative passion, and political voice.” (Hokowhitu, 2014b, p.224)

## **Making my mind up – kohikohi, capture and catharsis**

My moemoeā and a karakia give me focus and balance to enact desires. I kohikohi,  
carefully gathering myself a new form. Kohikohi adds layers of potentiality to the intent  
I aspire toward – the intent of a brighter tomorrow.

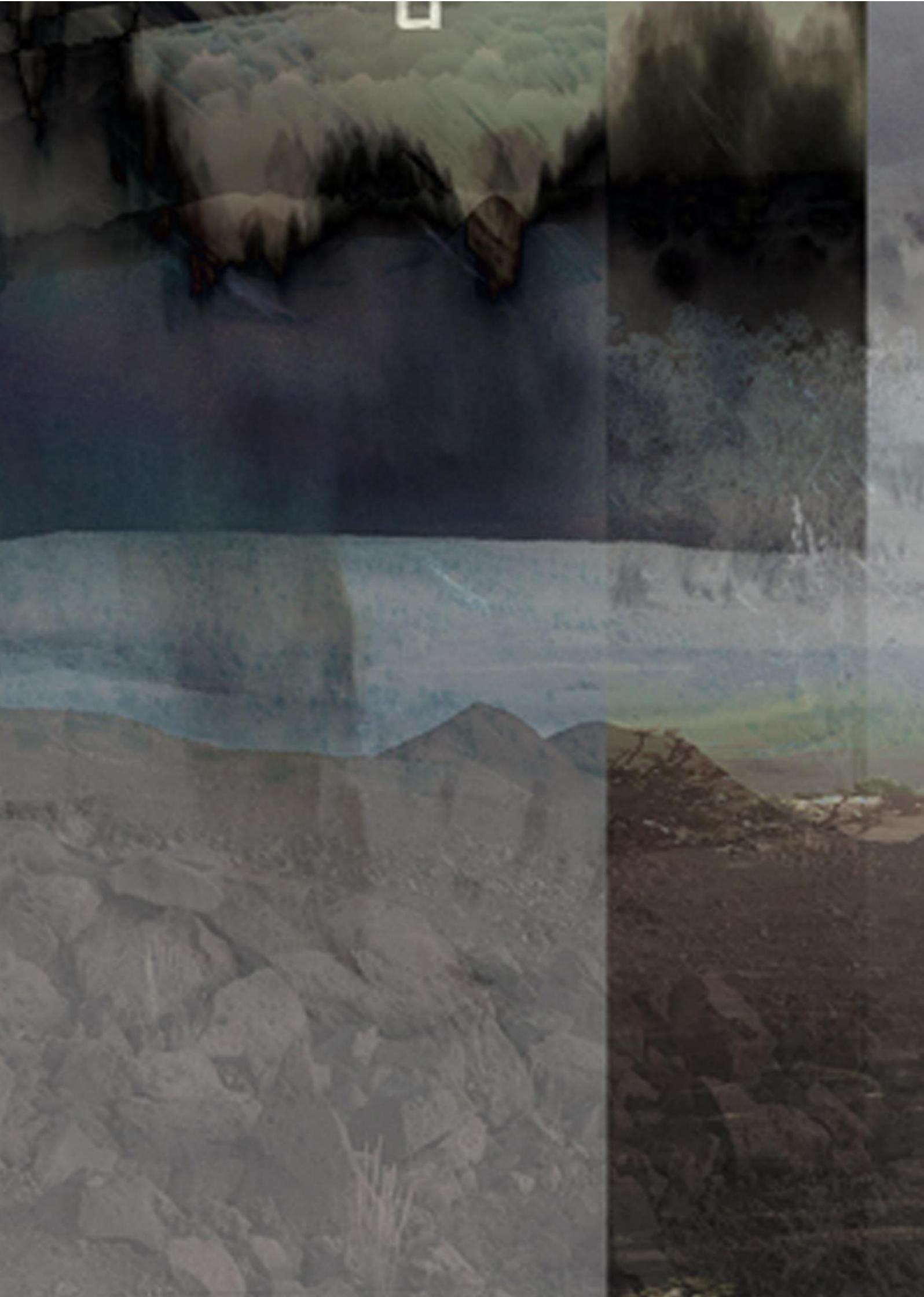
Kaupapa Māori theory is a means used by Māori scholars to help rewrite narratives about Māori and re-right our position in Aotearoa. As a theory, it has been founded in the strategies of Māori community development and is grounded in Māori socio-cultural values and ways to create respectful relationships. Kaupapa Māori theory provides ways to critique the State's obligations to Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi. As with any theory, there are questions about its direction and relevance, but many emerging Māori scholars are finding new ways to help our communities flourish upon the pathways and potential offered through kaupapa Māori theory. In this project, it enables me to commit to mana motuhake – transformation in practice.

I need to kohikohi theory that can help me beyond the binary system of 'the powerful' and 'the powerless', which impacts upon gendered social practices. Colonialism has split our ways of being into what Māori expect as the norm for our people today. I assert a genderfluid perspective to challenge these mechanisms of dominance and argue that raranga can offer a genderfluid means to embody agentive theory. Through gathering ideas about gender and genderfluidity, I attempt to weave strands that have become disparate compartments of unknowing. I have searched for and gathered theories about genderfluidity, which through the history of Western research has become demonised and monstrous. Today, transgender theory attempts to open healthy spaces for those who have become ostracised gender minorities.

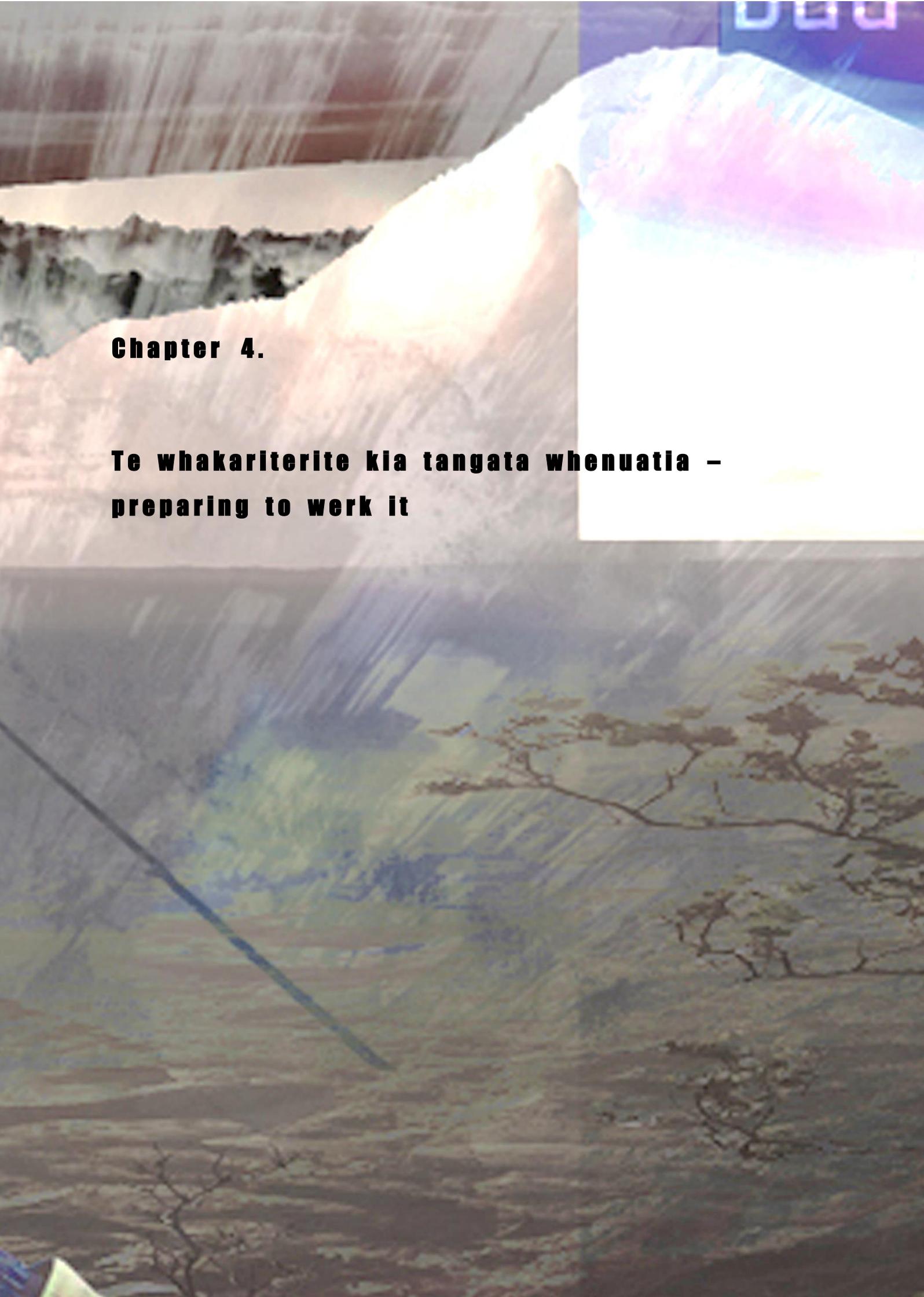
The bi-gender system has become so normal in today's world that a high degree of confusion has ensued for genderfluid people, which parallels the experiences of Indigenous peoples. I offer raranga as a means that can help bridge ever-widening gaps in social equity and inclusion – it is a technology filled with knowledge that can assist and heal. Within this chapter I describe a 'do it yourself' approach which is explored as offering genderfluid people agency and informed discussion about our bodies and choices – sharing experiences through new communicative technologies can help critique the experts who live 'outside' of our experiences but who have an incentive to control how our bodies appear.

By gathering new ways to think about my reality I assert a passion for change – passion within this chapter is identified as a way to create utility value – as a means to interrupt the capitalist drive that fragments identities and communities. The conveyance of ideas helps accumulate their value and is what gives them strength and integrity. I write about the ability of social-media blogging to do this and discuss the work of transgender theorist and artist Micha Cárdenas. I write about ways Cárdenas investigates a variety of technologies to assist in transforming the lives of genderfluid people, who in essence live in constant states of gender performativity to meet social expectations. Ultimately, her artwork *Becoming Dragon* allows ways to consider avenues that fill the spaces between separated minds, bodies and spirits.

Finally in this chapter, I explore haka. Haka is a Māori creative form that has many similarities with raranga – I describe it as weaving space with the entire body. Like raranga, haka has been inscribed with strict gendered notions – regulating who can perform and who should make. These ideas are without doubt colonised. As a masculine appearing person, I am highly aware of how I should perform being a Māori man – even though it is completely incongruous with how I feel in my soul. Whilst performing haka as a type of whole body weaving experience, I want to create works that inspire ihi, wehi and wana and generate positive change. Through the kohikohi of knowledge about haka, I am able to live with a deep connection that is foundational to the origins of haka, even though my own haka may differ from those of my ancestors and relations. In my kohikohi of narratives about haka, there is clear evidence that it is a powerful way to conscientise our bodies – so why don't we haka every day? The primary finding in this chapter affirms that Kaupapa Māori Theory can challenge dominant perceptions of gendered Māori bodies, and is inclusive of the 'do it yourself' strategies described through Transgender theory.

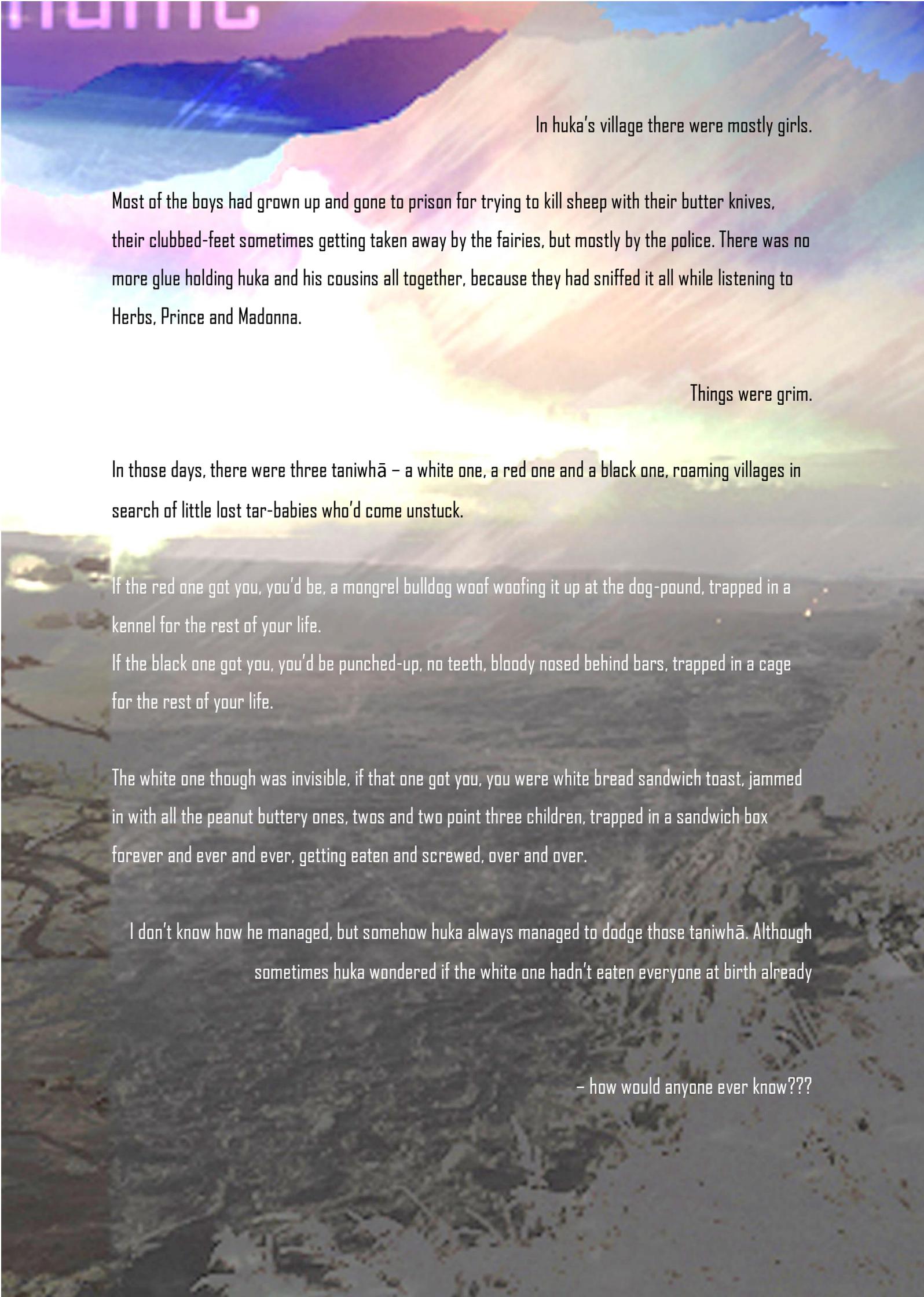






**Chapter 4.**

**Te whakariterite kia tangata whenuatia –  
preparing to work it**



In huka's village there were mostly girls.

Most of the boys had grown up and gone to prison for trying to kill sheep with their butter knives, their clubbed-feet sometimes getting taken away by the fairies, but mostly by the police. There was no more glue holding huka and his cousins all together, because they had sniffed it all while listening to Herbs, Prince and Madonna.

Things were grim.

In those days, there were three taniwhā – a white one, a red one and a black one, roaming villages in search of little lost tar-babies who'd come unstuck.

If the red one got you, you'd be, a mongrel bulldog woof woofing it up at the dog-pound, trapped in a kennel for the rest of your life.

If the black one got you, you'd be punched-up, no teeth, bloody nosed behind bars, trapped in a cage for the rest of your life.

The white one though was invisible, if that one got you, you were white bread sandwich toast, jammed in with all the peanut buttery ones, twos and two point three children, trapped in a sandwich box forever and ever and ever, getting eaten and screwed, over and over.

I don't know how he managed, but somehow huka always managed to dodge those taniwhā. Although sometimes huka wondered if the white one hadn't eaten everyone at birth already

– how would anyone ever know???

I remember running away from the police a lot as a young person, and my mother made  
sure I never wore red.

My parents made it very clear to me at five years of age that people would treat me  
differently to my sisters because I was, and still am so dark – it was important to them  
that I recognise what racism looked like.

I would get scared whenever I had to run past the gang-pad up the road from our home  
and I would worry about my cousins who were ‘street-kids’, or who had  
mongrel mob boyfriends.

The 70s and 80s in Aotearoa felt like an incredibly intense time to be a Māori child,  
because it seemed like there could be no real future beyond being in a gang, or ending  
up in prison; even though I had aspirations it felt like I would always be running  
from, rather than to somewhere.

In this chapter I use art process to seek out a journey beyond running away, by exploring and describing whakariterite – defined as verb; to make preparations, arrangements, perform prayers, to regulate – a modifier; negotiating, comparing – or a noun; arrangements, planning, preparations (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2003-2017). Whakariterite is an intensified form of whakarite, which means to “[m]ake like”, “[c]ompare” or “liken”, to “[p]ut in order” or “arrange”, to “[b]alance by an equivalent”, or to “[f]ulfil” or “perform” (Williams, 2005, p. 343). I whakariterite the materials I acknowledge as necessary to enable a vision; and in this, find pathways not constrained by Western regulatory norms that have in the past determined my future. Works in this chapter are media explorations undertaken during 2013, the second year of my project, as a way to prepare and sort through ideas I had been gathering for this research project.

The initial section of this chapter clarifies my intent in project, which is to describe raranga as a research methodology. It makes sense to include it in this chapter because of the ways the project emerged through a patient weaving together theory and practice. In the section that follows, I discuss the process to develop a performance artwork which was used to frame an academic presentation. The next section explores the development of an academic text that followed on from the performance described, where I used of creative writing strategies towards publishing as part of conference proceedings. The next three sections detail video works created in the second year of my project – *Slowing*, *Uncle Chicken* and *That time I got laid*.



## Looking but not seeing – practicing change

The major challenge of this project has been finding a way through what often feels like a fragmented and disjointed creative practice. Rather than a sole focus on reading widely to help determine direction, I instead gave a lot of focus to the things I was doing – in day to day life, in making art, and in the ways I deal with deep personal issues. In his PhD research, Moana Nepia (2012) devises a research methodology ‘Aratika’, which he describes as an appropriate pathway for creative practice research:

“As a methodology, Aratika draws upon pūrākau (ancestral narratives) and mōteatea (poetic chant) as precedents helping to make sense of experiences and synthesise information. As a searching and gathering of information, Aratika involves ako (learning and teaching together), wero (creative provocations), patai (questions), kitenga (observation), whakarongo (sensing), and whakapapa (layering) as a process of making and analysis. Understanding emerges at different stages and is fed back into the process through devising new wero and patai.

Both researcher and research outcomes belong to a continuum of relationships, where thinking is variously cognitive, physical and cumulative.” (pp.118-119)

I am exploring raranga as a transformative methodology and have organised the different aspects of my practice to describe different stages of my raranga process. With a similar intent to film scholar Jani Wilson (Ngāti Awa, Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Hine) (2013), I use raranga to separate interwoven strands of research, to fully interpret the body of my research exploration. Through Nepia’s description of *Aratika*, I have a lens into how to develop a kaupapa Māori creative practice methodology – and by searching through raranga I can add voice to ways Māori values manifest through our creative practices. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes about transformation as being a process, rather than an endpoint of research; which as an agenda for Indigenous researchers is the achievement of self-determination from colonial marginality. She writes how for us, devising research strategies that empower our realities must manifest in outcomes that affirm our relationships with each other, explaining:

“For indigenous and other marginalised communities, research ethics is, at a very basic level, about establishing, maintaining, nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships, not just among people as individuals, but with people as collectives, as members of communities and with humans who live in and with other entities in the environment. The ability to enter pre-existing relationships, and to build, maintain and nurture relationships and strengthen connectivity is an important research skill in the indigenous arena. It requires critical sensitivity and reciprocity of spirit by a researcher.” (Smith, 2006, pp.10-11)

In her book *Decolonising Methodologies*, Smith (1999), writes about cultural aphorisms that describe some of the behaviours positively perceived by Māori people –

- “1 Aroha ki te tangata (respect for people).
- 2 Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face).
- 3 Titiro, whakarongo ... korero (look, listen ... speak).
- 4 Manaaki ki te tangata (share and host people, be generous).
- 5 Kia tupato (be cautious).
- 6 Kauga e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the *mana* of people).
- 7 Kauga e mahaki (don’t flaunt your knowledge).” (p.120)

Through engaging with the theory that emerged from the initial phase of my project, in its second year, I began creating works that investigated how *haka* might perform theories in academic spaces. This required me to think a lot about the kinds of behaviours I needed to exhibit because I was entering a space where art practices were not the norm. I begin with the description of a performance work, given at *He Manawa Whenua International Indigenous Research Conference*. This performance evolved into a published paper within the conference proceedings a year later – a creative practice research paper titled *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen*. Around the same time, I began to explore the potential of working with moving image and in this chapter I discuss three video works created and presented at the *MAI Doctoral Conference* (2013). Whakariterite was vital to creating the creative practice components of my research because it empowered pathways to prepare material for use.

## Producing processes – playing profound and lost

Early in 2013, Māori PhD students who had attended Māori research capacity building wananga – or learning sessions, were invited to submit abstracts for *He Manawa Whenua International Indigenous Research Conference*. The invite was supported by Te Kupenga o MAI, a national network that nurtures Māori graduate students – with the incentive that those who submitted abstracts would have their registration fees sponsored. Through my MFA studies in the largest city in Aotearoa, I felt quite singular in attempts to communicate Māori theory, so it felt inspiring to feel connected with other Māori students during this next phase of research. The MAI network allowed multiple ways to think and engage with a broad range of Māori knowledges. Even though I had never presented at an academic conference before, being networked helped engender feelings of whanaungatanga, or familial support to do so. I wanted to discuss the connections I had begun to make between raranga, haka and gender performance, but the ideas were still in my head taking shape.

In my performance at the Indigenous knowledge gathering, I used a range of performative strategies, and observation of performances to create links to ideas for people in attendance. However, to get there I first needed to write an abstract. As with the creative blog writing I had been engaged in at the time, I wrote the title first – thinking through quite quickly, a poetic way to sum up the ideas I was interested in. Doing this helped me concretise the overall intent of what I hoped to discuss. *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen* had emerged from the observation of haka performances and the body of research done to prepare my final PhD proposal, a necessary component within the first 6 months of study to outline the parameters of my project. The poetic nature of the writing helped me elucidate a first draft in a very short time; less than thirty minutes – I wrote in a stream of consciousness voice to get it all down on paper without second-guessing myself.

The process to write the abstract was relatively straightforward because to begin, I narrowed down the six main ideas I wanted to write about – summarising them each in the words ‘TV’, ‘gender’, ‘haka’, ‘raranga’, ‘relational’ and ‘sovereignty’. I used each word to write a single sentence, forming the main body of the abstract. Part of what had inspired me to connect those ideas in the first place was watching *Te Matatini* (2012), the national Māori kapa haka competition finals. I decided to frame the ideas in the abstract around what I had seen over the duration of the competitions – where different kapa from various parts of my tribal region, each performed quite different gendered aesthetics.

What interested me in watching those performances was noting that three of the competing groups performed across three generations of kapa haka aesthetics within my tribe. In many ways it reminded me of switching between television shows from different eras.

When it came to thinking about how to present I was daunted, haunted by feels of alien audiences – not really knowing me anxious. I was worried I would stick out amongst the theory overload. I decided to go with that flow, to help frame my making-do.

By time it came to presenting I had developed a fairly good outline of the raranga process I was using through my practice. I wanted to include this in my discussion and also considered the ways it might empower. I focussed on pattern, tension and seemingly innocuous practices of agency within Māori creativity. Likewise too, I had begun to get a good grasp of what a methodology actually was through MAI workshops. At that stage, I still hadn't realised that my entire research project would be to describe raranga as a methodology – raranga as a theory that emerges through specific methods. As well, I had already deeply considered Māori representations of culture and gender within the milieu of a New Zealand imaginary, and so was able to think about connections between the two. The final layer I added to my presentation was to enact some movements I had been practicing with poi. I had travelled to Hamburg with my haka group – Te Kapa o Ngāti Tarawhai in the year previous and had begun to copy some of the men who considered as poi experts within my tribal region. Even though my poi was without the finesse and control exhibited by the women and girls in my tribe, I felt good about feeling the dexterity in my fingers, wrists and arms improve as each week passed by and I picked up new poi 'tricks'. I decided that I would pair an improvised performance of poi with a spoken word narrative – *The ballad of Jewell Nivahpipettah* – a 15 minute monotone monologue that I had written and performed in 2011 for an exhibition titled *Mana Takatāpui - Taera Tāne*. It was an exhibition in which I had a suite of digital visual works exploring diverse representations of Māori male same-sex intimate partnerships – I felt this might be appropriate given the inbetween space of gender I was investigating through kapa haka aesthetics.



Nopera, T. (2013) Mass production Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen 2 June 2013 [digital performance stills gathered by Katie Kamelamela] Unset dimensions

To structure the presentation (Appendix D) I began with approximately seven minutes of performance, in which I recited the monologue whilst improvising poi and listening to *Rihanna* at high volume through a set of headphones connected to my phone. I dressed in very casual attire without shoes – which is relatively normal for me in any context. I wanted to convey how difficult it might be to perform haka and recite poetic text whilst being bombarded with mainstream culture. On breaking out of that particular performance mode I then discussed the different kinds of haka aesthetics I had seen at *Te Matatini* in 2012. Afterward, I spoke about research that explored Māori stereotypes and the ways these have been conveyed through mainstream media. To conclude, I outlined my methodology highlighting it as an ethical means to research through its embedded accountability to Māori communities. I was very aware that I needed to be careful about the ways I discussed haka aesthetics, especially in relation to mediated gender representations and the ways they manifested on stage. It was particularly important on that occasion because without me knowing, a cousin who performed in one of the groups I was comparing attended the presentation. Her attendance made me very aware of ways to communicate my ideas ethically

In performing *Mass production*, I really had to 'kia tupato', or tread with caution, which Ngāti Pahauwera social and developmental psychologist Fiona Cram (2001) asserts as " ... being politically astute, culturally safe and reflexive about our insider/outsider status" (p.46). Smith (2006) expands on this discussion by adding "It is also a caution to insiders and outsiders that, in community research, things can come undone without the researcher being aware or being told directly" ( p.12). The political astuteness referred to is significant; although I am performing a degree of tricksterism, I do not want to damage relationships that enable wellbeing of my tribe. For me, I am performing as a trickster to heighten awareness about the taken for granted nature of marginal spaces, rather than to trick people or make anyone feel unsafe. If I jeopardise familial relationships, I become marginalised even further within my already marginalised community; politically, this negatively impacts upon my ability to create alliances and make suggestions that are received as credible by my community.

As a first attempt at bridging academic ways of doing things and those that are creative, I had to be analytical about what I was doing. Smith's (1991) aphorisms referred to earlier were things that I know as a Māori person, but which were often incongruous with ways of making entrenched through many art schools. Often, respect for people is secondary to artistic voice; there is no seen face, only that which is projected through objects created; artists 'speak', then only sometimes look and listen; there is little opportunity for reciprocity between artists and audiences; artists are encouraged to 'throw caution to the wind'; criticism of others in public fora is expected through creative making, and; artists are encouraged to flaunt their wares. By changing my approach to making through attendance at *He Manawa Whenua* (2013), I became keenly aware of ways that art school had colonised my practice. A kaupapa Māori theoretical lens began to change my practice because there were many layers of accountability that I had to negotiate to become a Māori artist with an academic practice. I felt that perhaps my previous making methods had espoused a Western patriarchal approach to thinking about the world I lived and created in – as a lone individual. By making processes in a kaupapa Māori academic space, my practice became accountable to the needs of my community.

Swim me to the shore – it's all so boring floating, drifting, sinking and blinking out the  
blinding salt.

It's all my fault, even though I am flawless, but not today without make-up and bling.

Sing me some new songs.

## Formal writing – igniting informal formations

Following on from presenting at *He Manawa Whenua International Indigenous Research Conference*, I began to write a paper for the conference proceedings. This provided me with an opportunity to further explore raranga as method. My process to write the 4000 word limit started in a fairly mathematical way. Raranga involves the preparation of intense numbers sometimes, as a way to create complex patterns, but also functional objects. I am quite formulaic in my approach to academic writing and normally begin dividing a word count limit into chunks – I know that a good paragraph takes about six sentences and that for me, this equates to between 150 and 200 words. It made sense for me to consider ways to join the 6 main ideas I had communicated in my abstract/performance/presentation into 3 main ideas, so that I could work with 1000 words for each idea, leaving the other 1000 words for the front material, introduction and conclusion. This meant that I would have about 5 paragraphs per section – meaning that for each of the three main (combined) ideas I would need to focus on five points each. Whilst the final paper didn't actually reflect those concise numbers, it was the best way for me to whakariterite towards the structure needed for an academic paper. After dividing the 3 main ideas into smaller components that could give flow to each section of the paper, I again delved into a more creative writing process. Rather than write an academic paper, I wrote a long poem – for each paragraph I let go completely and wrote a stream of conscious narrative about my research intent for the publication.

At that time I was blogging a lot, and so it just made sense that I write what I felt rather than what I thought – with the time constraints it was also the most expedient way to write. In essence, what I had done was first create a broad overall structure using numbers to standardise the components of research I wanted to weave together. By writing the paper in an abstract manner I gave it shape – using this strategy was almost like writing a draft because I could see quite generally if the strands I wove would fit together. They almost did, however, I had to rewrite the section that outlined a raranga methodology. No matter how many attempts I took to write this poetically, it needed a formal description that could communicate the raranga process simply to readers. When I finished putting the draft submission together I was really happy, because it resonated with the abstract and the academic round-table discussion that had led to the paper – it felt good to carry the creative thread though to something usually even more rigid than conference presentations.

The final layer of editing towards the publication of *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen* (Appendix E), was to cite the research. To achieve this end I had to work a sentence at a time, considering the poetic text and interpreting what the dominant meaning of each might be. When I was fairly sure about what this was I would go through my research notes looking for writing by other scholars that paralleled my thoughts. In cases where I couldn't find any, I would use the poetic text to generate search terms I could either google, or look up on the University of Waikato website – being in California at the time meant I had limited access to research about Māori or kaupapa Māori approaches. Raranga for me is about working with what I have around me – I search hard to find the use value of things already at hand and whakariterite until I know I can construct what I need.

The part of the writing that took the most energy was integrating the research with the poetic text. It was hard for me to let go of the poetry because I enjoyed the flow of language, however, in some parts it inhibited clarity. Often, the research and quotes I wanted to include were just too complex in terms of language and register, and so to massage them into my paper required shifting what I had written stream of consciousness to allow the voices of theorists I included to 'speak'. I had never really thought about the privileging of voices through research, thus, if I was going to adapt my own voice for the sake of an academic, I wanted to ensure I privileged voices I really respected.



Writing *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen* enabled a process whereby I could clearly connect the academic role I was attempting to perform with my role as an artist. The text was poetic and in many ways quite open to interpretation – different from the decisive language usually enacted for theoretical texts. It was a good means to test out my academic voice and *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen*, as well as other papers published during my PhD studies, have been integrated into this thesis. Although in this thesis the words take on a different emphasis altogether. People who have read the paper have commented that they enjoyed reading it, both because of the ideas expressed but also because of the poetic language used. As a first attempt at producing a peer-reviewed academic text for publication, the process empowered the use of my creative voice within a theoretical discussion.

Though *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen* I was beginning to find ways to evolve a creative practice research space between theory and practice, aligning to a Freirean idea of ‘praxis’ which highlights the necessity of the relationship between theory and practice, and the reflexivity necessary within that process. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2005) highlights the interdependence of subjectivity and objectivity in being a human who performs praxis. Praxis can never emerge from purely intellectualising oppression, nor from activism alone, but rather through engaged reflection and a trust in the reasoning enabled by those who are oppressed. Through first performing *Mass production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen*, and then writing it, I was able to stand in the threshold between masculine and feminine, and between the Indigenous ‘other’ and modes of Eurocentric creative and academic production. In doing so I reflected upon my reality as oppressed through both subjective and objective lenses of theory and practice. Activating this space attempted to bridge the distance between the cultural emphasis of Kaupapa Māori Theory, and those that are political, identified by Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2012). I am keenly aware that as an adept artist I can continue to assert the agency of creative processes developed by my tūpuna, but in the colonised reality of Aotearoa today, true political acts are those that can transform the academy and in turn transform the ways Māori lives are governed. In the next section I discuss the strategies employed to create the first in a suite of short digital video works titled *Slowing* (2013). The digital video work is a site of struggle between theory and practice that constitutes a “boundary image” according to Vietnamese born filmmaker, writer and composer Trinh-Minh-ha (in Trinh & Vitali, 2005, p.35). I created *Slowing* as a boundary image to contrast with the intentional performances already created and discussed for this project – as a means to first reflect upon, and then secondly gain agency over the duality of my cultural and political Māori transgender body.

## Walking aimlessly – making momentary moves

Whilst staying in California I began collecting footage for moving image works. I had been exploring with still images and animation, but I felt that I wanted to work in less of a production type mode – I wanted to see through video footage, what my life looked like. I had won a *Sony Action Cam HDR-AS100V* (similar to a *GoPro*) during a breast cancer fundraising event *Paddle for Hope* (2012), where I raced a stand-up paddle board whilst wearing 8 inch platform stilettos. I hoped that by making moving videos I would be able to invest in learning more about whakariterite, or editing of moving images.

I got used to always having my *Action Cam* with me whenever I went walking – I walk a lot, sometimes for hours processing thoughts and observing the world as I pass it by. One of the limitations of using a small portable HD sports camera is that unless it is connected through an app to a smartphone, there is no way to gauge what is in the frame of the lens. Unfortunately for me, the app was incompatible with the phone I had at the time, a *Blackberry 9320 Curve*. I didn't really think of this as an inconvenience though, because after a few trials I could make pretty good estimations of what would be included in the frame when I pointed the recording device. As well, I liked not really knowing what I would get until I sat down to view footage and edit.

The first video work I made included footage from a night out to a gig in Auckland city with friends, video of me swimming, and also footage I had gathered walking through San Francisco – on days when the friends I was staying with were at work. I didn't really even have enough money to eat – let alone hire a car or catch the bus, so my days in San Fran were often spent exploring on foot alone. The short video piece (1 min 56 secs) was titled *Slowing* (Appendix F), and it moves through the three different spaces in quite a fluid way – enhanced by the underwater sounds of swimming in a California community pool.



Nopera, T. (2013) *Slowing* [digital video stills] 1280px x 720px

I approached the work in a similar manner to the ways I whakarite still digital images. At first I worked with each of the raw videos I had selected to balance the amount of light, contrast and colour saturation. I used *Adobe Premier Pro CS 5.5* again, the settings, although not the same as *Photoshop*, were similar enough. I used YouTube tutorials to fill in gaps in my knowledge of the software. Beginning with the footage in the pool, I began to separate out segments where figures were visible, but unidentifiable – I am uncomfortable with my body so I didn't want anyone to see it. With that footage as a foundation, I then began to layer the video I had collected from my night out with friends – I remember that night I spent more time walking through the city talking to strangers on a walk for fast food, than I did dancing at the gig. Using this video, I prepared the segments that included parts of those conversations. Because I had been walking, the footage shows lots of moving lights and in one part the MC at the gig talks about Aotearoa and aroha.

Like *Photoshop*, *Adobe Premier Pro CS 5.5* allows layers to be of footage to integrate with each other to create unique effects using 'blending options'. On blending the first two layers, they seemed without depth and too regular – so I added the third layer. Adding the third layer interrupted the ways the surface moved – with flickers of poi in store window reflections. Doing this gave me ideas about what to include next and how to progress an emerging sense of narrative. Unlike the animations which looped and set rhythmical cycles of tension, these video fragments depicted my movements in time – merging experiences of being at ease in different parts of the world. The experiences shown were very domestic, eating breakfast, swimming, going for walks, practicing with my poi and spending time hanging out with friends.

Ultimately, the sound recorder on the *Action Cam* was not great quality – everything I read about sound insisted the need for excellent sound quality. Regardless of what whakarite was applied through filters and adjustments, the low quality audio track remained low quality. However, the use of low quality sound with high quality images that are abstracted, brings into question the authenticity of representation within the video. In *Slowing*, the digital technology mimics reality as I add layers – the argument could be made that similar to Micha Cárdenas' *Becoming Dragon*, I merge with the digital media I use to represent myself, with "the technology itself becom[ing] complicit in the formation of the subject that it seeks to represent" (Kinsey, 2014, p. 912). Trinh (in Trinh & Dungan, 2005), writes that digital capabilities make reality elastic, whereby through the movement of her camera and layering techniques, she is "painting and veiling with lights" (p.6) – providing infinite possibilities to improvise and thus become a 'listener' to her own creative process. For me, Trinh's revelation is crucial, because it helps me understand that within the digital self-documentary and editing process, I am improvising a body beyond the one I have been born with, and enact the DIY approach to gender confirmation as articulated by Tobias Raun (2012). I watch and listen as I create, and find ways to perform a new version of my body; challenging the static and bi-gender societal systems described by Vipond (2015), and finding ways to revision the body I live as. In the next section I describe the video work *Uncle Chicken*, which whilst allowing me to investigate video aesthetics further, in particular the painterly qualities of *Slowing*. This allowed a means to document and consider my body within the safety of my home environment.

## Sifting sounds – shifting perspectives

Safety and security are central to whakariterite, because as kairaranga mahi, they must develop safe practices to ensure their wellbeing. For harakeke preparation, this involves simple things like being careful not to step on or eat near the harakeke being prepared, so as not to damage the work in progress, or being careful when using knives or combs that help in preparation processes. Harakeke whakariterite helps kairaranga determine tikanga, or best practices to retain the sense of security affirmed through the process. Having tikanga ensures the properties of the harakeke being prepared and helps protect kairaranga and the environment where kohikohi takes place. To discuss some of the ways these practices have been maintained through the whakariterite of video material towards the outcomes of this project, I describe the development of a 2 minute 38 second digital video titled *Uncle Chicken* (2013), and in the section that follows a 3 minute 51 second digital video titled *That time I got laid* (2013). As with *Slowing*, the kohikohi of source footage was enacted using my *Sony Action Cam HDR-AS100V*, and the editing done using *Adobe Premier Pro CS5*.



Nopera, T. (2013) *Uncle Chicken* [digital video stills] 1280px x 720px

The footage I used to make *Uncle Chicken* (Appendix G) was gathered within a month after making *Slowing*, on my return home to Ohinemutu after being in the US for three months. Even though I love to travel and experience other cultures, I always miss my whānau intensely, especially all of the kids in the pā, my village. On Guy Fawkes Night in 2013, my cousins, siblings, mother, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews lit a huge bonfire on the land my extended whānau kaitiaki, or protect, next to my family home. Even though my siblings and I are adults, it is important to us that our tamariki have each other to grow with; at their best they entertain and make us and our mother happy, at their worst, they remind us of our own dramas as young people. On that Guy Fawkes Night we enjoyed fireworks together, and being the only one with a decent camera, everyone asked me to film. Through whakariterite, I recreated the painterly effects achieved in making *Slowing*.

To whakariterite the digital source video I used similar preparation strategies to those used in work already discussed, making adjustments to light levels, contrast and colour saturation. What differed in this work when compared with *Slowing* was that I over-saturated the colours in the Guy Fawkes video which really degraded the image quality – this happens when digital pixels become overloaded with information (Zhang & Brainard, 2004). By forcing information to cross over between pixels, I made the colours in the video clip bleed into each other to create painterly qualities. I wanted to maintain the silhouettes in the video footage whilst simultaneously breaking it down and to achieve this, I made multiple copies of it which were then overlaid at varying opacities. For each overlay, adjustments were made to the overall image quality, whilst retaining specific details in each; for instance, in the first layered copy I really enhanced the colour, but kept the contrast quite balanced; in the second layered copy I completely took out all contrast but maintained the original colour balance, and; in the third layer I made major adjustments to the brightness whilst maintaining the colour.

The Guy Fawkes footage was narrowed down to a segment lasting 2 mins 38 secs where the youngest children in my village began to chant “Uncle Chicken” – a nickname that had suddenly revealed itself that night. In the past the kids in the village had always dreamed up nicknames for me, but this one had no apparent source that I could decipher beyond one cheeky nephew verbalising it into existence. As well as the Guy Fawkes video, I also layered footage of myself on a trip to Lake Tarawera. Mount Tarawera erupted in 1886 killing many of my ancestors and traumatising those who were left to mourn – the area has always been where I feel most deeply connected.

In layering the two footages together, I began to edit portions of the video taken at Tarawera to impart a sense of journey and lone contemplation. Again, I used blending options to merge the two source videos working mostly with a dissolve blend, a colour blend and a luminosity blend. The use of filters and blending options helped smooth transitions between scenes. Unlike *Slowing*, *Uncle Chicken* conveys a sense of narrative. Although I interpret the visual aesthetics as successful, again, the audio was a problem. In this particular video the audio was very hollow. The hollowness of the audio made me think about an often felt sense of emptiness I experienced. Viewers of both *Slowing* and *Uncle Chicken* had commented that the work reminded them of their own experiences of emptiness – articulating that intense research journeys can feel incredibly lonely. I wanted to explore this sense of emptiness further and see if there were ways to emphasise the low audio quality towards a confessional narrative video.

In his book *The question concerning technology and other essays*, German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1977) explains the essence of art as involved with the creation, or revelation of truth; through making, artists bring forth things that are at first concealed, through the revelation of these things artists enact a process of storying truths for themselves and others to observe. Similar to the idea expressed by Heidegger, making articulates the ways I utilise my creative capacities. Through making I story broader narratives. The whakariterite I enact in making *Uncle Chicken* is generative, which is an idea also supported by Trinh Minh-ha. For Trinh (in Mitzuta-Lippit, 1999), within the material gathered a world of information, experiences and life already exists. She explains, “[w]hen I work on a film, I am drawn very intensely to the world of images and sounds. On a basic level, such a state of creative availability and of active receptivity is in itself a “project.” But the making of a film also opens up many doors to other means of creativity” (Trinh in Mitzuta-Lippit, 1999, p.131). Here, there is a precedent in the ways I utilise digital video, because my intent is not to make a finished artwork for display, but rather something that can help direct and extend my thinking towards other creative media. For Trinh (in Mitzuta-Lippit, 1999), the making of a film is not an end point:

“I am not merely “giving form.” Taking shape is not a moment of arrival, and the question is not that of bringing something vague into visibility. Rather, the coming into shape is always a way to address the fact that there is no shape. Form is here an instance of formlessness, and vice-versa.” (p.132).

The making of *Uncle Chicken* allowed me to consider things not immediately present within the frames I edited. There were thoughts and actions happening outside of the viewers lens that were contributing to the artwork, and these were things I wanted to consider further to progress the content of my thesis. In the following section, I describe the artwork *That time I got laid* (2013), which begins to address some of the deeper issues explored as this thesis progresses.

I love these ways, as they wend and take me forever into the fray... I am no longer flayed by devils of daily grinds. My mind is free to manifest fast fusions, illusions and depth.

And now I feel my forays into a new future, glittered with gorgeousness and genius graspings.

I can see a pathway, I look ahead and I see the lifetime I have walked in darkness and dismay.

My past, even though troubled, is what it is. Now that I can see it clearly on my return to the place where I forgot to live, it doesn't scare me anymore because in all its torment, it was my beautiful journey and as alien as I am, I experienced its emotions fully.

## Hiding from stuff – resurfacing lost worlds

On beginning this PhD, there were many personal goals I wished to achieve, beyond describing raranga as empowering my creative practice. Those goals ranged from a desire to more fully interpret Māori cultural practices, to practice speaking my language and to escape economic impoverishment. However, the dominant personal motivation was to find self-acceptance as a transgendered person. I assumed that on completion of my project I would more than likely have begun a medical process toward gender confirmation, although before completely transforming my body and identity I wanted to test if raranga strategies could help me feel good about my uncomfortable sense of masculinity.

After making *Uncle Chicken* I returned to footage I had gathered in San Francisco a month previous. The 3 minute 51 second video *That time I got laid* (Appendix H) is a confessional narrative where I relate an experience of drink spiking and rape; hinting at the ways I express gender – where powerlessness feels like a masculine part of my inner identity. The video depicts me walking through the Castro district in San Francisco and is overlaid with a direct to camera conversation. I approached making *That time I got laid* as a way to prepare for artworks that could help me find strength after being drugged, raped and left in the gutter of a strange city. All of the footage used in *That time I got laid* was shot in a single day, walking to Corona Heights Park, close to where my friends live in San Francisco and then returning to their apartment approximately three hours later.

Corona Heights Park is a place where I often go to contemplate when in San Francisco, because although in the heart of the Castro District, its elevation helps me find quiet in one of the world's huge metropolitan centres – the peaceful view makes the space feel sacred. At that time, I collected footage by holding the camera in one hand so I could hide what I was doing; it was not my intent to stealthily film others but rather avoid people observing me self-consciously filming myself. Whakariterite helped prepare ways to feel safe talking through my experience of trauma, because for four years I felt too vulnerable to talk with other people honestly about what happened. When I edited the video later that day, I merged the narration with the footage of me walking through the Castro, where whakariterite of the source footage, using blending and sound effects, allowed me to alter the quality of light, colours and audio.

I also overlapped segments of footage so that the pace of the moving image played slightly out of synch with the narration. Blurring, abstracting and distorting aspects of what viewers saw in relation to my own experience, helped me feel safe enough to communicate my experience.



Nopera, T. (2013) *That time I got laid* [digital video stills] 1280px x 720px

Making *That time I got laid* was very difficult. It was hard to talk about the experience of being sexually assaulted and because I had been drugged I was unsure of many details – all I really knew was my entire life had been changed irreversibly. I used many of the techniques I had been learning through video editing to blur and abstract my disclosure of that particular event, but in many ways I was also beginning to find ways to ritualise healing practices within my creative practice. In the previous chapter I wrote about the transformative potential of haka, but in what ways can Māori people whose bodies have been traumatised to states of disembodiment, express *ihi*, *wehi* and *wana*? I argue that more intimate practices of expression such as *whakariterite* of digital video making can encourage haka into our bodies. Through *That time I got laid* I began to perform the making a video with my experience of being immersed in American gay culture. Trinh Minh-ha (in Trinh & Leimbacher, 2005), describes this as ritualistic where “[m]aking a video ... is to engage in ritual – both the rituals of new technologies and those of creating and structuring images. Travelling in a country and showing its culture is another form of ritual” (p.135). In my digital video making ritual, the intent was to unveil an experience of trauma generally described as feminine. However, in this work I want to traverse the colonial gender binary and find a safe space to haka – I need to haka to myself so that I can haka for others. Trinh Minh-ha (in Trinh & Julien & Mulvey, 1989), discuss a work titled *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, explaining that this film questions a Vietnamese identity that is “homogenised [and] subsumed into an all-embracing identity” (p. 192).

Trinh particularly questions the notion that revolutionary movements enable equitable social relations to be reformed, because in the case of Vietnam “the tendency is always to *obscure* the question of gender by reverting it to a question of communism versus capitalism and salvaging it in a binary system of thinking” (Trinh, Julien & Mulvey, 1989, p. 196-197). Similarly, *That time I got laid* questions the emergence of binarised gender portrayals in Māori re-assertions of cultural identity. Through making this video work I expose the impact of colonial gender identification upon Māori bodies, but also ritualised pathways to healing this through intimate digital media explorations.

This chapter has discussed the direction taken for works created in the second year of my PhD project. These works led to research in the third year of my project where I began to investigate more fully, the trauma experienced by Indigenous genderfluid people and those amongst us who are same-sex attracted. In the next chapter I write about quantitative research that highlights the kinds of disparities faced by Indigenous transgender people and Indigenous people who are same-sex attracted – I write about traumatised bodies, minds and spirits. Rather than concentrate on the harm our communities experience, I begin to explore thresholds that enable us new pathways – I focus on *te whare tangata*, or the womb, and Māui narratives that can help us understand healing thresholds and how facing death can help us want to live more fully. What has been paramount in this chapter has been to seek out ways to *whakariterite* the material, both practice-based and theoretical, so that it can be transformative for others who might walk along similar pathways to my own. The primary finding in this chapter asserts that *raranga* as a methodology, can be embodied through the *whakariterite* of performance and performance artefacts, connecting research to the lived experiences of research subjects.

Whakariterite prepares for use,

it standardises and makes things normal when they feel strange.

Whakariterite creates safety protocols.

I am spiritually, physically, emotionally and mentally safe when I slow down and

*whakariterite* reality.







don't let the b



**Part 3.**

**Sexual expressions denied through colonialism**

**Chapter 5.**

**Whakapapa – planting seeds of ascent**

astende get u down



huka went to a school where everybody looked like ghosts, with pale skin that reflected all the light. They shone so bright that huka was always in the shadows – dodging, huka just played in the library. He liked the books, he was a good reader, shade and reading were his favourite things. He loved to hide away in stories about giants, fairies and princesses and would dream all his days hoping that a prince would save him with a kiss - save him from all the shade and reading.

huka's best books were the ones about olden-day people, people like him with dark bodies – who traversed the universe changing it all up. They had names he could remember from when he was really little, they were the names his grandmother would whisper as she washed his fuzzy hair and tucked him into bed.

As huka grew, the books, stories and whispers faded as shade and reading became arguments and fights, flights to Never-Neverland wishes washed up on hungover shores. Sure it hurt for a few hours but there was always more liquor to kill the blanks – bank accounts empty but always filled up on debts. One day after another, falling down, over and over, that was the new hook.

It looked pretty but it wasn't.

I definitely struggled with addiction from an early age. When things got bleak, or even when they were perfect, there was always a reason to get altered on some level, and through my teens and twenties I coasted somewhere in an alternate reality of avoidance. Getting closer and closer to thirty, the fog of fag-life began to slowly dissipate. I always had a yearning for something, to be someone, to do good things but I really didn't have the skills, skin colour nor knowledge to figure out what the things were that I desired – they stayed abstract until a friend empowered me with some life-coaching tools.

Deep down I wanted to be an artist, because art is one thing I always knew I could do well, it made me feel good. I knew that I wanted to weave and found an art school in my tribal region that taught raranga – home seemed like the best place to start again after years of drifting to, and through lots of other places.

I remember my first day of raranga class when my tutor, standing behind me asked “were your ancestors weavers?” It was a question I really hadn't thought about before and so I shrugged – she responded; “they must've been because you can already weave, I can see it in your fingers”.

In this chapter I describe whakapapa as a raranga process, where the rhythms that have been established through moemoeā, karakia, kohikohi and whakariterite are fixed within an object's foundations. Through whakapapa, ideas, intentions and practices are encoded as patterns that kairaranga weave as pathways to be traversed. As I weave, I practice sustainable rituals to help reduce escapist or addictive behaviours, replacing them with healthier and more sustainable rituals. These new patterns require focus, dedicated space, time, as well as a high degree of commitment and patience for myself. Even though these things aren't weaving in the traditional sense, to me they function in the same way; they enable ways to combine the strands of my life – by doing things over and over and over again until they become second nature and remembered in my body.

The first section of this chapter describes whakapapa from a range of perspectives, exploring the different ways whakapapa can be conceptualised. Whakapapa assists with interpreting genealogical connections and so it is used in this chapter to frame discussions about the internalisation of colonial practices, and also some of the resulting traumas. The second section of this chapter deals specifically with sexual trauma, detailing quantitative data about sexual violence enacted upon Indigenous people but also foreshadowing a later exploration of healing through performance. The third section describes creative spaces of potential that are beneficial to healing and in this, te whare tangata, the womb and house of humanity is described. Te whare tangata is used in this thesis to connect with primordial narratives, and in the fourth section of this chapter I discuss Māori ancestral trickster narratives, making a connection between these and those of another Indigenous culture. In the final section of this chapter before concluding, I write about the art of Keith Haring, an artist who lived with HIV at the onset of the global epidemic and who used guerrilla strategies to educate his audiences beyond the stigma associated with HIV during the 1980s.



## **Watch the stars – we navigate points of light in the dark**

Whakapapa is generally translated as genealogy, although can be understood in many different ways as – to lie flat, to place in layers, to recite in order; or considered in parts as ‘whaka’ – cause to be, to become; and ‘papa’ which can mean – the Earth, or anything broad flat and hard (Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary, 2003-2017). The H.M Williams (2005) dictionary adds to go slyly or with stealth, to lay low or strike down, as well as a bush felled for burning as alternative meanings.

“‘Papa’ in Māori has many meanings associated with ideas of ground, site and layer. Papatūānuku, often shortened to Papa, is the female personification of Earth. The word ‘kaupapa’ can mean the woven foundation for a cloak and has the figurative meaning of a platform or purpose. ‘Whakapapa’ has a literal meaning of placing things in layers. That extends figuratively to reciting genealogical links in their proper order and from there to the word for ‘genealogy’.” (Smith, 2011, p.46)

Roberts (2009) highlights Whakapapa as identity and as a critical cultural template for knowing who you are, where you come from and who you belong to. Whakapapa is then considered to be

“... a philosophical construct implies that all things have an origin (in the form of a primal ancestor from which they are descended), and that ontologically things come into being through the process of descent from an ancestor or ancestors” (Roberts, 2009, p.93).

In the process of raranga, whakapapa inspires life. Whakapapa allows Māori people to keep memories alive, to order them and interpret the relevance of lived experiences over aeons, particularly through re-storying practices. Through whakapapa, I am always able to locate myself at the core of my accumulated experiences, which are sometimes fragmenting and disorienting. Whakapapa resists marginalisation by centring identity. Leonie Pihama (2010) asserts; ‘[w]hakapapa is regarded as an analytic tool that has been employed by our people as a means to understand our world and relationships’ (p.5). Whakapapa relates Māori to every aspect of existence and in this project I use my whakapapa to reimage the marginalised position I have lived throughout many different (but the same) globalised contexts.

What I observe through whakapapa, within the process of raranga, is the ability to resist consumptive and confusing impulses that have unwittingly become part of my identity.

In this project it is my intent to be free of these sicknesses so that I can find sustainable ways to manage myself within a network of healthy relationships.

The ability for whakapapa to be an analytical tool with which I am able to re-story my reality, especially in a way that resists marginalisation is essential, because colonisation and colonial patterns become embodied. Lee Maracle (1996) writes, “Native women and some Native men know full well that what is abnormal is very often natural. Internalized racism is the natural response to the unnatural condition of racism” (p.136). Freire (2005) writes about internalisation as a necessary process of colonisation, because the more energy invested in storing, remembering and performing colonial ways to be, the less criticality is developed which could be used to transform worlds of oppression. In *Black skin white masks*, Frantz Fanon (1972) writes

“[e]very colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation ... The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (p.14)

For Fanon, there is only one way out that does not lead to becoming as the coloniser – it involves a turning of backs on inhuman histories and voices. It is the inhumanness of colonial patterning that the creative processes in this thesis seek to elevate beyond, because from the inside out, colonialism infects bodies with negativity, self-doubt, self-incrimination, depression and fear – ultimately, internalised colonial behaviours and thoughts promote illness.

An explanation of colonialism and its varieties as forms of illness, is pertinent to this project because I assert the ability for raranga to heal. The dominant behaviours of colonisers in the world today can be understood through the understandings proffered by Powhatan-Renapé and Delaware-Lenápe scholar, poet and activist Jack D. Forbes, where 'wétiko', a Cree term, which is similar in meaning to a Dakota and Lakota term 'washichu', as well as an Ojibwe term 'windigo', explains colonising behaviours that are cannibalistic in intent (Audlin, 2012; Forbes, 2008; Marano, Bishop, Black, Bolman, Brown, Hay, Hurlich, Landes, Mcgee, Murphy, Paredes, Preston, Ridington, Rohrl, Smith, Teicher, Turner, Waisberg, & Weidman, 1982). Wétiko, washichu and windigo refer to "fat eaters", or those who in times of scarcity, eat the fat of an animal normally reserved for children and elders – the most vulnerable in our society. Forbes describes wétiko behaviours as being driven by individualism to the extent that wétiko becomes a type of sickness, where one person consumes another's life energy for their own benefit, or even economic profit (Forbes, 2008).

When I think of the ways that oppression manifests in my life, were I to see Western doctors, the effects of being marginalised would be described as illnesses – depression, schizophrenia, gender dysmorphia and anxiety. The research that I have gathered, made sense of and used to create artworks through this project, allow me to gather my experiences. By doing this I gain an abstract or generalised sense of how I feel and compare this feeling to how I think about myself as part of the world. Through whakapapa, I create a new pathways, because I am constantly analysing singular experiences through a whole story of life events that gives each experience flesh, bones and skin. In the following sections, I describe the process of whakapapa as a way to interpret the influence of Western values upon my perception. In particular, the next section deals specifically with traumatic experiences which can become part of a person's whakapapa. Whakapapa is a crucial part of raranga because it helps kairaranga embody critical awareness – it helps us shape the forms we create and find beautiful ways for these to function as we desire.

## Starting from scratch – making things match

Some of the more traumatic issues that I deal with in this project are sensitive, both because of the personal impact, but also because they expose ways I am often exoticised Indigenous prey. Opelousa/Atakapa-Ishak, West African, French Creole & Spanish scholar Andrew Jolivet (2016) expresses the harm of this intersection from a Native American perspective stating “Two-Spirit bodies – those bodies that are deemed to lie outside the normal gender and sexual identity classifications by colonial powers ... have been beaten, silenced, and traumatised in often insurmountable ways” (p. 11). Often, popular gay culture has a marked association with alcoholism and for Indigenous people, racism too (Gilley, 2006).

Indigenous people whose gendered and sexual identities lie outside mainstream norms are more likely to experience harm (Aspin, 1996). This is emphasised in a 2006 report produced by the University of Auckland, describing the intersection of Indigeneity and youth as exacerbating experiences of sexual assault within social contexts for men who have sex with men. The report states; “ ... that Māori youth may exist as an exoticised and eroticised ‘other’ for some older Pākehā men”, and that the effects can negatively impact upon their sense of being Māori (Fenaughty et al, 2006, p.39-40). The report also points out that for the Māori research respondents, Te Ao Māori offers a cultural means to heal (Fenaughty et al, 2006). Being able to connect to the knowledge of ancestors heals our disassociated aspects – causing “ ... a remembering ... among Native and Indigenous peoples that calls for a reconciliation of all of our parts” (Jolivet, 2016, pp. 11-12).

This is evidently true in healing from my own experiences of sexual coercion and assault – where artmaking and creative writing are the means I am using to recover from painful experiences that have inhibited my ability to express myself. Differentiating between painful life experiences and those that are traumatic, Leslie Young (1992) explains a Japanese understanding of trauma as stopping time; “[b]ad events maintain and extend a person’s sense of personal coherence and continuity; whereas traumatic events, by contrast, create personal incoherence and discontinuity” (p.91).

The sexual assault I recount in *That time I got laid* was incredibly difficult to process, it brought back the body memory of similar experiences – I felt very lost and alone in the world for many years after that happened.

According to a 2015 report written on sexual violence against men who have sex with men and transgender women in Mongolia,

“[p]revalence data on sexual violence among MSM are predominantly from the US, UK, and New Zealand and vary widely, and data for transgender women are even less conclusive. The percentage of gay and bisexual men reporting history of forced or unwanted sex ranges from 12% to 54%, with a recent meta-analysis estimating that 32% of gay men experience sexual violence. A recent US review concluded that the “most common” estimate of lifetime sexual violence victimization is “about 50%” among transgender populations.” (Peitzmeier, Yasin, Stephenson, Wirtz, Delegchoimbol, Dorjgotov & Baral, 2015)

With the likelihood of sexual violence so high amongst transgender people and men who have sex with men, it important to expose its prevalence – especially for people within our communities who are marginalised even further for being other-than-White. Shockingly the statistics for sexual assault on Indigenous women with diverse sexualities and gender identities are even higher. In a comprehensive study of Two-Spirit identities within the United States – *The HONOUR project*, led by Choctaw academic Karina Walters, 85% of all Two-Spirit women surveyed had lived through experiences of sexual assault, and; 78% of all Two-Spirit women surveyed within the study experienced physical assault and 38% had experienced both sexual and physical assault (Walters, 2010). With rates of both sexual assault and physical assault so high amongst Two-Spirit women, the need to heal is especially pertinent so that the impacts of traumas are not passed on to successive generations. Where Two-Spirit identities are normalised within families it is crucial that histories of suppression and harm do not become expected as normal within Two-Spirit communities.

Writing about First Nations women who reclaim of aspects of identity that have been lost through histories of colonial trauma, Canadian theatre and performance scholar Shelley Scott (2011) writes;

“... the scars of history are worn on the body and made visible by a kind of storytelling that is a mixture of public testimonial and personal healing. While it is primarily the performer herself who is healed, by witnessing their performances, that embodied healing can be shared by the audience and wider community” (p.135).

In this body of practice-based research, recounting my experiences as a form of preparation ceremony allows me to reclaim my own body, and in the words of Shelly Scott (2011), this gives me ways “to physically re-inhabit it in a public ceremony of sorts” (p.124-125). A public ceremony is necessary to expel the damage done – otherwise I remain trapped in my memories and private anguish.

Donna Campbell explains that ultimately, harakeke has a will of its own, that “it just wants to be free in the wind, growing” and in essence, that is true; when kairaranga weave we impose our own will, our intentions and hopes through nurturing a relationship with te pā harakeke (personal communication, April 14, 2004). I have imposed my will upon the research I conduct and the art I make – enabling ways for me to feel connected with te pā harakeke and yet free to experience without fears of growing. The enactment of ‘will’ allows a process of translation where through moemoeā, karakia, kohikohi and whakariterite, I design a whakapapa of text. This text is filled with meanings that emerge between my thoughts, my actions and the media I use – the text is fluid in its development and validates the many contexts that determine its meanings. Te Rarawa and Ngāti Kahu reo Māori translator and sexual and reproductive health researcher Jillian Tipene (2014), offers insight into the translation of Māori texts, asking; “[w]ill the translation process result in a significant loss in relation to the integrity of the source text?” (p.33). It is my hope that using raranga to translate my experiences, I ensure connectedness between my experiences and the research and art that they lead to.

As ‘Uncle Chicken’, ‘Uncle bushy hair’ and ‘The lips of doom’ – a senior adult male bodied figure in my whānau, I have a responsibility to nurture and protect the integrity of the relationships that bind my family. My experiences at times, have disconnected me from my whānau, but this research reconnects me – it helps reweave me as an integral member of my whānau. My life has an impact upon everyone I am related to, and to remain accountable in my whānau I must keep myself safe, and my whānau safe in the process. Jillian Tipene (2014) writes,

“If, however, we take as our starting point the notion that meaning is socially constructed in accordance with particular beliefs, experiences and worldviews, we must conclude that it is always context-dependent and always contingent, that it can never be permanently ‘fixed’. (p.20)

What this means is that in translating my experiences through whakapapa, I rebirth life and energy through my network of relations – as I move and transform from the darkness of painful experiences, so too can my relations heal from their own histories of marginalisation. In the following section I describe te whare tangata which is the womb. In this, I explore ways te whare tangata can be conceptualised toward the process of healing from colonial traumas.



## Dark matter – visualising rebirth

Whakapapa helps to establish patterns for making – a woven whakapapa transforms the resource of te pā harakeke into taonga, or something important and of value. When I begin to focus my intent toward a pattern that can bring about a desired object, I transcend the immediacy of my body which begins to ‘feel’ more expansive and aware of its environment. Whakapapa through raranga establishes rhythms that become ‘liminal’– defined as “of or relating to a sensory threshold ... barely perceptible or ... of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase or condition ...” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Slowing down to focus on whakapapa within weaving, connects me to a liminal space, similar in concept to ‘te whare tangata’: the house of humanity, the womb or uterus (*Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary*). In an explanation of whare tangata, Kirimatao Paipa (2011) of Ngāti Whakaue writes;

“Te Whare Tangata for Māori represents a place of safety and protection – a haven for new growth. Te Whare Tangata represents the continuous link that exists between land, mother and child as each is bound in a cycle of nourishment and care.” (Paipa, in Mikaere, 2011, p. iii)

Whare tangata, as a concept, is thought of in broader terms “beyond the physical role of producing life” – it is the human link to cosmologies where the potential for growth and emergence form in the darkness of Te Kore (Gabel, 2013, p.78-79). In this there is a duality of experience because “Te Kore may articulate experiences and feelings of absence, void, nothingness, loss and annihilation, and also notions of potentiality, a source or origin” (Nepia, 2012, p.28). Ani Mikaere (1995) writes:

“The progression from Te Kore, through Te Pō and on to Te Ao Mārama is an ongoing cycle of conception, development within the womb, and birth ... The female presence at the beginning of the world is all encompassing. The female reproductive organs provide the framework within which the world comes into being.”(p.12)

Although the transformative potential of art is understood within Western cultures, it is often bound by Western empiricism. Transformation which cannot be observed or measured in quantifiable ways is difficult to assert through Western art institutions. For example, during my MFA studies students were discouraged from writing about our work in terms of spirituality. I am critical of the limitations of Western aesthetic analyses, because they generalise non-Western cultural expressions of identity. To counter this empirical threshold, Steven Leuthold has developed a theory of Indigenous aesthetics (Hart, 2000; Leuthold, 1998).

Eastern Band Cherokee/Appalachian Native art theorist Christina Ballengee-Morris (2008), describes Indigenous aesthetics as necessarily borrowing from Western aesthetics to extend possibilities – “[e]ngaging indigenous systems of aesthetics expands appreciation and refines understanding of how arts can produce meaning for multiple audiences” (p.31). For some Indigenous peoples, artistic expression is perceived in a “parallel time” where past and future are present and individual identities are communal identities; “[p]arallel times bridge the living, the dead, and spiritual elements into a continuous flow that creates and maintains power. It is from ancestors and ultimately from the god(s) that the viewer responds to emotionally, spiritually, and physically” (Ballengee-Morris, 2008, p.31-32).

Whakapapa through raranga can empower beyond the abuses enacted upon my body,  
because it fills nothingness with potential and in this way extends  
possibilities for transformation.

This internal and personal process can be applied externally, as a way to manage  
colonial landscapes of visibility that constantly forecast the exclusion of  
Indigenous lives.

Susan Sontag (1979), an American photographer and art theorist explains the overload of images in today's world, as akin to Plato's cave – where chained within, a trapped individual's concept of the 'truth' is based on the projections of shadowy figures that dance and move in front of a fire – rather than see people move past the fire, the person in chains experiences life second-hand, never grasping the true world and the people who move with it. Sontag's rewriting of Plato for contemporary contexts, brings to mind my understandings of Te Kore and nothingness. I could forever continue internalising colonial perceptions that distance me from empowerment, and believe in that finite circumstance as empty, nothing and devoid of hope. Alternatively, I can grasp the potentiality of Te Kore offered through pūrākau and resist the second-hand reality I am offered through visual enculturation. Neither Sontag nor Plato's theories of capture describe the agency people are able to affirm through Te Kore and its connection to te whare tangata – both Te Kore and whare tangata enable Māori to consider our deep enduring relationship with the world that sustains us and the hope it always offers.

Māori creation whakapapa assert intervention through the pūrākau of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, which parallels conception and the growth of a baby within the womb. In this pūrākau, the energies birthed between the Earth, Papatūānuku and Sky, Ranginui, enable hauora, or wellness and vigour – “a healthy relationship with the environment is also crucial to real hauora, there must be responsibility for looking after, acting as part and in balance with it” (Powhare, 1998, p.17). Personified, Ranginui and Papatūānuku become separated by their child Tāne, the atua or energy of living things, through the vision of hope that Tāne has. As already recounted in an earlier chapter, Tāne shapes Hineahuone to progress the embodiment of earthy procreative energy for humanity. Paipa (in Mikaere, 2012), explains;

“Te Whare Tangata represents the world's first multiple organ transplant within the womb of Hineahuone, a combination of divine gifting, of twisted sinew, of prayer and love. It represents the act of birth and the ongoing legacy of a people who prize life and longevity and whose men will die to ensure that it does so.” (p.iii)

Whakapapa empowers creativity through connecting common threads of humanity, life, cosmological origins, and the intangible aspects of life. Māori narratives reinforce generative potentials – through whakapapa, Māori organise our understandings of reality, and in raranga, this provides foundations to adapt and transform.

## Tricking you – tricking myself

In the previous section I described the *whare tangata* and the ways it connects Māori bodies to the bodies and experiences of our ancestors. In this project, I specifically connect myself to Maui, a shapeshifting trickster ancestor and in this section describe this process in more detail. The persona I perform through this project *huka*, emerged from the womb-like rituals enacted through ceremony – he connects me to this project’s future potentials, and to an ancient past as an aspect of the Māori trickster deity Māui. Ngāti Hui scholar Ngahuia Murphy explains Māui as helping to interpret human understandings of time – she connects Māui to lunar time through menstruation cycles, and solar time, writing;

“Flowing like an ancient ‘river of time’ and binding the generations, Māui’s monthly appearance signals continuity and the immortality for the people down through the generations. Ironically, Māui is already closely related to time through the masculinist escapade in which he ‘snags the sun’ to slow it down in order to attain more daylight hours.” (Murphy, 2013, p.59)

Rethinking Māui stories and using them to frame the persona of *huka* has provided a way to connect the diverse theories, concepts and Māori cultural practices that I explore through this project. Nepia Mahuika expresses the value in keeping Maui *pūrākau* current because “[t]he revitalization of the stories depends not on how they stand up as critical scrutiny as to their veracity, but how they might be understood beyond those confines” (Mahuika, 2009, p.141). The most driving reason to perform an aspect of Māui for this project and *whakapapa*, or organise my research themes through narratives about him, has been the sense of connectedness Māui children’s books provided me as a child. Moving away from the safety of a Māori village in the 1980s to Christchurch, a city of mass British settlement, meant that as I entered state school education, I had very few ways to express being Māori outside of my home environment. As a child, Māui became an important ancestor who connected me to being Māori, as explained by Nepia Mahuika (2009),

“MAUI-TIKITIKI-A-TARANGA is more than simply a ‘mythic’ hero. For many he is a prominent figure in a long family line. The whakapapa that binds Māori to our tupuna is significant to the present and future, and carries with it the ‘ultimate expression’ of who we are. Maui has been described as ‘the most important culture hero in Māori mythology’, whose exploits and archetype provide precedents that Māori respond to in the present.” (p.133)

Similar to Ngāti Raukawa kairaranga and education scholar Lesley Rameka (2012), by considering *huka* as my contemporary embodiment of Māui, I reweave this heroic trickster story with an aim to claim a better space from which to learn and grow. I am most definitely not alone in revitalising trickster narratives through creative practice, as a means to critique and make sense of today’s world. K’ómoks and Kwakwaka’wakw First Nations artist Andy Everson (2015) writes about similar heroic trickster narratives within his First Nations oral traditions, expressing;

“Our people believe in a time when our ancestors wore the clothes of animals. They could take off their animal skin and become human and put that skin back on and return to their animal form. Many of our crest figures harken back to this era of transformation.

In the time before the flood, our ancestors could shapeshift into other creatures or objects. One of the common shapeshifters in our history is the trickster raven. While often getting into mischief, he also contributed in setting up the world as we know it today. By transforming himself into a pine needle, for instance, he was ingested by a chief’s daughter, impregnated her and managed to release the sun from a box held in the chief’s possession.” (Everson, 2015, para. 1 & 2)

Living in Vancouver B.C. at the time I began my MFA studies, I found Raven trickster stories important – they helped me cope with distance from home and the unfamiliar surrounds that didn’t made sense to me. Learning First Nation’s ancestor stories empowered me to connect with the place I was living in through similarities between First Nation’s cultures and my own.

Everson explains how through colonisation, many First Nations people have lost access to oral traditions that both contextualise and challenge daily experiences – in 2011 he began to merge First Nations aesthetics with a contemporary heroic story – *Star Wars*, as a way for his relations to find sense in their experiences today. Everson explains;

“[c]ertain Star Wars characters, they’re very iconic and they come pre-loaded with meaning in the viewer’s mind, and so I really like the idea of juxtaposing this preloaded meaning with the landscape, with the treaty process and with things that really affect us on a day to day basis for us as First Nations people.” (Everson in Comox Art Gallery, 2014, 8:23 mins)

Everson talks about being at a protest over proposed oil pipelines through Native territories, and having a vision of a *Stormtrooper* covered in oil moving through the crowd. The vision allowed him to consider ways of imbuing a figure, who blindly followed orders, with a sense of autonomy and personal accountability for positive change, leading to artworks depicting Westcoast warriors (Everson in Comox Art Gallery, 2014).



Everson, A. (2015) Northern Warrior [giclée print: Edition 99] Copyright 2015 Andy Everson Used with permission.

Everson (1997-2016) writes,

“In modern times, our warriors have put down their daggers and bows. In their place we take up weapons of a different sort. We adapt. We replace our slatted armour with a suit and tie. We run pitched battles in court rooms or stand outside in protest. We pursue an education. We walk on the narrow path between tradition and modernity; between past and future. The hat on this helmet displays the Kwakwaka’wakw crest of the sisyutl—the double-headed serpent. This symbol of the warrior reminds us of the dichotomies in life—good and evil, right and wrong—and puts a human face in the middle to teach us that we must choose where we stand.” (para.3)

Social media empowers political activism, and it is through these means that Everson distributes the narratives embedded in his artwork to a broader audience, enabling dialogue between himself and his audience. During *No Enbridge* and particularly the *Idle No More* protest movements, *Facebook* sharing helped Everson’s images and Indigenous political intent to become globally recognisable symbols for change.



Everson. A. (2012) We Are IDLE NO MORE [digital image] Copyright 2012 Andy Everson Used with permission

Although social media does allow feedback from audiences on the artwork that I make, I don't specifically share my artwork through social media to distribute it and increase its reach. Rather, I share my work on social media as a way to emote immediate concerns so that I am not pent up with voiceless frustration. When I activate my emotions through social media, especially in the context of *hukacanhaka.com*, I write without much thought of semantic sense – not always, but sometimes when I read what I have written I will edit to correct grammar and spelling and add spaces between phrases and words for structure. As a performance artist, when I externalise the ideas I have through image, form, writing, and performance, I always search for ways to re-internalise these into my daily practices. Performance art in its broadest sense is an incredibly powerful means of reshaping habitual lived actions. Even though *huka* is a virtual persona, he emerges through creative actions from *te whare tangata*, in the between realm where idea and life merge – like Māui in his encountering the womb of Hinenuitepō, this “equip[s] him with his capacity to shift shape and transform as a medium between worlds” (Murphy, 2013, p.76). In the final section of this chapter I describe the art of Keith Haring, a contemporary trickster artist whose work gave voice to HIV, which during the time Haring was prolific, people knew very little about. Through his art, Haring was able to transform popular misconceptions and aid many who at the time were voiceless and dying.

This creative practice research project enables a way for me to shapeshift between many worlds – to learn from my own learnings and present a process for readers to perhaps learn about themselves and shapeshift in their own changing worlds.



## Shady sex downtown – death warmed up

This thesis begins with a pūrākau that describes Māui in his contemplation of immortality, where he is transformed by Hinenuitepō into something new. Most contemporary versions of this pūrākau describe the encounter as the death of Māui – as his final adventure. However, for the purposes of this project I have imagined the potential asserted through re-describing his fate – what if on entering te whare tangata, Māui is given wisdom that alters perceptions of gender binaries? If Māui had lived, cognisant of the inner-workings of feminine creative space through re-entering the womb, what possibilities could have been revealed? Māori language expert Timoti Kāretu conceptualises Māui and his attempted engagement with te whare tangata of Hinenuitepō, making connections to sexual health, writing:

“In the legend of Māui's search for immortality we have Hinenuitepō, the Goddess of Death, lying asleep with her legs open and her vulva exposed to view. She is blamed for our mortality because she killed Māui in his attempt to gain immortality. It should be noted, however, that Hinenuitepō, as Hinetītama, was abused by her own father, Tāne, and to conceal her embarrassment and shame upon discovery of this fact she retired to the nether regions, there to reside for all time.

The female sex organs as a consequence of Hinenuitepō's killing of Māui are referred to as 'te whare o Aituā' literally the 'house of death'. One need not exercise the mind too much to realise that this is an allegorical reference to the act of copulation for the male at the beginning of the act is strong and virile in his tumescence but after orgasm is limp and lifeless. While the reference is to 'the house of death' my own interpretation is that this exhibits a healthy respect for that part of the female and therefore, in my opinion, a healthy respect for the act of copulation itself.” (Kāretu in Te Puni Kōkiri, 1995, pp.7-8).

My consideration of Māui narratives through this lens is an attempt to heal from a conceptual death of sexual identity and sexual expression after contracting HIV in 1998. Following on from the work of Ngahuia Murphy (2013), I reinvigorate Māui narratives beyond stereotypical masculinist escapades – Māui allows me a gender-fluid envisioning of reappearance, continuity and re-storying entrenched traditions and ways of contemplating our life-death experiences.

I was twenty two and living it up in Melbourne, I felt like there was just too many barriers to living in Aotearoa in the 90's because there was a lot of prejudice against sexuality diverse and gender fluid Māori people. This was a norm that Ngāti Maru ki Hauraki scholar Clive Aspin (1996) writes was completely entrenched in Aotearoa by the 1970s through Christian influences, but most predominantly through research about Māori gay and transgender people. I contracted HIV living in Australia through unprotected sex with someone I stupidly trusted, and in the following year became extremely ill, returning home to Rotorua and telling only a few friends because I felt so ashamed. Access to HIV information and healthcare in Rotorua was negligible as it was at that time throughout regional Aotearoa (Aspin, 1996). I didn't want to be a burden to my family and I most definitely didn't want them to find out so decided to return to Melbourne where HIV awareness and treatment seemed a lot more progressive. Accessing free healthcare through the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, doctors advised me to begin anti-retroviral therapy immediately because at a younger age I was more likely to gain longevity of HIV suppression through available medications, with limited side-effects. Committing to a lifetime of medications, in secret and without any support was really scary, but eighteen years later this has proved true as I am a really healthy person – never having experienced the side effects that many people suffer through anti-retroviral therapy.

What has been difficult to live with during that time has been the extreme stigma and discrimination that exists for people living with HIV and AIDS. After the initial decade of HIV and AIDS becoming a persistent reality, the first Māori Governor General of Aotearoa New Zealand, Sir Paul Reeves of Ngāti Puketapu commented:

"I believe that life is about living and letting live, and about love and letting love. Sadly, my observation is that people living with AIDS are vulnerable to a pain which is not only physical ... for many it is the pain of secrecy, a feeling of being outside society, the experience of being on the receiving end of everyone's ambivalence."  
(Reeves in Te Puni Kōkiri, 1995, p.8)

Letting myself fall in love has been dangerous territory, as many still view those with HIV or AIDS as being 'dirty' or as a threat to wellbeing and vitality. Disclosure of my HIV status has often resulted in exclusion or rejection and to reduce these occurrences I have been as overt as possible over the past decade, particularly through the use of social media, about being a person who lives with HIV.

New York based American artist Keith Haring rose to fame in the 1980s as an art activist who publically challenged social silencing around many issues, but in particular HIV and AIDS. He performed messages of awareness and critique in public social spaces, initially using empty advertising spaces in the New York subway which he describes as filled with “power and tension and violence”, explaining:

“What happened to me is that it started in the subways, it began in popular culture and was absorbed and accepted by the popular culture before the other art world had time to take credit for it.” (Haring in Sheff, August 10, 1989, para.14)

Haring describes how for him, momentum came through engagement with what was happening around him at the time, rather than through institutional structures and their power mechanisms. In the midst of the emerging HIV and AIDS crisis, creating outside expected spaces helped Haring communicate lived realities. Witnessing first-hand the deaths of many friends to AIDS related illnesses and eventually living with his own HIV positive test, Haring sought to break down social stigmas about the ensuing epidemic – he educated people through creative forms of engagement. Haring states:

“... AIDS has changed everything. AIDS has made it even harder for people to accept, because homosexuality has been made to be synonymous with death. It's a justifiable fright with people that are just totally uninformed and therefore ignorant. Now it means that you're a potential harbinger of death. That's why it is so important for people to know what AIDS is and what it isn't ... So imagine how horrible it must be to some young kid who knows he's gay or someone thinking of experimenting. They could have a sentence of death. It's horribly frightening. It gives so much fuel to the people who are telling you that it's wrong to be who you are.” (Haring in Sheff, August 10, 1989, para.65)

Haring describes the intersectional nature of living with HIV, which is affirmed by *UNAIDS* (2015) who explain populations most likely to be affected by the virus as already marginalised by either homophobia, transphobia, drug use, racism, gender discrimination or poverty.

What Haring's artwork and approach has always offered me, is the inspiration to learn from experiences that signal death – by the time I contracted HIV I had already lost my father, all of my grandparents, half of my mother and father's siblings and also a handful of friends. Whilst saddening, knowledge about how to face death can affirm reasons to live -

“Unfortunately, death is a fact of life. I don't think it's happened to me any more unfairly than to anyone else. It could always be worse. I've lost a lot of people, but I haven't lost everybody. I didn't lose my parents or my family. But it's been an incredible education, facing death, facing it the way that I've had to face it at this early age. I guess it's similar to what it must have been to go to war and to lose your friends while you're at war ... A lot of people don't start to lose their friends until they're fifty or sixty years old. But to start having it happen when you're in your midtwenties – especially because a lot of the people that I've lost have been lost because of AIDS – to have it happen that way, in a way which can many times be very slow and very horrible and very painful, you know, it's been really hard. It's toughened me. It's made me, in a way, more respectful of life and more appreciative of life than I ever, ever could have been.” (Haring in Sheff, August 10, 1989, para.57)

Whakapapa affirms both life and death at the same time – it emphasises genesis, continuance and pathways that extend from perceived end points. I consider whakapapa in this way, within the constraints of academic research, as a means to design and embed trajectories toward positive project outcomes – whakapapa is grounding and foundational, but also fluid and yearning. The foundations of my life experiences led to a situation where I felt at my end, where an important part of my human experience became denied through stigmatising beliefs that discriminated against me, but whakapapa through the lens of raranga regenerates toward alternate pathways.

## Joining the dots – make pictures in the sky

Whakapapa has been described in this chapter as a part of the raranga process that is connective – as an analytical tool that assists Māori to understand our world and relationships. The process of whakapapa enables a way to heal from deeply embedded colonial behaviours and thoughts, contextualised within this chapter through the Native terms and concepts wétiko', washichu and windigo. Whakapapa helps me gather the experiences of harm and hurt I have encountered within the context of a whole life of similar experiences, as a way to create pathways beyond. Rather than separate out each strand of experience, whakapapa helps me bring these all together, to understand why and how they interconnect. I write about the intersection of Indigeneity and likelihood of increased exposure to sexual assault, but also affirm ways Indigenous cultural knowledge can heal damage upon our sexual identities. Trauma stops time, it disassociates and creates incoherence that disconnects Indigenous people from our families, especially disconnecting those who are same-sex oriented and gender-diverse.

Statistically, the likelihood of sexual trauma for these groups of people is excessively high, which points to a need for talking about these experiences as a way to expose their prevalence. Performance storytelling methods are discussed as a form of public ceremony that can heal and reconnect traumatised whakapapa (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins & Altschul, 2011; George, 2014; Hatala, Desjardins, Bombay, 2015; Stimson & Houle in McKegney, 2014; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt & Chen, 2004; Walters, 2014; Wirihana, 2014; Wilson, 2008) – which is the ultimate goal of this project where I impose my will upon different media to design text that communicates both pain and healing. This isn't an easy process because the creative works can be highly emotive – raranga allows a safe way to translate these experiences so that the retelling can have positive impacts that go beyond myself.

Whakapapa is transformative, especially within raranga, because it empowers weavers to cross between the thresholds of concept and practice – which I argue as being akin to inhabiting te whare tangata, the womb. As a concept, te whare tangata links Māori to our origins where our eternal energies emerged from a great void of unconscious darkness, to begin again as potentiality. Within research, even art research, it is difficult for Indigenous artists to describe these kinds of liminal spaces because of the boundaries and scientific processes of cemented in academia. However, ways to do so are being opened up by Indigenous scholars who propose aesthetic systems that offer multiple ways to connect thinking and making. Rethinking creative processes in these ways can help us heal our bodies and the spaces we inhabit so they are safe for us to be in again.

In this chapter, I explained how I enact this through *huka*, a persona derived from transformative Māui narratives. Thinking my project through the challenges performed by Māui in ancient times, has helped me embody a genealogy of tricksterism and critique for this project. For some American and Canadian First Nations cultures, heroic trickster acts are performed by Raven who transforms to empower social realities (Cole, 2006; Everson, 2015; Leschak, 1994), and I assert K'ómoks and Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations artist Andy Everson explanation of how he enables this to be. Everson describes how the loss of knowledge about these narratives by many First Nations people through Colonialism, caused him to consider contemporary heroic stories that could be transformed to convey meaningful Indigenous aesthetics. In this, he began to depict *Starwars* characters as Northwest Coast warrior heroes. Part of Everson's rationale for doing this was to explore the ways contemporary patterns of daily life had redefined the traditional concept of a warrior – by appropriating the masks and images of *Starwars* characters he humanised *Starwars* heroes towards First Nations socio-political concerns. Within the context of my practice, externalising my 'inner-hero' helps me find ways to practice desirable habits and behaviours.

Social media enables ways to promote discussion about Everson's art amongst his audiences, and also activate its political reach. However for me, working through social media is intended as a means to emote and interpret my patterns, and then find how these connect to theories I am interested in and test ideas for chapter content. Besides being used to express gender constraints, my use of social media is also intended to explicate issues related to stigma about sexuality, in particular amongst communities affected by HIV. I base *huka* upon Māui in this regard, because pūrākau about his final encounter with our origin Goddess Hinenuitēpō, emphasise sexuality.

Having lived with HIV for close to a two decades, as an outcome of this project I want to expose the layers of exclusion and discrimination I live with daily. This is important to me because I experience privilege of voice as an artist and now an academic, which other people living with HIV may not necessarily ever know. The experience of shame that can harm people living with HIV needs to be expressed and outed because it interrupts our ability to properly help heal those who live with the virus.

Finally in this chapter I have written about the work of Keith Haring, a celebrity artist and activist who worked tirelessly to re-pattern popular culture from the social silencing that slowed responses at the onset of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. During his life Haring talked about the intersections of oppression that affect people most likely to contract HIV, and I have used his words from an interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine to magnify the extreme burden of accountability and fear deferred to us. For Haring, coming to terms with his own HIV status whilst witnessing the deaths of so many around him in the 1980s, him to develop particular attitudes towards death that were beyond what others were experiencing at the time. I have written about the layers of contemplation described in this chapter, because whakapapa as an analytical tool helps to create connections and enable new options for living. One of the characteristics of colonialism is the ways it detaches things – it separates and dissects everything to the extent that it has been difficult for its victims to again feel whole. Through writing about whakapapa, I have explored the ways that disassociated aspects of bodies, minds and spirits can reformulate – to fill the spaces of confusion and loss that lead to disconnected patterns and destructive habits. In the following chapter I focus on creative works that deal specifically with whakapapa, transgender and HIV trauma, but also the ways my research offers ways for me to cross thresholds toward new hope and a renewed feeling for life. The primary finding in this chapter recognises whakapapa as a powerful tool to interpret sexual trauma, offering connective strategies to release damaging internalised behaviours.

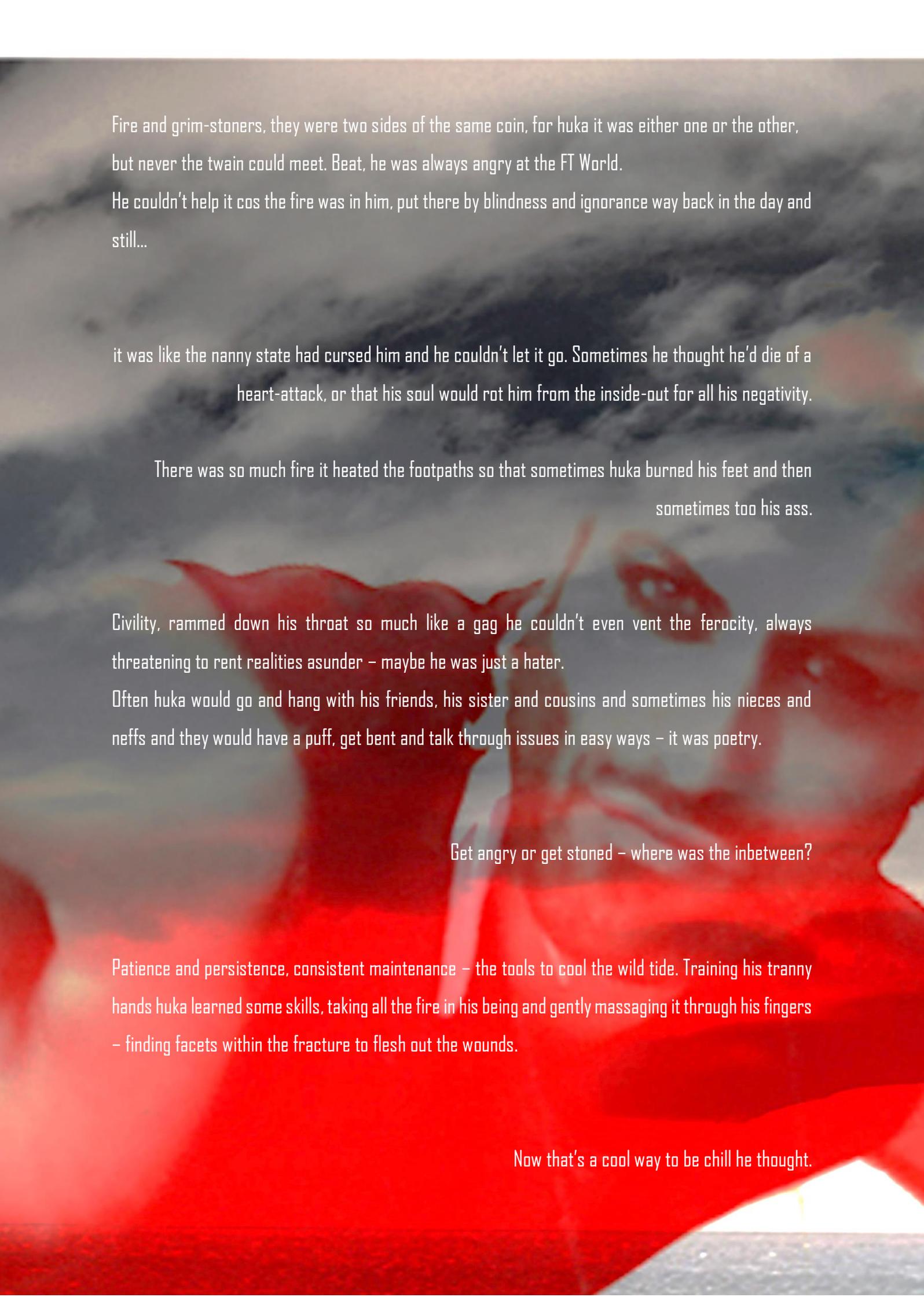






**Chapter 6.**

**Mahi raranga – making it**



Fire and grim-stoners, they were two sides of the same coin, for huka it was either one or the other, but never the twain could meet. Beat, he was always angry at the FT World. He couldn't help it cos the fire was in him, put there by blindness and ignorance way back in the day and still...

it was like the nanny state had cursed him and he couldn't let it go. Sometimes he thought he'd die of a heart-attack, or that his soul would rot him from the inside-out for all his negativity.

There was so much fire it heated the footpaths so that sometimes huka burned his feet and then sometimes too his ass.

Civility, rammed down his throat so much like a gag he couldn't even vent the ferocity, always threatening to rent realities asunder – maybe he was just a hater.

Often huka would go and hang with his friends, his sister and cousins and sometimes his nieces and neffs and they would have a puff, get bent and talk through issues in easy ways – it was poetry.

Get angry or get stoned – where was the inbetween?

Patience and persistence, consistent maintenance – the tools to cool the wild tide. Training his tranny hands huka learned some skills, taking all the fire in his being and gently massaging it through his fingers – finding facets within the fracture to flesh out the wounds.

Now that's a cool way to be chill he thought.

Māori oral narratives describe a series of encounters between Māui and his ancient grandmother Mahuika, an atua or goddess of fire (Gabel, 2013; Mikaere, 1995; Mikaere, 2005) – in some accounts she is the sister of Hinenuitepō and Hineitapeka (the atua of fire stored within the Earth) (Stokes, 2000). Mākereti, a high-chiefly born grandmother of my Ngāti Wāhiao whakapapa (my great-grandfather’s first cousin), retells how the tricksterism of Māui in this story nearly results in his death – in attempting to understand fire and his relationship to it, Māui enrages Mahuika to the point where she throws the last of her fire-stored fingernails at the Earth, attempting to engulf Māui in flames (Mākereti, 1939). The pūrākau that begins this chapter discusses my own space between volatility and sustained heat – a temperature of emotions that at times helps me focus on solving problems, but at other times just leaves me feeling angry and detached.

‘Mahi’ refers to work, and mahi raranga is the work of weaving. Mahi is defined in various ways, as work, to perform, duties or a practice, including the following; “. Mahi. *This is my work of love*. He mahi ā ngākau tēnei nāku.” (Ngata 1993, p.535); “ mahi(a). *perform your duties well*. Mahia o mahi a tika.” (p.333); “ Mahi. *The doctor sold his practice in Auckland*. Ka hokona e te tākuta tana mahi i Ākarana.” (p.350). *Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary* (2003-2017) similarly defines mahi as a verb meaning to work, do, perform, make, accomplish, practise, raise (money); a noun meaning work, job, employment, trade (work), practice, occupation, activity, exercise, operation, function, or a noun meaning abundance, lots of, many, heaps of. It is also a term that has been co-opted within government and policy sectors to describe activities. For example, *The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (2007)* use the terms “mahī aroha” to contextualise Māori perspectives on volunteering and cultural obligations. Similarly, *The National Network of Stopping Violence, New Zealand (2005)*, use the terms “koi mahi” to contextualise their core value of best practice, or excellence in practice.

In this chapter I explore the process to create three bodies of creative works, firstly; *Under Heartbeat City’s golden sun: Māori and the margins of performing the ultimate urban* (2016); an essay produced for a Routledge publication on urban marginality. The section following details another academic text, *Tranny Tricks: The blending and contouring of raranga research* (2015), published through an online interview, the digital recording of an academic presentation and a short peer-reviewed journal text. The final section describes an untitled series of works that includes *No lies* (2015), *Lake* (2015) and *Flight* (2015). These are all works that began to emerge in 2015, the third year of my PhD.

## Performing marginality in text – voicing the oppressed eye

In late 2013, I submitted an abstract for a panel on the ways ‘Assemblage’ theories, described by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), can be applied to consider marginalisation in urban contexts. I saw the call for papers on a *WordPress* blog that I followed, and even though I knew nothing about their theories, I had heard friends talk about Deleuze and Guattari when I was doing my MFA. The call was to present on a panel at the *American Association of Geographer’s Annual Conference (AAG)* in 2014 and had been disseminated by Italian urban geographer and ethnographer Michele Lancione. Even though completely unfamiliar with Assemblages as a theory, through art I had a means to discuss an assemblage and as a Māori person I considered myself an expert in urban marginality. I emailed Michele to introduce myself and my research, asking him if it was worth submitting as the deadline was very close. Michele seemed excited and after submitting it, the abstract was accepted.

I committed to repeat the same process I had already used to write the abstract for *Mass Production*, writing stream-of-consciousness – initially I wrote a list of themes I wanted to carry through the panel presentation, then wrote whatever came to mind until I reached the 250 word count limit. I edited the abstract, shaping the first loose connections into comprehensible strands of inquiry. For instance, as I started to write, I imagined my father’s experience of urbanisation compared to my own – it reminded me of a film he talked about enjoying – *Escape from Absalom* (1994), which I jotted down and included in my abstract. After writing ‘Absalom’ I did some reading on him which helped me shape the abstract further to convey diaspora and notions of ancient cities in warm climates.

The AAG panel – *Assembling life at the "margin": Critical assemblage thinking and urban marginality*, gave me an opportunity to discuss the themes in my abstract; providing me with a means to gain feedback before formalising my research into a publication. In 2014 I applied for allocated University research funds to travel to the *American Association of Geographer’s* annual conference in Tampa, Florida; a group panel at the *National Association for Ethnic Studies* conference in Oakland, California, and; the *Humanities, Arts, Science and Technologies Alliance and Collaboratory* conference in Lima, Peru. The funding enabled me to present at the first two conferences, but not in Lima.

As described through the works discussed in previous chapters, after presenting I gathered a range of source materials to begin writing the 6000 word paper. I wrote the entire paper poetically – stream of consciousness to communicate an assemblage of experiences and theory. In the editing process with feedback from Michele, I began to reorganise the words I had written to give them more sense – sometimes ‘sense’ might have been semantic, at other times ‘sense’ may have been rhythmical in the way words sound when read. My focus for the paper investigated three points through a range of vantages – Māori creative practice research approaches; Māori marginalisation and tino rangatiratanga, and; whakapapa through raranga. Once I thought I had successfully conveyed ‘sense’ in what I was writing, I then pared the words down to communicate my ideas more succinctly. I felt that every word should count towards clarity – so even through the use of poetic form, I aimed for brevity. Writing *Under Heartbeat City’s golden sun* (Appendix I) helped me assert “titiro, whakarongo ... korero (look, listen ... speak)” as Māori research values which emphasise “... the importance of looking and listening so that you develop understandings and a place from which to speak” (Smith, 1999. P.120). For marginalised people, the details of power appear vague and indistinct from the peripheries; thus I argued how observation through many lenses could help find ways to hear many arguments, toward re-centring marginalised voices.

*Under Heartbeat City’s golden sun*, helped me to develop strategy for embedding a structure-with-flow in my PhD design; because on the one hand I fluidly wrote ideas through the use of emerging poetic connections, whilst on the other, I formalised my theory-narrative into an academic mode. As a creative PhD output, writing in this manner emphasised text as a site of struggle for coherence between ideas I was reading about and generating in photographic, videographic and performative explorations. *Under Heartbeat City’s golden sun* was very much a way to test how an academic text might more closely resemble the inbetween space I occupy as a creative practice-based researcher, where text poetry, like academic writing entails analysis and editing. Making this academic text offered me agency by helping with ways to describe a research problem. It helped me find a process to write with confidence as an academic and ultimately, create an object that could be used as tool to problem-solve in other contexts. Perceiving my academic writing process as raranga enabled me to weave many ideas together, editing made written work clear. At times when writing *Under Heartbeat City’s golden sun*, I felt like I was weaving together an intolerably fractured Māori life – my own. It was a difficult task similar to that described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith when she writes:

“The tension between fragmenting and coming together is an almost impossible situation and, in many cases, at our most vulnerable points fractures occur, whānau fragment, core relationships between parents and children break down and Māori people become alienated from themselves, their whānau and communities. Marginalisation, as a process as well as a state of affairs, impacts at multiple levels and sites. (Smith, 2006, p.20)

It was important to acknowledge I how fragmented and hurt I really was. It was vital to recognise that being marginalised meant I was vulnerable – I could be complicit in perpetuating colonial processes in an anxious effort to fit in amongst an assemblage of global academics, within a theoretical text. I actively resisted approaching my chapter as an academic and asserted my emotional creative voice to re-centre from that position of marginality, it was crucial to find processes that could operate within multiple settings – creative writing strategies for academic forms offered pathways to do so. Academic texts can often place distance between theorists and their subjects. Writing *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun*, I shifted my relationship to some of the theoretical discussions I had been immersing myself in and reoriented myself in a more empowering way.

Marginalised, I am misunderstood, reduced, silenced, spoken for and often ignored, but using raranga I blur my status quo, interrupting how I might be perceived at all levels of engagement – I take control. Rather than turn my back on inhuman histories and voices as suggested by Fanon (1972), I embraced them from the heart of my ‘jungle’ – I relied on the aeons of Māori ancestral embodiment, to perform myself within the text I wrote. The process to develop *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun* empowered me through embedding myself at the core of my research question – it highlighted me as a solution rather than persistent problem. *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun: Māori and the margins of performing the ultimate urban* was published as a chapter in *Rethinking Life at the Margins: The Assemblage of Contexts, Subjects, and Politics*, a book edited by Michele Lancione and published by Routledge. In the following section I describe the process to present and write another academic text, *Tranny tricks: The blending and contouring of raranga research*.

## Tranny bags – necessary weight

I sat by the wayside, biding my time – all things nice and spicy.  
Full of flavour, full of ways to humpty dumpty the aubergines into a  
splash splash splash.  
Flash, aha, he'll save every one of us. Catch the bus stop, don't go – flow.  
Finite fancies, tickle my panties and party hearty till the sun goes down. You clown.

Early in 2015 I presented at *Tranny tricks: The blending and contouring of raranga research* (Appendix J) at *Cultured Queer / Queering Culture: Indigenous Perspectives on Queerness*, Australia's first Indigenous LGBTQI symposium held at the University of Wollongong. Other invitees included Dr Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee), Dr Alex Wilson (Neyonawak Inniwak from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation), Dr Sandy O'Sullivan (Wiradjuri), Maddee Clarke (Bundjalung) and Andrew Farrell (Wodi Wodi) – I felt pretty blessed and a little overwhelmed because I had only really begun my research journey.

My intent for the *Tranny tricks* was to discuss the ways that raranga can help weave heathy Māori genderfluid identities – and the ways we support positive futures for our whānau. The convenor of the symposium needed abstracts and supporting info in a hurry, so I had limited time to write an abstract towards a 1 hour presentation and if comfortable, a creative activity. I knew that if I came up with a good theme to narrate with, I would find the right ways to pull together interesting strands of research. Again, I wrote my abstract speedily and in a stream of consciousness fashion, using a simple framework of ideas. With such an awesome funded opportunity to be in the world sharing ideas, I put a lot of effort into shaping my abstract after the initial poetic draft. I loved the poetic abstract initially written, but I wanted to clearly articulate the aims I had for the presentation and exercise – bringing together ideas I had been exploring through my project.

To shape the *Tranny tricks* presentation, I took each of the six sentences from the first part of my abstract and narrowed them to single ideas – giving me 10 minutes to present on each idea. I then took each sentence of the second part of my abstract and did the same, matching each context being explored with the six ideas from the first part of my abstract. These helped me think about concrete ways to talk through each idea. I had begun to develop a style of conference presentation, where I used *PowerPoint* images to narrate a personal journey – threading through theoretical concerns as I story-told. Because I presented my own images, I was familiar enough with them to talk for about 2 minutes on each image – selecting each so that it would remind me to convey a particular aspect of each main idea being presented. When it came time to present, I intended to use a selection of both images and video and had prepared a *PowerPoint* as well as a short summary sheet to help guide me in the presentation. For some reason, my *PowerPoint* wouldn't work on the University computer and I ended up using my own with an HDMI cord. However, the videos wouldn't play which really threw me – I was framing my presentation for the most part through video, as well as the creative exercise.

I was nervous, but when I realised the video would not work at all, I decided to move out from behind the lectern and speak directly to attendees. I spoke about myself – using my experiences as grounding points for different kinds of theory. I felt like I was fumbling at first with adrenaline pumping after trying to figure out the technology, however, within a few minutes I had settled and found a steady way to progress – I spoke slowly, cracked jokes, got a bit deep sometimes and used my fingers a lot to help shape ideas in spaces around me. Once I got in the rhythm, it was fun to stand there and present – as I got less self-conscious I felt more able to describe connections between ideas with confidence. After presenting, invitees were asked to consider a special edition publication for the *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, focusing on diverse Indigenous gendered identities and sexualities. As a group, we each agreed to publish 1000 peer-reviewed words that contextualised our recorded 40-50 minute presentations – as well, the online publication would include a presenter interview.

For the *Tranny tricks* writing, I wanted to centre myself between different media, worried that an interview, an academic text and a recorded presentation might overwhelm my identity with theory. From the outset I of the paper I committed to poetic narrative:

“The stars fell around me, lighting puddles of potentiality that we each had to wend our ways through. I was with my Native tranny sisters, alive in a dreamscape but floating, like the Jackson 5 in some discoed out dessert of soft wind-song. I hear my own question echo like footsteps: “Where is my Nation, I have forgotten my name. I am nowhere, but I am somewhere... my inbetweenness is my strength”.

(Nopera, 2015, p. 3)

Although less than one hundred words long, these introductory words helped situate an identity hovering somewhere between ephemeral existences; denied relevance as both Indigenous and genderfluid. I used personal pronouns to let readers know immediately that the research stemmed from an internal process. Beginning in this way foreshadowed potential themes explored within the publication. Because the ideas within *Tranny tricks* included many different disciplines, I combined academic and poetic writing styles to communicate with thinkers, readers and makers in diverse spaces.

Building on the narrative writing style used for *Mass Production* and *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun*, I wrote *Tranny Tricks* to test strategies for academic writing. My focus in the text for the *Journal of Global Indigeneity* was to try and write as if orating a great story, shifting language sometimes to allow for rhythm and pace. By writing somewhere in the middle of theory and poem, I attempted to find emotive ways to connect with readers. With only 1000 words, I did not want to overload my text with too many voices – especially because I was still experimenting to find my own. For the most part, I prioritised only a handful of theorists whose ideas could help me contextualise my presentation and interview videos. *Tranny Tricks: The blending and contouring or raranga research* was published in *The Journal of Global Indigeneity* in 2015. The opportunity to present in Australia and then publish works encouraged me to envision hope and imagine new spaces for myself. In the next section of this chapter, I describe the process to create large-scale image works through which I attempted to explore envisioned hopes and imagined new spaces.

It was difficult to stand in an international forum, in front of strangers and talk about some of the deep trauma I had experienced. As part of my research story, I was beginning to recognise the value of being able to stand and confidently express the abstract quantities of same-sex attracted and transgender people as real, living and present within a research space. The statistical data that I had carried a lot of shame through life because of experiences where I felt hopeless enough to end my life, where I was sexually assaulted, or where my trust in another had led to a lifetime of living silently with HIV. The presentation of *Tranny Tricks: The blending and contouring or raranga* was like Shelley Scott's (2011) public testimony, albeit framed within an academic discussion – it was a visible storytelling ceremony that felt particularly healing, and people present commented on how healing it was to hear things they could relate to in a research presentation.

I interpret my body as a Māori text, and I am the only person who can authentically describe its lived experiences, social contexts and future impacts. *Tranny Tricks: The blending and contouring or raranga* enabled me a space to validate the statistical information representing the lived experiences of same-sex attracted and transgender Māori people, torn between urban and Māori social contexts, who have lived from the mid-1970s onwards. Jillian Tipene's (2014) concerns around ways Māori texts are translated, discussed in chapter 5, are relevant when I consider my life-research-art-praxis. The ways I story the text of my body will change with time, because as Tipene (2014) asserts, meaning is socially constructed and can never be fixed. However, standing as a kairaranga of my own text, using a range of quantitative and qualitative strategies to give a living context for the research I engage in, gives voice and place to identities often ignored, mis-storied and mis-represented through research. Doing this enables what Donna Campbell (2014) describes in the process of harakeke preparation, whereby weaving data and practice-based strategies with my body-as-text, I enable an empowered means to re-story a traumatised history as one of empowerment and change.

## Image a nation – visual lies

Writing academic papers and being exposed to the work of Indigenous scholars through *MAI Te Kupenga*, my focus began to shift from the harm continually being enacted on Indigenous people, to a vision of hope beyond negative experiences. I wanted to communicate this in my artwork, but as an artist who makes self-portraits how could I make artworks about an authentic vision of promise when I still felt without hope?

I began to explore new ways to make images.

By the third year of my research project, I had become particularly enamoured of the video frame – the dimensions seemed epic in a sense that for me at least, the size was reminiscent of a theatrical space. I liked that within the space of 1280 pixels x 720 pixels, I could make a moving image where things happened, where I could store feelings at safe distances for viewing at later times. Video on my computer and through digital media reminded me of times at drama school, where my friends and I created tableaux, played out directed scenes and enacted emotions – rehearsing ideas that only sometimes would end up being performed in front of an audience. During the third year of my project I began to consider these dimensions rather than those generated automatically by digital cameras.

On a more practical level, I got used to working with images at 1280 x 720 pixels in *Photoshop*, especially when making still frames for the animation process I was exploring. In *Kōwhaiwhai*, I had mirrored the images I used – both horizontally and vertically. I titled that artwork *Kōwhaiwhai*, because this is the term to describe traditional fluidline drawn, tattooed and painted designs, where symmetry and asymmetry are prominent principles – true also for raranga patterns.

At first, my intention was to make quick images that I could use to juxtapose with writing whenever I posted on *hukacanhaka.com*. I wasn't looking to make resolved images at all, rather I wanted to imbue images with feelings and emotions that until then were only coming out as words elsewhere. The process to make images in this way was a little mechanical. I began to make my process about simple regulated actions – doing this meant that often the works I created looked imperfect and even wrong. As a visual artist I had been lead to believe that unless a work was resolved, it should stay hidden from audiences and that the best artworks are the polished ones. Resisting this was liberating, I didn't exactly feel comfortable putting unresolved image works into my blog, because by then people had started to 'follow' me – but I wanted to commit to what I was trying to learn through *raranga*. I began to blog whatever images emerged in the same way I committed to blogging whatever words I was writing. This helped me back to making works for the pleasure of engaging a process rather than a focus on outcomes.

To create digital works in this untitled series, I first selected a few images, no more than five, and prepared these in Photoshop with brightness, contrast and vibrancy adjustments. I would then transfer all prepared images onto a single canvas before working between each layer with blending options. Eventually, on finding a merged image that reflected the writing I was generating in my blog, I would transfer this to a new canvas with dimensions that equated to 1280 x 720 pixels. At a good printing resolution of 300 dots per inch, these images print out quite small at 10.84 x 6.1cms – I created bigger images by adding an extra zero into the values so that the image size I was working with was 100.84 x 60.10 cms, enabling me to print at a very large size.

From that point, I explored the use of guide-rulers in Photoshop to divide my canvas into quarters, putting an image in one quadrant, copying it three times and then placing a copy into each of the quadrants so that they created a mirrored and abstract artwork. Sometimes, the final result didn't look harmonious and so in these instances I used only two copies – placing rulers on either the horizontal or vertical axis to mirror what I had. I liked creating images in this way because I wanted to learn things rather than put intentional meanings into them. Creating in this manner helped ease a lot of anxiety within my project, because I had an outlet to express without the pressure to perform. Uploading works from this series of explorations, straight to my blog, was a way to take away forms of self-censorship.

I realised that putting my own image into works was restricting in many ways because I was constantly trying to make myself look good, rather than exploring for the sake of it. I started to remove my face from the artworks I was making.

For *no lies* I included my hands as well as photos of the places where I was staying. For this artwork I used my *Blackberry* to gather images of things around me, whilst I stayed sitting in one place. At the time I had been staying with my older sister on the Gold Coast of Australia, where she had temporarily relocated with her partner and her three children – on that day we had taken my nephews to the bank to get debit cards. When I began to mirror these along horizontal and vertical planes, the central point created a cross encircled by fingers. I saturated the colour significantly to enhance the blues and purple tones that emerged through the application of blending options. The powerlines and lens flares in the original images created segmented frames in the final piece and I began to enjoy the patterning of frames within frames. However, I was starting to find the images I was making too complex – there was too much in them for me to consider on reflection, and so I started to experiment with fewer images to see what I could create.



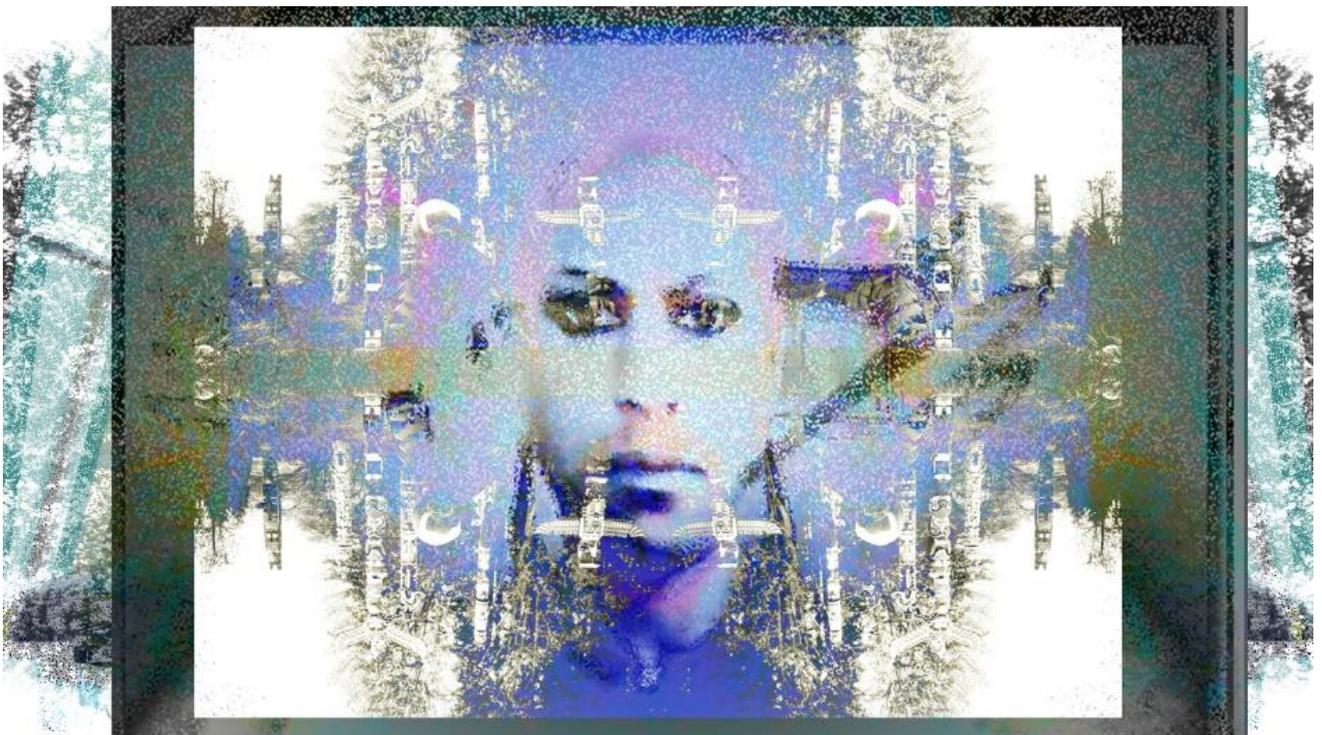
Nopera, T. (2015) No lies [digital image on Phototex] 2.5m x 1.5m

The source images for *Lake* (Fig. 7) were gathered approximately six months later using a *Samsung 3 Mini* in Rotorua, on an early morning run along the lakefront. On that particular morning the air was cold; the thermal heat rising from Lake Rotorua had caused a blanket of mist which greatly reduced visibility. When I ran along a certain part of the track I liked to run, the vision was eerily prophetic – it was as if my lake was telling me that something unseen was around the corner, waiting for me to experience it. I only used one image to create *Lake*. I mirrored part of the image along a central horizontal axis, having erased the parts of the running track that were in the original image. I increased the contrast in the image and also the brightness – this caused the water in the centre of the image to turn a turquoise/green colour, and the foliage in the foreground to take on a blue hue. I spent more time than usual to construct a lake-scape that does not actually exist, by copying one part of the image, shrinking it and using multiples of the copy to create a small enclosed body of water. Of all the visual works made during these explorations, even though I deviated from the simple process I had devised initially, I felt this most clearly represented the vision of hope I held in my heart.



Nopera, T. (2015) *Lake* [digital image on Phototex] 2.5m x 1.5m

By the time I made *Flight* (2015) I had begun to put my face back into my images because I was feeling a lot more hopeful about the things I was doing and the places my research was taking me. *Flight* was made using three images, with two of those images gathered in Vancouver, BC on a visit to a friend living there, and the third image a self-portrait I had created a year earlier. The images from Vancouver had been taken by my friend as we stopped to spend time with the totems at Stanley Park. As with *Lake*, after working through the initial process to balance light levels, contrast and vibrancy, I mirrored the result along a horizontal axis in the centre of the image. I struggled to create a resolved work, but my experience that particular afternoon had been really grounding – I wanted to make something that communicated how alive and real I felt. I went through images of unresolved work on my hard drive and found a self-portrait I had made in the previous year. As soon as I layered this over what I had been working on, the entire image came alive. This time there was an intentional frame within my image, and even though off centre, the idea of multiple frames within an image, where some things cross-over, became something I investigated further in the coming years.



Nopera, T. (2015) flight [digital image on Phototex] 2.5m x 1.5m

Through these three works I was beginning to find image-making strategies that could help me slow down and contemplate pathways to healing. To do this I needed to be able to create images, have time to analyse them to interpret what personal histories might be present within them, and then consider what new stories that might also be emerging. Kai Tahu/Scottish artist Fiona Pardington explains that for her, “[p]hotography is all about arresting time, or at a point of time you make a decision and you take a photograph and something beautiful or meaningful exists” (Pardington in Brick, 2015). I feel a need to give the moments I image further space and time in which to consider them, beyond what might be immediately available. Pardington comments that “[e]very photograph is a being in two worlds, beginning in the physical and ending in the virtual” (Pardington, 2013, p.22).

The process I enacted through this series of artworks is similar to Pardington’s except rather than two-fold, it is three-fold and cyclical. It begins in the physical, moves through the virtual and begins again in the physical – at which point the process can begin again and again. For me, the image as an endpoint offers no hope, because the image is static, whereas I live and breathe. I need the process I enact through image making to move me through the liminal space, which in the previous chapter I have described as *te whare tangata*, so that I bring back the potential of *Te Kore*. For me, the creative process is a *whakapapa* journey. Through consciousness of it as such, I recognise that I am rebirthing my own genealogy all the way to the beginning of time. I am not simply making art, I am bringing parts of myself back from ‘nothingness’ so that I will no longer be fragments searching for space, but instead will be whole.

Doing this with intent and observing what I do allows a means to re-pattern from learned habits, which through social processes have become internalised. In this manner the images I create become like the trickster I have described in chapter 5, where I symbolically occupy the space of my ancestor *Māui* and I ‘trick’ myself into a new consciousness of behaviours. It may seem questionable that this is what is happening, but I evidence this through images are made from imaged fragments of my life. When I assemble the digital information through the use of *Photoshop*, the parts become whole. They are translucent frames within frames that suggest layers of experience, and whole they are beautiful, contemplative and powerfully hopeful – they are the ‘tranny tricks’ I use to retell myself a life beyond what I can remember as immediately present.

## The 'A' tricks - performing goodness

The first creative works discussed in this chapter explain the context within which I developed *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun: Māori and the margins of performing the ultimate urban*. I described this paper and the process used to write it, which follows on from *Mass Production: Transmitting the reel back through the TV haka screen*, and also writing towards this thesis. In particular, writing *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun* helped me find ways to centre myself within a research 'problem' so that rather than just theorising, I was able to find solutions I could actually live with. Writing this paper helped me to look and listen to what was going on in my life – and I used those observations to find voice and express honestly. Academic writing is a site for struggle, and even though it is not always perceived as a creative form of writing, I developed a way to write, tell stories and convey a sense of transformative potential.

Following on from *Under Heartbeat City's golden sun* I described *Tranny tricks: The blending and contouring of raranga research*. Again, this paper offered me a new place to speak from and a new vantage from which to observe. I discussed the ways I had planned to present, although ultimately I had to deviate and present in an alternative manner. The ways I distilled the themes of my research, provided helpful prompts when it came to improvising a discussion that lasted close to 45 minutes. The presentation opened a pathway to publication and through writing I was able to balance a sense of my identity across three different online publication modes – using both poetic and formal writing strategies.

Finally in this chapter I explained the development of an untitled suite of digital image artworks. To create these images I investigated strategies for making that emerged through the editing of digital videos. I persisted with some of approaches already explored in previous years of my project, but I also incorporated new methods, some of which stemmed from traditional Māori creative practices. For the most part I was creating images to be uploaded with writing to my blog – in this I had been attempting to enact an immediate process for image-making. Resolution of works was not the top priority in the making of these, but instead I wanted to move beyond some of the limitations that can be part of slow-making processes – in particular self-censorship.

The three visual works discussed in this chapter were exhibited as large-scale artworks in the inaugural exhibition of the *Rotorua Lakes Council Galleria*, at the end of 2014 – featuring the works of selected Te Arawa artists. I printed the works on *Phototex*, a highly durable and self-adhesive media used predominantly for advertising. I had limited options for printing large prints in the small city of Rotorua, however, on seeing test prints at a much smaller scale I knew immediately that the medium would hold the colour saturation I desired for the final prints. These visual works and the papers described in this chapter were instrumental in helping towards a shift in the ways I lived my life and interpreted my potential to help enact positive communal attitudinal change. It was empowering to be offered opportunities to present both creative and research works to local and international audiences because they affirmed the poignancy of Māori experiences in today's world. Having these poignant Māori experiences also encouraged in me a renewed perspective of myself. I couldn't keep relying on being marginalised because my research practice had signalled that there were ways beyond always feeling useless, hopeless and unlovable.

In the next chapter I describe the ways a 'vision of hope' is being expressed by Indigenous scholars, as a means to heal from the historical traumas we experience in our communities. I firmly believe we need powerful affirmations in Māori spaces – reminders of our potentials and reminders of our pre-colonial pasts where the vitality and connectedness of te pā harakeke kept us safe, prosperous and happy. As well as an exploration of liberatory visions, I explore a theory of art that emerged in the 1990s – *Relational Aesthetics*, seeking ways to advance its premise within Indigenous creative contexts. Relational Aesthetics is art that provides spaces for communities to communicate (Bourriaud, 2002; Bishop, 2004), and in this I discuss in more detail, the work of three Indigenous practitioners who create positive pathways for change in their own communities. The primary finding in this chapter asserts that raranga can centre marginal identities as bodies full of hope;

I fix my sights on the winding embers of yesterday, and whisper with the wind.

We tell stories and in the gusts and flurries we giggle as they grow.

Why do I sometimes imagine I lived my life in a cage?

This age is no longer the same... that much is clear.

There is no longer any fear, I have forgotten it and its impeding impact upon my life,  
on my love, on my heart I start a song that soothes the anxieties of a lifetime.

My mixtured dreams don't disappear at the neon light of the dawn.

Instead the fathoms of oceans evaporate and rain my life into liquorice ... it sticks to my  
teeth and tongue and I speak the language of leisure.

Pleasure?

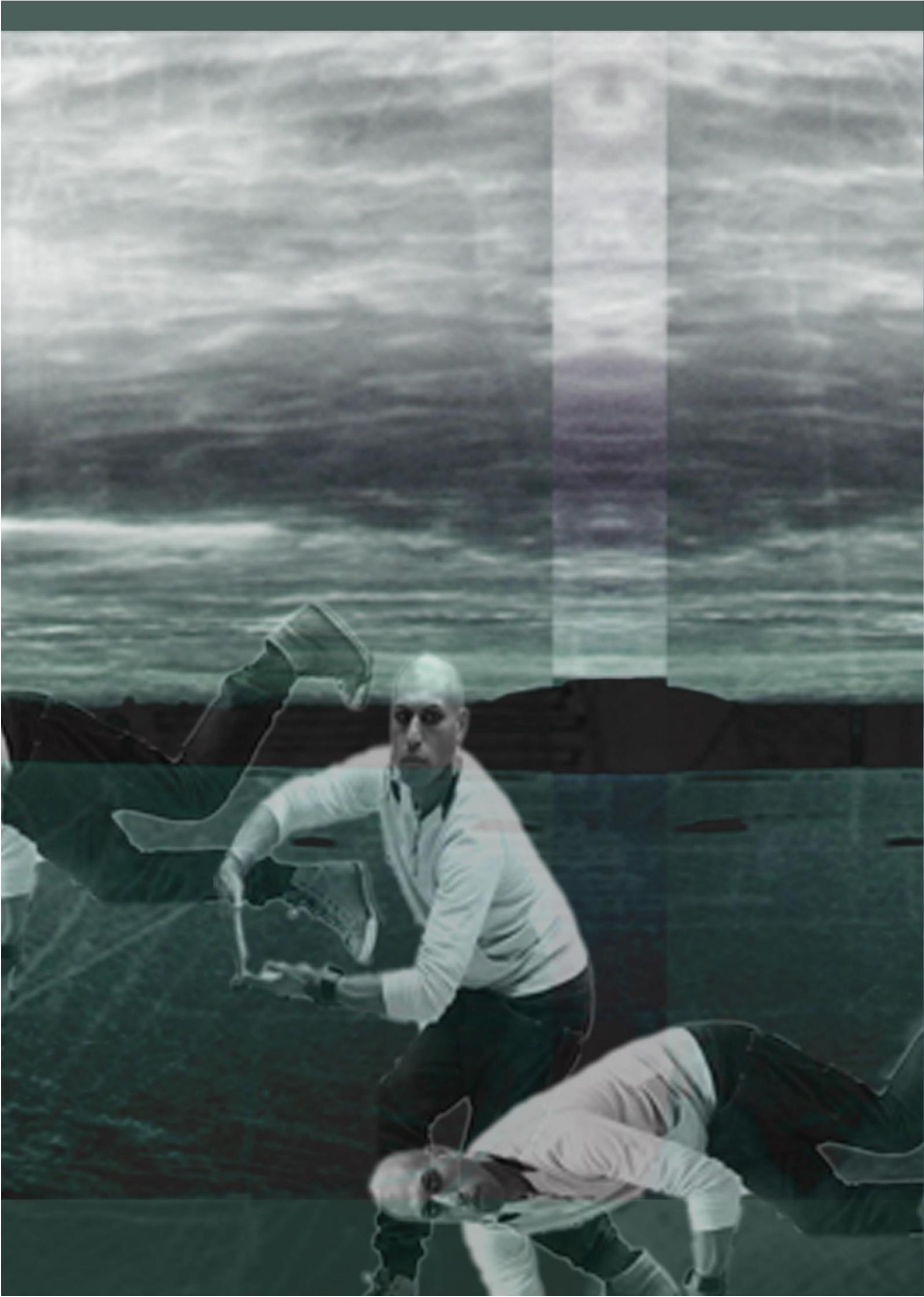
Assuredly I coax my feet into the soft blowing breeze, bedridden for only a fleeting  
moment of rhyme I arise and yawn the apocalypse of business days  
back to their briefcases.

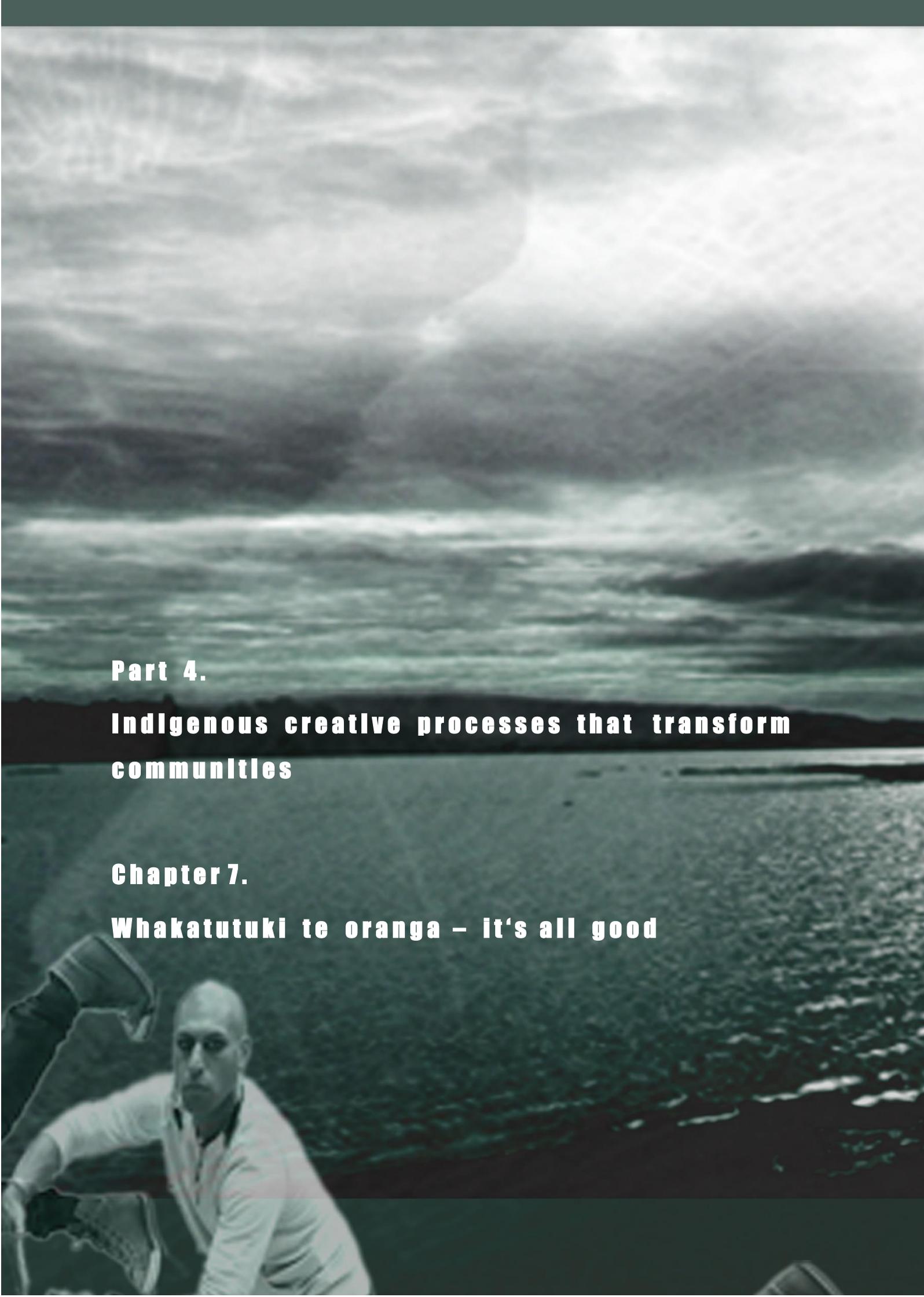
It's all too sentimental, this dreaded soapy foundation of nine to five fictions.

This is the liberation of nuclear fission, a conjoined company of me, myself and my  
makings, a king or a queen, whatever the jest, my best is yet to come.







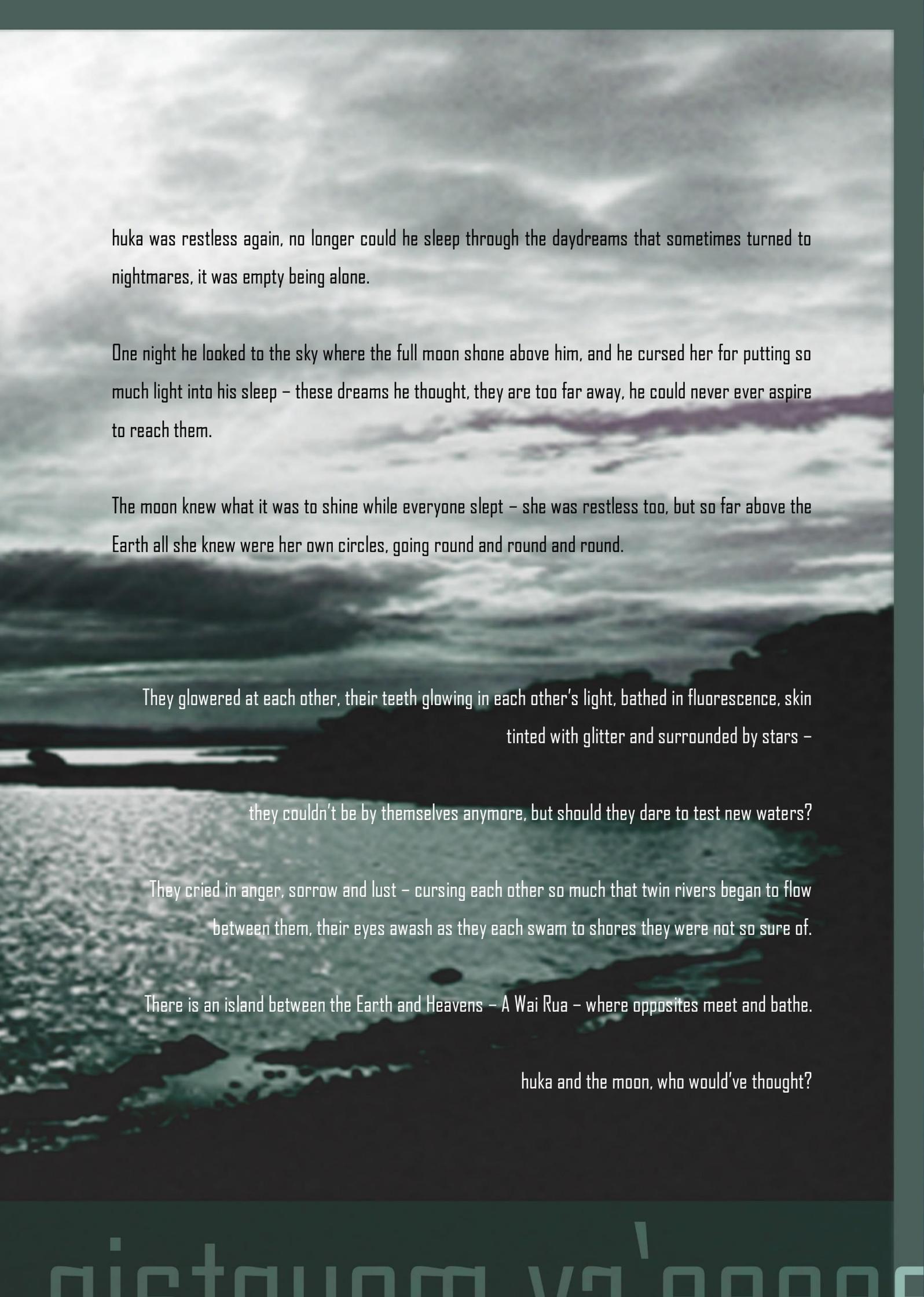


**Part 4.**

**Indigenous creative processes that transform communities**

**Chapter 7.**

**Whakatutuki te oranga – it's all good**



huka was restless again, no longer could he sleep through the daydreams that sometimes turned to nightmares, it was empty being alone.

One night he looked to the sky where the full moon shone above him, and he cursed her for putting so much light into his sleep – these dreams he thought, they are too far away, he could never ever aspire to reach them.

The moon knew what it was to shine while everyone slept – she was restless too, but so far above the Earth all she knew were her own circles, going round and round and round.

They glowered at each other, their teeth glowing in each other's light, bathed in fluorescence, skin tinted with glitter and surrounded by stars –

they couldn't be by themselves anymore, but should they dare to test new waters?

They cried in anger, sorrow and lust – cursing each other so much that twin rivers began to flow between them, their eyes awash as they each swam to shores they were not so sure of.

There is an island between the Earth and Heavens – A Wai Rua – where opposites meet and bathe.

huka and the moon, who would've thought?

nietauua va'ooooo

In the night-time hours I stare at the moon a lot, casting spells of reprieve and change.

I won't lie, this has been a lonely journey to embark on and at many points I thought,

“what's the point ... maybe it's just me and the moon 4 life.”

The pūrākau that begins this chapter is based on narratives about Māui and Hineteiwaiwa, the moon deity – also the deity of raranga. Throughout the great moana she has other names too – Hina, Sina, Hine and many more. In some narratives the moon and Māui are married, he gives her light to cure her blindness. In other narratives they fight and she leaves him for her sanctuary in the sky.

Finishing can be messy business.

Within the context of raranga, finishing is a journey all of its own. After making, making and making, concluding an object can put a weaver at the end of their wits. In part because endings can seem so long and even painful in coming, but at the same time are short and sharp too. Weavers often just cannot wait any longer to arrive at their dreams.

I feel like I am arriving at many of mine.

Whakatutuki is the focus of this chapter, which is the completion, realisation or achievement of a predetermined end. *Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary* determines ‘whakatutuki’ as:

- “1. (verb) ... to carry to completion, complete, finish, accomplish, fulfil, execute”,  
and
2. (noun) achievement, completion, attainment, realisation.” (2013-2017)

Whakatutuki too, has been co-opted by the New Zealand government, through the Ministry of Health as a framework title; “‘Achieving Health for All People – Whakatutuki Te Oranga Hauora Mo Ngā Tāngata Katoa’” (2003, p.iii), and also as a title by the New Zealand government agency Sports and Recreation New Zealand (now Sports New Zealand), in the establishment of their strategic plan for Māori engagement through Te Rōpū Manaaki; “Whakatutuki Te Māiatanga Māori - Realising Māori Potential” (2006/2009). However, in both cases, no effort is made to describe what ‘whakatutuki’ means beyond a simple exchange of English for Māori words – through governance, they are circumscribed from te reo Māori practices.

Within this chapter, I describe a range of theories and creative approaches, and in this explore whakatutuki – which I perceive as completion, realisation, attainment and fulfilment. Whakatutuki, affirms the good things in a making process, but also helps interpret difficulties encountered – it helps give a balanced approach to achieving positive ends. I begin in the first section by exploring hope in the context of historical trauma research as in trying to make something right – particularly as a goal for Indigenous wellbeing and vitality. In the second section, I investigate how art theory can provide hope and encourage collective forms of engagement by writing about ‘relational aesthetics’ beyond what I argue are Nicholas Bourriaud’s institutionalised limitations. Indigenous creative practices are inherently relational – they offer hope for our communities through knowledge our ancestors practiced over aeons. I write about these practices as being the aspiration that Western art theory has been moving towards for some time – if only it had ways to acknowledge this. To exemplify how these kinds of practices appear in a range of spaces, in sections three, four and five I write about a group of artists and knowledge-keepers. In particular, I describe the ways they inspire me through their practices of collective engagement.

## Hope and hopelessness – ebbs and flows

“The quest for hope is not limited to the sick or troubled but applies to every man, woman, and child who seeks a brighter tomorrow. The relatively few who have abandoned hope appear more confused than liberated in their decision making. Some of them presume that hope is synonymous with denial of the painful or difficult realities of life. Some view hope as a passive mindset designed to delay gratification of their desires. And others simply harbour a fear of hope. They prefer to brace themselves for the worst and cannot imagine anything better coming their way; they have already suffered too much and would rather settle for a predictable routine than open themselves up to a myriad of future possibilities.” (Scioli & Biller, 2009, p.18)

The above quote encompasses many of the strands that led to this point in my research project – a quest for hope should not be limited by illness of body, mind and spirit; abandonment; confusion; difficult realities; desire; fear; imagination, nor; routine. Hope toward desired goals and aspirations can be a hard transformation to maintain in the face of constant struggle – struggles which, for Indigenous peoples, are embedded in continuing stories of hurt. This is ‘historical trauma’, understood as the ongoing impact of colonial harm upon entire communities – hurts that go beyond what happened in the past and have ripping impacts today due to the ways they are transmitted between generations (Baranowsky, Young, Johnson-Douglas, Williams-Keeler & McCarrey, 1998; Duran, 2006; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Elsass, 2001; Estrada, 2009; Gagné, 1998; George, 2014; Hatala, Desjardins & Bombay, 2016; Jasienska, 2009; Nagata, 1991; Nagata, Cheng, 2003; Palacios & Portilla, 2009; Walters, Beltran, Huh & Evans-Campbell, 2011; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt & Chen, 2004; Wirihana, 2014; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins & Altschul, 2011; Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998)

“Such events include direct attacks on the community, as in the case of massacres, as well as indirect attacks, as in the case of destroying buffalo to near extinction. Individually, each event is profoundly traumatic; taken together they constitute a history of sustained cultural disruption and destruction ... The resulting trauma is often conceptualized as collective, in that it impacts a significant portion of a community, and compounding, as multiple historically traumatic events occurring over generations.” (Walters, Mohammed, Evans-Campbell, Beltrán, Chae & Duran, 2011, p.180)

In a keynote presentation *Isht Ahalaya: Transcending historical trauma with loving responsibility*, offered to audiences in Auckland, Aotearoa, Professor Karina Walters encourages a reconnection with the power, love and vision that is part of stories about trauma (Walters, 2014). In her presentation, Walters contextualises trauma for Indigenous peoples as historical as well as contemporary – articulating colonisation as a process that becomes embodied, disrupting our connections to each other, our land as well as connections to time and space. However, in speaking about historical trauma, she argues for a shift in perspective and describes traumas as powerful standing-places from which to transform (Walters, 2014).

Our Indigenous ancestors are amazing repositories of knowledge, as we are too, and our abilities to story collective histories and the journeys of our people, enable us to persist and create good futures (Archibald, 2008; Cariou, 2016; Kovach, 2012; Lee, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wall Kimmerer, 2013; Walters, 2014). How we talk about our world and our relationships is important, because our relationships centre us, giving spaces to breathe and be present on our own terms. Story within this PhD is the dominant feature of transformation, because through *raranga* I have been able to re-story myself in the world – reframing my experiences by engaging with ancestral knowledge to theorise my practices today. I create a pathway through story, clarifying visions of potentials that I stand amidst within a disconnected network of relationships, whilst repairing webs of hope. Therapies that are documented as improving the impacts the historical trauma involve storying methods (Denham, 2008; Duran, 2006; Ferreira, 2006; Nagata, 1991; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009; Walters, Beltran, Huh, Evans-Campbell, 2011); with Denham (2008) writing that,

“recounting past narrative and emplotting new experiences ... provides an historical perspective that facilitates the control and integration of experiences and events. Additionally, the act of speaking of one’s experiences, or those of an ancestor, permits the understanding and negotiation of the self as located within the context of a larger family narrative” (p.408).

Through the process of raranga, story goes beyond oration and dialogue, and extends to writing practices, visual image making, moving image making, and ultimately inhabits my body. For me, performance of stories is crucial – if colonial disruptions limit my behaviour, then I need powerful ways to exorcise things I may not even know exist in my body, where “... embodiment acknowledges that while bodies tell [his]stories, they reveal stories that are also not conscious, hidden, forbidden, or even denied by individuals or groups.” (Walters, Mohammed, Evans-Campbell, Beltrán, Chae & Duran, 2011, p.184). Performance offers ways to create ceremonies that can resolve the fractures in my identity I know exist, but also reveal many I am unaware of – performance, ritual, ceremony and physically engaging with land help heal historical trauma upon people and their lived environments (Begay, 2001; Kingsley, Townsend, Phillips & Adouls, 2009; Ferreira, 2006) . The process of raranga helps me to identify states of existence I wish to heal from, but also to imagine new ways of being that can empower my community and I.

Performance can help with strategies to explore the deeper tensions of being colonised, because at the margins of daily life and representation, binaries really do exist. Life and death, hope and difficulty, critique and possibility, Te Kore and Te Ao Marama all at once at the margins – ‘performance’ is the fulcrum point to balance and make sense of embodiment as is emphasised by Martineu (2015) when he writes,

“For Indigenous artists, creative action must be continually brought (back) into alignment with the dynamic forces of life and creation, renewed through story, song and ceremony, and performed in the making and re-making of decolonial struggle”. (p.136)

When I perform, I am gathering technologies and immediately available resources to create ceremonies that help me understand how to heal myself. Ceremonies are restorative, they help restore balance in personal, familial, communal, language and cultural spaces that have become weighted down by the burdens of colonial process (Stimson & Houle 2014; Walters, 2014; Wilson, 2008). When I perform publically, it helps me to acknowledge the responsibility I have as a maker who is finding ways to perform ceremony.

Canadian Indigenous art historian Carla Taunton (2007), writes about the performance art of Anishinabe artist Rebecca Belmore, and Payómkawichum (Luiseño) artist James Luna, both as ‘high-tech’ storytellers performing pseudo-ceremonies – they utilise contemporary media and technology to highlight the impact of colonising cultures upon storytelling within their communities. I always karakia before I perform to connect with the earth and the energies I am surrounded by – what I do isn’t ‘traditional’, but it does draw heavily upon what I understand and know of tradition.

“Aboriginal performance practices are closely aligned to traditional practices and, in some cases, this is what creates such beautiful work - but there are considerations and negotiations artists have to make when dealing with spiritual practices and artists make these negotiations in different ways.” (Claxton & Willard, n.d., para, 13)

When I am perform as ceremony, I am as honest as I can be – this is what helps me remain accountable to the strands that make my life possible.

Ultimately, reconnecting with the visions of love our ancestors had for us through performative stories and ceremonies that heal, we enable strategies to relate. Te pā harakeke knowledge is about relationships at every level – with raranga being the process that brings this knowledge to life. At first, the knowledge is highly intrapersonal, with kairaranga simply problem-solving ways to create forms that can address internal barriers. Often when I encounter a problem with my weaving I throw my hands up and walk away in dismay – when I finally get back to resolve the problem sometimes it is no longer even there, which tells me that the problem was really an internal one rather than a problem with my weaving. Logical thinking can trap me into structures that stifle the creative strategies I will encourage, if only I can let go of my head sometimes. The relational aspects of raranga continue to extend outward, into the network of relationships kairaranga are at the centre of – the ability to relate to oneself is what helps us to form strong bonds with others too. In the next section I locate my practice within the theoretical art context of relational aesthetics and in doing so add dimensions to the potential of art toward social transformation.

## Relational nations – aesthetics and lunar gyrations

In the 1990s, a group of artists were written about by the French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud as contributing to what he termed *Relational Aesthetics* – artistic practices that are participatory or interactive, open-ended, process-based and in-progress rather than resolved and easily saleable object (Beech, 2011; Bishop, 2004; Choi, 2013; Patrick, 2010; Rottner, 2011; Watson, 2015). Claire Bishop (2004), an art-historian, critic and writer, explains Bourriaud’s relational art as,

“... a means of locating contemporary practice within the culture at large: relational art is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy. It is also seen as a response to the virtual relationships of the Internet and globalization, which on the one hand have prompted a desire for more physical and face-to-face interaction between people, while on the other have inspired artists to adopt a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach and model their own.” (p.54)

For Bourriaud (2002), these participatory installation-type works assist toward re-engaging social connectivity which has dissipated through advances in technology. Participatory art does not necessarily equate to relational art according to Bourriaud, but rather only social interactions that occur solely within the realm of art exhibitions – for Bourriaud, these kinds of practices inherently democratise art through encounters which allow viewers to engage in democratic participatory acts beyond art institutional spaces (Bourriaud, 2002; Rottner, 2011). Bourriaud (2002) writes,

“[o]ver and above its mercantile nature and its semantic value, the work of art represents a social *interstice* ... The interstice is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system. This is the precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition ... it creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contracts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the “communication zones” that are imposed upon us.” (p.16)

However, Bourriaud's stance is criticised for limiting the potential of relational artworks, because by asserting the harmonious nature of exhibition art as 'interstice', the power of contemporary art and its institutions that perpetuate the 'overall system' described by Bourriaud, is never exposed (Bishop, 2004; Choi, 2013; Patrick, 2010; Rottner, 2011, Watson, 2015).

Claire Bishop (2004) argues that by upholding particular artists as the epitome of participatory practices, and in turn those who write about and curate their practices, "art does not feel the need to defend itself, and it collapses into compensatory (and self-congratulatory) entertainment" (p.79). Through Bourriaud's relational aesthetic, art institutions are validated in finding ways to increase their marketability – they capitalise on audience participation. Under the guide of relational practices, art institutions avoid their responsibility to democratise through art, and instead create 'star' artists, directors and curators who organise relational engagements for audiences to participate in (Bishop, 2004; Choi, 2013). In response to Bourriaud's assertion that relational exhibition art democratises, critics have raised questions about how empowerment for audiences to relational art actually happens, because in no instance does Bourriaud ever include viewer voices (Bishop, 2004; Choi, 2013; Rottner, 2011; Watson, 2015).

I insist that art should be emancipatory – it should lead to a change in the ways people do things to enable good and sustainable relationships. Contemporary art practices and institutions should actively find ways to include viewers so that the transformative potential of the making process can enhance everyone's lives. In a personal and subjective creative space, transformation for the artist happens in the making process, but for art to truly empower audiences and the public beyond art spaces, artists need to consider actively including the voices of many people through structured creative engagements (Choi, 2013). Artists with relational practices have been accused of being "... the gleaners, scavenging for the bits and pieces of conceptual and performative gamesmanship that now can once again coalesce into the appearance of novelty." (Patrick, 2010, p.56). What Patrick desires is recognition of artists and art movements that have informed relational aesthetics. In describing raranga to be relational I identify abundance and connect with the multiple sources of inspiration gifted by my ancestors, and so affirm Patrick's position. Scavenging is only a matter of perspective, I acknowledge I have learned everything from my tūpuna. I am my tūpuna.

Rather than rely on notions of the egalitarian exchange that Bourriaud describes through relational aesthetics, I am more devout to the possibilities inspired through disruption, in particular outside of art spaces. When viewers are exposed to indigenous realities, inclusive of multiple hardships, but also values of reciprocity that enable us to heal, there is an unsettling that happens. This discomfort stems from negotiating difficult truths beyond what is 'normal' in mainstream society (Watson, 2015). In these uncomfortable spaces, giving viewers opportunities to perform and acknowledge their own identities, and also ways to contribute to change through reciprocity, can make art truly relational (Choi, 2013; Watson, 2015). The tensions that arise through these types of engagements require viewers to make sense of what they know about their identities amongst others, how they feel about any differences or similarities, and instil within them the inspiration for positive resolutions.

The unsettling that must be negotiated to resolve an artwork is where the relational potential of raranga lies, because to whakatutuki a creative investigation, I have to search outside of myself – feelings of success and completion require going beyond my 'normal' to achieve positive ends. This can only really happen if I search through and reach out into the relationships I am connected to. Any subjective investigation I enact always requires intersubjectivity, or outside engagement with 'audience' as a means to whakatutuki. When I write audience, I really mean the people who are part of my life and those who I wish to be transformed or affected by what I do.

It is in these spaces where empathetic involvement helps engender solutions to the pressing global concern of disconnection – disconnections from people, ideas, places and ultimately the planet we live with (Gilchrist & Joelson, 2011). For me, performance is queen amongst all the different forms of media I weave, because it is through performance where theory becomes practice and I enable my creative practice to speak back so that,

“... connections are made possible, a 'possibilising' made visible, by the making material of the words of theory, by making visible the materiality of the words, by alienating them from the context whence they come.” (Lahey Dronsfield, 2011, p.134)

The introduction to *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, considers the ability for individuals to act as transformative agents,

“despite the enormous pressure of social conditioning ... *gestures*, learned techniques of the body, are the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to the test ... motor challenges to acculturated behaviors are themselves a form of agency, one that arises paradoxically, by acculturation itself.” (Noland, 2009, pp.1-2)

When I perform, I bring together relationships between viewer, artist and an installation space, which become woven together through participatory forms of dialogue. Relational experiences woven in this way become a means to communicate theory which “... is itself a practice, a complex practice that can reflect upon the kind of entanglements it takes part in and the other possibilities it can support” (Steyaert & Van Looy, 2015, p.2). Rather than being neutral and wholly internal, theorising, especially through Indigenous means, leads to relationships that instigate participatory responses – helping solve the extreme and urgent problems of today’s world;

“[i]ndigenous peoples, both in historical and contemporary times, have served as the guardians of knowledge that, for centuries, has helped to perpetuate life and keep the Earth’s systems in balance, a knowledge whose value has never been greater than it is now.” (Carlson, 2015, p.82)

In the following three sections I write about the practices of artists whose work helps me resolve my intent – their work parallels what I am doing, or provides cultural and theoretical precedent for some of the investigative and transformative explorations I have undertaken.

## Talking stories and making movements – Katie Kamelamela

I met Katie in 2007 when she was being hosted by Te Arawa painter June Grant in Rotorua. Katie is Hawai’ian and was studying at that time toward a PhD in ethnobotany, which is the study of the relationship between people and plants. With a focus on ethnoecology, which investigates relationships between people and their environments – Katie’s work contributes to an emerging field at the University of Hawai’i. Although in the strictest sense her research is classified as scientific, Katie reinforces a practice-based approach to theory, developing a methodology for sustainable food gathering practices. In this she asserts traditional knowledge that has nurtured Hawai’ian environmental wellbeing. She applies traditional observations with scientific practices of analysis. We have spent many occasions hosting each other and sharing story about research, art and Indigenous political activism in both Hawai’i and Aotearoa. I write about Katie’s practice as relational because her intent is to transform through involvement – advancing her community with knowledge that connects people with their environment, and employs both logical and poetic strategies to help move those surrounding her toward democratic activism.

Regarded as a paradise holiday destination, Hawai’i is perceived as a cornucopia of abundant tropical foods, alive with the ‘aloha’ spirit of the Hawai’ian people, however, an opposite social reality starkly contrasts with its idyllic representation. Katie speaks strongly about “intentional annihilation of Hawai’ian culture and lifestyles by American citizens” (K. Kamelamela, personal communication, December 12, 2015) enacted through annexation by the United States. Most recognise the strategic military position of Hawai’i within the Moana as being a major reason for US occupation, however, the temperate climate which also includes mountainous cold areas, allows for year-round crops; making it an equally profitable acquisition for mainland America. Colonisation’s most devastating impact on the archipelago of islands has been to reduce its biodiversity, with both pineapple and sugar-cane the dominant colonial industries, followed by coffee, corn and macadamia nuts. In a contemporary era of increased concern about loss of food diversity, Kamelamela comments;

“[c]urrently we import 90% of our food and materials. We are industrious persons and our relationship with our islands will support us when we start to support our islands and the knowledge that remains with us from our living ancestors”.  
(personal communication, December 12, 2015)

Katie believes Hawai'ian people's reinvigorated engagement with their environment can enable a return towards more sustainable ways of life. She believes that "[m]any issues such as health, education, incarceration rates and economics have been solved through re-kindling our relationships with the land. There was a time when our islands fed and provided beds for many on the west coast. We can do this again when we understand that we are valuable" (K. Kamelamela, personal communication, December 12, 2015). As a knowledge gatherer, Katie understands her role as a community connector, a person able to translate between the theoretical frames that cement knowledge within science and the academy, and the lived realities of her relations – her goal is to provide overviews of contemporary Hawai'ian contexts so that others may dive directly in to do necessary work (Kamelamela, 12 October 2015).

As a way to acknowledge being Hawai'ian through an expressive and embodied practice, Katie attends a hālau hula, a school where she is able to learn and practice hula traditions. She talks about hula as a perfect complement to her PhD study, because rather than just writing and theorising about Hawai'ian traditions in her research, she's living them. As she prepares for class she gathers some kī leaves, which she twists in pairs to make kupe'e wristlets and anklets, and with these she symbolically binds herself to the work being done. I have spent time with Katie, gathering and preparing kī, and other leaves that affirm Laka, the ancestress deity of hula. Whilst weaving these into lei and hair adornments for performance, Katie explains all of the plants she is weaving as water collectors – describing their value within the ecosystem beyond their human use. Katie tells me about an upcoming performance and shows me the hula skirt she has printed – she has used her knowledge about plants to maximise the ways she can print plant cross-sections, dipping edges and stems in ink repetitively, to build an overall story-through-image. Through hula, Katie reinforces knowledge about ways to manage and re-Indigenise her lived environment – rather than experiencing her environment as a place to simply deal with and navigate through, it is a resource that affirms relational traditions. The ways that Katie engages her research through traditional practices helps her sustain many relationships over time, where,

“... gathering isn't a passive act by any means, it is a cognisant pro-active event that is ongoing all the time and like, people that do it do it intentionally whether it's just to feed themselves, or to educate, or to pass on, to create the space, to have that educational moment, it's really active ... there's a continuum of person” (Kamelamela, 12 October 2015, 1:13:58 mins).

Connecting knowledges through hula have helped Katie coordinate conversations about Hawai'ian political activity and research on Hawai'ian environmental engagement – combining the multiple strands of her life help benefit and sustain Katie as a Hawai'ian person amongst relations. As she researches, Katie interprets the utility of the spaces she inhabits, but also her role in helping enhance the land's ability to survive colonisation. The problems that Katie and other Hawai'ians experience through colonisation by Britain and then the US will not simply vanish; in fact there is no single solution to the many issues these invasions have brought about. However, there has to be some vision of hope, some way to visualise and imagine beyond invasive disruptions. Without the ability to experience and make sense of the changed environment, there is no way to assess impact, adapt and heal. Traditional practices are deeply rooted in our histories, they stem from social environments and spaces that existed before colonial incursions. I believe in Katie's practice because she encourages sharing the development of traditions that can ground us in our physical environment today – she witnesses, and contributes to the between space of tradition and science so that she can match multiple terrains, helping her relations envision beyond the exclusions imparted through colonialism.

I see lots ... not dead people, but messages –  
in the breeze I hear whispers and they  
help me to know what to do.

Sometimes the sounds are confusing, but as I get older I gain agency over them and  
wend my own pathways, through valleys, plains, marshes, concrete, bricks and sand.

And then there I am again. I never left. I never disappeared.

I never dissipated into oblivion but rather, reformed.

Right on.

## Fantasy islands and makeup brushes – Dan Taulapapa McMullin

In 2007 I was fortunate to attend *PIKO*, an international gathering of Indigenous artists. Dan Taulapapa McMullin was the first person I met there, we shared a shuttle between Kona airport and Waimea. At the time Dan told me he was a painter, writer and filmmaker of Samoan whakapapa, but that he currently lives in the US. We connected because at the time I was writing a lot and painting too. Through the years since we have remained allies as Indigenous artists and writers, with us hosting each other between Aotearoa and the US. When I met Dan he told me a story about an old woman who fell in love with a pig – and it made me laugh to hear such a beautiful tale. Dan identifies as fa’afaine, which is a Samoan term that resonates with its Māori counterpart whakawahine; translating as being like a woman. He writes,

“[w]hen I was a small boy in the Sāmoa Islands, my great-grand-mother Fa’asapa showed me how to print and paint Siapo cloth, which was women’s work ... When we moved from the U.S. Territory of American Sāmoa (Eastern Sāmoa) to the United States of America, my U.S. Army drill sergeant immigrant father asked my immigrant mother to sit with immigrant me in the backseat of our family station wag-on telling me to act like an American boy because we were not in Sāmoa anymore. I had trouble knowing how she meant; I wasn’t sure how I was not acting like a boy.” (Taulapapa McMullin, 2011, pp.115)

To me, Dan is a tuākana, an elder more knowledgeable relation. In this case he is my older sister from another culture because he has helped me accept a gender identity that may never match the Westernised masculine body I live within. I write about Dan’s work within this chapter, not only through gender affinity, but because his artwork disrupts in ways that can lead to whakatutuki for Indigenous people who have become unsettlingly absorbed into Western systems. In a recent body of work, *100 Tikis*, Dan collected images and videos from online searches to produce creative and academic writing, paintings and video artworks – questioning the idealism and consumption present within images produced by the West. In particular, for *100 Tikis* Dan uses images produced by the mainstream West that wholeheartedly appropriate our cultures and taonga and depict us in offensively strange ways. In writing about the Tiki-kitsch culture that has been popular since the 1930s.

Dan writes;

“[t]he abject associations of tiki kitsch some-times makes identifying as Polynesian feel like inhabiting all the dumbed-down representations of us in movies, books, magazines, paintings, songs, cartoons, tourist items, and jokes. But to avoid tiki kitsch, that manufactured parody of our deity Tiki, is to avoid the history of Tiki himself. How can I say that tiki kitsch is not part of who I am, and indicative of something powerful in my life, that is, my political resistance and my creative process?” (Taulapapa McMullin, 2015a, p.583)



Taulapapa McMullin, D. (2016) Video still taken from *100 Tikis*, an appropriation video [originally sourced from *Betty Boop's Bamboo Isle* (1932) by Fleischer Studios]

What Dan points out in these works is that it is very difficult to separate the surface projections of the West about Indigenous identity, from lived realities. The representations are so embedded in not only the West's perception of Indigenous people, but in the West's perception of itself. It is therefore fundamental to the power of the West that Indigenous people remain peripheral curiosities, which highlights the potential of Dan's art to unnerve viewers so they re-negotiate their relationships to Indigenous representations.

Through Dan's making processes, he provides a means to wrestle with mainstream Moana stereotypes, and to critically analyse what the Western audiences choose to see of the Moana, while simultaneously ignoring the legacies of damage they perpetuate. For a series of paintings created and exhibited between 2012 and 2013, Dan gathered images about genocide being enacted in West Papua, depicting the rape and murders of West Papua people at the hands of the Indonesian military. Dan describes his intent to make the paintings as beautiful as possible, imitating the selective types of seeing that are part of virtual visual culture – where people can choose to see the world as it is, but often opt to witness the glossed over constructions of Hollywood glamor (Taulapapa McMullin, 2015b).

Dan expresses the negotiation he experiences when Los Angeles gallerists tell him his work will not sell because of the challenging content, he writes, "... basically, when making images that are a part of Indigenous sovereignty, one has to make them for oneself and the community. It's not going to be part of the market" (Taulapapa McMullin, 2015b, pp.24-25). This kind of negotiation is something that many Indigenous artists have to consider, because on the one hand we want to use our work to empower our communities, but on the other we still have to find ways to survive – it's a tough balance. By gathering images that are part of mainstream visual culture, but which are also quite horrific, Dan is able to emphasise the power of media constructions to tell story – pointing out the narratives mainstream culture prefers to consume over those it would prefer to ignore. Through making challenging art, Dan emphasises the complicity of people in mirroring stereotypes, mistruths and denial.

At the core of Dan's ability to do this, is his understanding of Samoan knowledge as being poetic and symbolic, allowing multiple ways to see and engage. In his writing, Dan is influenced by fa'agogo storytelling which he explains as, "... to fashion "fa'a" like a seabird "gogo" (pronounced "ngoh-ngoh") a story that travels from person to person and changes in the telling" (Taulapapa McMullin2015, p.18). He also points out that "[i]n Samoan "tusi" means both writing and painting, the act of making marks that have significant, but variable, meaning" (Taulapapa McMullin, 2015b, p.15). Dan occupies an intermediary space pointing out;

"Here in New York, I identify as Indigenous but I am not Lenape or Mahican; I identify as Samoan but I am not in Samoa; I identify as fa'afaine but I live the life of a gay American man; I attack white supremacy and Zionism but I am part Irish and Jewish, and my primary visual conversation is with European painting; I embrace Marxist deconstruction but my partner is a real-estate lawyer; I'm basically an atheist but I embrace the practice of mystical thinking or wandering, especially in the polytheistic foundations of Pacific Islander philosophies." (Taulapapa McMullin, 2015, p.22)

As a prolific thinker and maker, Dan describes his work as being "... in the region where art and literature speak to each other in different languages about interwoven narratives" (Taulapapa McMullin, 2015, p.16). I identify with Dan and his work because to enable a vision of hope, he asserts the difficulties that Indigenous peoples have to negotiate, and embraces the responsibility and accountability that Indigenous artists feel – to whakatutuki our creative intent means we must navigate multiple pathways to relate and share important stories.

## Polyswag process – Tanu Gago and FAFSWAG

In 2011 I was invited to exhibit at *City Gallery Wellington*, in a show titled *Mana Takatāpui: Taera Tāne*, curated by Rueben Friend (Ngāti Maniapoto). Alongside Hoteera Riri (Te Whakatohea, Te Whanau-a-Apanui), Dan Taulapapa McMullin (Samoan), Fear Brampton (Māori/Scottish), and Tanu Gago. Tanu is a Samoan born artist raised in Aotearoa amongst a whānau including siblings of Nuiean, Cook Island, Tongan, Māori and European descent (Stuart, 2014). In this section I write about the ways Tanu encourages relational practices amongst South Auckland-based gender and sexuality diverse Moana people, but also ways his practice extends into collaborative and structural spaces that positively impact upon our communities.

Gago's *The sounds of the ocean* (2015) interrogates white New Zealand's translation of Moana experiences, in particular the urbanisation of Moana communities moving from varied island nations to Aotearoa. In this artwork, Tanu creates a video-in-progress that re-appropriates film and television imagery of people from Moana Nui a Kiwa; it documents Moana peoples' migration to Aotearoa during the mass-urbanisation from the 1940s onward (Lopesi, 2016). Tanu writes;

“In this instance, historical footage of early migration has been disassembled, put back together and re-presented to the viewer from an embedded perspective. This reinterpretation is mine and has been informed from a lifetime of pacified consumption of mass media content, developed and delivered to assure Pacific people of a place in this country.” (Gago, in Tavola, 2015, p.9)

Tanu occupies a position of realisation; of knowing that his reality as a Moana person in Aotearoa has been constructed through a lens of mass consumption –

“Gago has always been focused on how we unconsciously absorb information and how he as an image constructor can harness that transmission, relaying a sense of ease to consuming the image while subsequently destabilising what is ‘normal’” (Lopesi, 2016, para. 3).

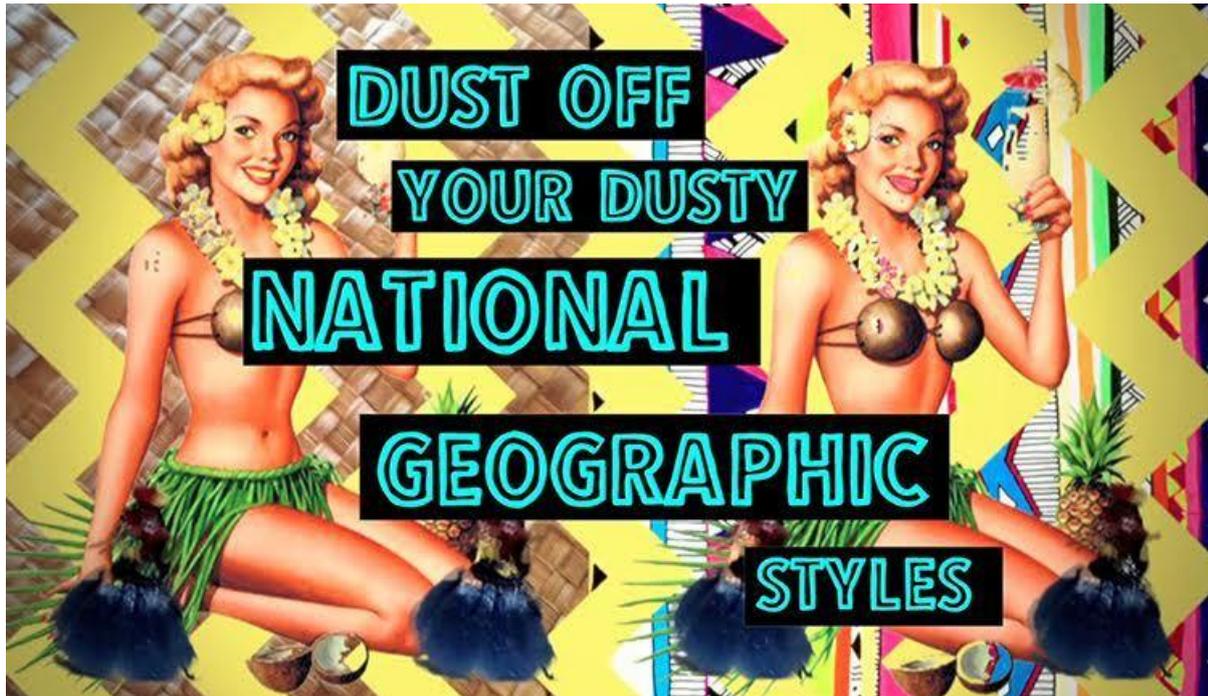
He further comments on the way Moana representations are becoming entrenched through digitised virtual forms, sourcing footage for *The sound of the ocean* from the internet,

“[t]his work looks at the idea of Pacific visual history and reinterprets found footage from the internet to offer up a perspective on life from South Auckland. I’m always reflecting on my surroundings. These things inform who I am, this includes the digital propaganda.” (Gago, in Fafswagball.com, 2016, para. 3)

What I appreciate most about Tanu’s *The sound of the ocean*, is the way he searches for the narratives coded within pixels and magnetised source footage, turning these into frequencies of light and sound that reflect vibrant aspects of Moana cultures in Aotearoa today. By wresting these back from paternal colonial perspectives into the aesthetics of his local surrounds, Tanu takes control of the stereotypes – using the colours and rhythms mainstream New Zealand expect from the pacified Indigenous ‘other’ to translate the heavy, and yet still sacred reality of those lived experiences.



Gago, T. (2015a). The sound of the ocean [digital video still] Copyright 2015 Tanu Gago Used with permission.



Gago. T. (2015b). The sound of the ocean [digital video still] Copyright 2015 Tanu Gago Used with permission.

As well as being an image and video-maker, Tanu has begun to collaborate with other Moana gender and sexuality diverse makers who have formed *FAFSWAG*. My first encounter with *FAFSWAG* was in 2013, when Fijian curator Ema Tavola invited me to participate as a judge in the first ever *FAFSWAG* Ball. The ball had been modelled on Vogue Balls that had emerged out of New York – the Vogue scene fulfilled a need for New York Afro-American gay men to have safe places to be, having been excluded from mainstream gay spaces (Holgate, 2012; Livingston, 1991; Trebay, Jan 18, 2000). In Auckland’s gay scene, there is persistent racist undertone, which *FAFSWAG* Ball aims to address by providing performative community spaces for young Moana people. At the first *FAFSWAG* ball I judged I was out danced and broke an 8 inch heel, at the second I was just amazed, but I really did show off my exemplary poi skills! *FAFSWAG* however, have a much bigger goal beyond their Ball events which is “to make art that celebra[tes] queer people of colour. Always positive. Never sorry” (Olds, August 9, 2015, para. 13).

“Fafswag started slowly, first gaining attention by printing T-shirts to sell at the Pride Festival, and posting images on Facebook. Soon it was getting commissions from organisations such as the Pride Festival. Every job was a team effort: they'd source props, style the set, shoot the image in Gago's Papatoetoe living room or in the studio at Manukau Institute of Technology's Faculty of Creative Arts, and then use the money to buy a feed at Denny's.” (Olds, August 9, 2015)

The artists who are a part of the FAFSWAG collective include Akashi Fisiinaua, Moe Laga, Jonathan Selu, Pati Solomona Tyrell, Jaycee Tanuvasa, Manu Vaea, Falencie Filipo, Jermaine Dean, Gabriel Halatoa, Jacob Temata, Tim Swann, Cypris Afakasi, Sione Monu as well as Tanu Gago. These artists are at the centre of a new generation of genderfluid and sexuality diverse Moana creators, which is exciting to see. In my youth there were no such collectives in Auckland beyond a small handful of Māori and Pacific Island drag queens – we struggled to survive in the white spaces where we were only regarded as objects of sexual desire or as useless and ugly. When I look at the work that FAFSWAG have been creating over the past few years, I get excited about their unapologetic and highly political approach – it makes me feel less alone.



FAFSWAG (2016). A FAFSWAG family portrait Copyright 2016 FAFSWAG Used with permission.

As well as exploring through his own creative practice and collaborations with FAFSWAG members, Tanu works as Pacific Community Engagement Co-ordinator at the New Zealand AIDS Foundation. In his role Tanu is focussed on the inclusion of Moana people, to contribute toward collective voice and visibility surrounding HIV awareness (New Zealand AIDS Foundation, n.d.). The spaces that Tanu creates and collaborates within are inspiring, because contradictory to Bourriaud's relational aesthetic that is limited to exhibitions and spaces that already marginalise most, Tanu's relational practice extends into the everyday, through his network of friends and into his community. Tanu's practice shows how for Indigenous artists, it is often not enough to gain accolades and admiration through institutional structures when real change needs to be affected at home and on the streets in which we live.



## **Loose threads – strands for forever**

In this chapter I have woven together quite disparate strands of inquiry, as a way to begin resolving the work of this thesis and the research project it describes. I began by describing historical trauma, which is a means to describe the collective traumas that Indigenous people are healing from, even though the trauma is not in the past but still happening today. In writing about historical trauma, my real intent is to write about hope beyond the hurt. I write about the work of Karina Walters who encourages a reconnection through envisioning what got our ancestors through their many traumatic experiences, because for Walters, trauma offers a powerful standing place from which to transform. I discuss how storytelling can offer ways to interpret our own inner power by connecting us with the journeys of our ancestors, although in my practice, story goes beyond oration and verbalisation of thoughts and is enacted through performance.

Performance offers ways to create healing ceremony, both through daily rituals and more public ceremonies that are perceived as performance art. Contemporary Indigenous performance art connects to established traditions of ceremony – it isn't just something that is done but is enacted with intention and integrity. Performance art for me, starts as an internal storytelling process that slowly moves outward from my mind to occupy the spaces immediately surrounding me and then even further into my network of relations.

To describe how this might appear through an art theoretical lens, I critique the writing of Nicholas Bourriaud, who positioned gallery practices that were emerging in the 1990s as engendering a relational aesthetic. For Bourriaud, relational art involved open-ended participatory acts to address the social distancing that occurs through the expansive technologies infiltrating our lives today. Bourriaud's idea of relational art however, remained as gallery productions, where he perceived the kinds of interactions he wrote about as democratising, encouraging viewers to co-create art instances provided for by artists – he understood these as providing agency beyond the gallery into audiences lived social realms. This is the major flaw of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics because the institutional art space has never been democratic – it has always served the needs of specific viewers, patrons and artists.

In this chapter I argue that to be relational, contemporary art practices need to include viewers and their voices. Rather than offer harmonious encounters, within this project I have been more attracted to the power of disruptions to put audiences in uncomfortable spaces so that they can be empowered through negotiating difficult truths. Raranga, especially during whakatutuki, is disruptive on many levels, because it causes me to go beyond myself and my comfort zone to successfully complete the things I begin – if it didn't challenge me then I probably wouldn't put effort into trying to make engaging works, I would just coast. In this, I describe how performance is what really enables me to engage, it is the part of my practice where the subjective and hidden aspects transform and become intersubjective – giving my work and myself a means to account and be responsible for transforming theory into practice.

To describe how themes in this chapter can be understood through the practices of other Moana people, I have focussed on discussions of Katie Kamelamela, Dan Taulapapa McMullin and Tanu Gago. All three, although quite different in their use of creative practices, disrupt in ways that offer protection and hope for the communities they are accountable to. For Katie, the gathering knowledge she garners from traditional practices help her to navigate scientific spaces, providing ways to relate quite distant bodies of knowledge. For Dan, multiple strategies of engagement through diverse media enable him to story tell the tension between exoticised notions of Moana people and our commodified realities within Western ideals.

I interpret Dan's work as relational because he draws upon so many interconnected but separate bodies of knowledge to create powerful paintings. He communicates these to audiences who might not necessarily understand their complicity in the oppression of others. Finally, the artwork of Tanu Gago is described within this chapter because what he encourages in his community transforms the space of being non-straight and brown in Auckland, the biggest city in Aotearoa – Tanu has been connecting young disenfranchised people, enabling them to tell their stories and helping them with opportunities to make stunning art. What Tanu has been doing is transforming the gay scene in Auckland, helping it to be safer and more responsive to the needs of Moana people. These three practitioners are resolving things to make them well. The primary finding in this chapter asserts that performance of historical trauma as ceremony can offer collective forms of healing.

I have been fearful with uncertainty, but now I embrace the embargoed emotions and  
turn the tides of trauma into theory, practice and patience.

No more pretending.









## **Chapter 8.**

### **He Karakia Whakamutunga**



huka had a big job to do  
but he didn't really want to be the one to do it.

Forever, people just lived on tiny lands with no space to breathe ... eeeveryone was always just suffocating each other, smothering out potentials and wallowing in self-pity, it was kinda pathetic but that was the way it always was.

huka could relate cos he felt pretty pathetic and self-piteous too, life was real.

huka's job was simple in lots of ways, he just needed to find some space, a place he could dredge outta the depths of the dole and humdrum days, but where the hell was there any left?

One day, walking around the village being a sad fulla huka managed to trip over his lip, that damned lip it was always bringing him down.

He frowned, and full of bleeding annoyance that his lips had failed him again he spat out angry words on the footpath.

His blood glistened in the sun, just like red glitter at the gay parade - it made him smile to think about dancing in the moonlight with his friends, friends all over the world who always sent love via email and social media, or in the flesh on the lucky times they got to hang.

He thought about his Aunty,  
the one who gave him her jawbone,  
always her ways of turning a lesson into love  
and he laughed at how absurd  
the cray world could be.

Bang, and there was the space,  
right in front of him, the space between thinking about love and feeling love, the space between feeling alive and being alive, the space between him and the footpath, the space where he could breathe was everywhere, he just needed a bit of glittery blood to help it make sense.

Senseless really all this going around glum ... stupid and dumb.  
Wish all the sorrow away.

Te Ika a Māui, the great fish of Māui – he was said to have fished it up from beneath the sea. It was a giant fish, so huge that he and his brothers could not see the other side of it. In versions of Te Ika a Māui that have been told in Aotearoa, it was the North Island he fished up, whilst standing strong upon his waka, or vessel, the South Island.

That's a pretty huge fish aye lol.

In some versions, Māui bloodies his nose with an enchanted fish-hook, fashioned from his Grandmother's jawbone – it is this that he uses to lure his magnificent fish, and once captured, the fish is hacked to pieces by his brothers in jealous rage. Those cuts formed the mountains and valleys of Te Ika a Māui.

I like the notion of fishing up an island, it's like bringing to life a whole new reality for your relations to sustain themselves, it's like making the best space in the world appear from where you least expected it, from inside your mind

This chapter is my karakia whakamutunga, it is like the karakia I began with but different – because I use this karakia to conclude, to finish my business.

In the conclusion of her PhD thesis, *Tihei Mauri Ora: Honouring Our Voices. Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Maori Theoretical Framework*, Leonie Pihama (2001) explains her final chapter by writing;

“I have titled this final chapter Kōrero Whakamutunga, this in line with the notion that I have finished my kōrero in this site at this time. It does not mean that the discussion has finished as that is far from the situation. It indicates that in this place, at this point I am willing to relinquish the thoughts, beliefs, understanding and theories to the public domain for consideration, critique and reflection.”  
(p.310)

In the context of karakia, my intent differs slightly – because although this chapter expresses an aspect of finishing, my karakia is the start of something new. Through karakia whakamutunga I finalise my project with a desire to set it free so that it can occupy other realms. In her chapter ‘Kōrero Whakamutunga’, Pihama (2001) writes about an “... opening of spaces in a theoretical domain” (p.303), and likewise, I karakia whakamutunga to send these ideas embedded in practice, out beyond myself for them to do necessary work. For me, my investigation is near conclusion and the only thing left to do with it is acknowledge its potentials and its trials so that I can simply let it go and move on to something more.

Through this chapter I write about how the subjective and autobiographical creative investigations described, have led to intersubjective practices – ways of doing things that help me include audience voices in multiple ways. I explore these as a means to karakia whakamutunga through a descriptions of creative works made in the final year of my PhD research. In the first section, I discuss a report written through Te Puāwai Tapu, now Te Whāriki Takapou – a kaupapa Māori sexual and reproductive health organisation. As with other creative works, I used raranga to write this report to aid in the establishment of a kaupapa Māori transgender advocacy network based in the Waikato rohe, or region. Following this, in the next section I describe an untitled suite of visual image works which have been created for my thesis – a selection of these were exhibited at the C.N. Gorman Museum between June and December 2016, as part of a group show titled *Patterns of Endurance*. In the third section of this chapter I discuss a series of performative images which were used to create a video work titled *Trouble*. Three of these images were exhibited with an improvised performance work, in August 2016 at Helium Gallery in Rotorua, with the video work having been shown alongside another performance at the *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Conference Aotearoa New Zealand (2016)* in Wellington. Showing the video work at the conference helped me frame a discussion about micro-aggressions transgender people experience in sexual health spaces.

## Getting and giving – transgender lives matter

Late in 2014, I wrote a report for Te Puāwai Tapu on transgender wellbeing in the Waikato-Tainui rohe – it described the need for better advocacy and support provision by the Ministry of Health in Aotearoa. The report - *Establishing an advocacy and support network for Whānau and Whāngai in the Waikato (2015)* (Appendix K), was written through a combination of narrative interviews done in person and over the phone, as well as online searches for relevant literature to support and advocate for transgender identities. The main incentive for the paper, was to give voice to inbetween gender. Until that time, I had only ever used academic modes to explore philosophical or sociological arguments, never before had I used writing to report on social wellbeing with a goal to enact structural change. However, through writing *Establishing an advocacy and support network for Whānau and Whāngai in the Waikato*, I was able to test two specific creative writing strategies; the first, infusing a text for a government agency with emotion, and secondly; using Māori terms within a text toward socio-political ends.

Much of what is written for bureaucracies uses particularly measured terminology and grammatical structures. The intent of writing in this way is to affect credibility, so that readers can trust what they read as reliable. Structure and formula are really important so that messaging is consistent across governmental departments. I wanted to test out the ways that personal pronouns and inclusive language add voice to writing for bureaucratic contexts, even though readers would have been acutely aware of potential bias in reading statements that used ‘we’, ‘us’ or ‘our’, I used them nonetheless – I wanted to humanise what I was writing. Putting the report together was a confronting task not only because I had not done anything like it before, but because when I heard the stories of others and read the terrible statistics for transgender Māori life outcomes, I felt a huge sense of loss and began to recognise lots of internalised shame.

Unfortunately, when it came time to present the report to the Ministry of Health, the use of inclusive pronouns was edited out. However, the style that I asserted throughout, added a ‘ring of truth’, with a narrative method conveying relatable human qualities that could embrace the quantitative information detailed. The report reads similar to a story with Māori transgender identities at the centre, surrounded by a plethora of gaps in service provision – highlighting multiple social exclusions.

To place emphasis on the impact of these, rather than over-describe a small number of instances, I used short statements to articulate many gaps in the health sector – each statement reiterating a large number of undeniable gaps that affect the lived realities of genderfluid people.

The other creative means used to transform this particular text, was through the use of kupu Māori, or Māori words. Early in the online search for literature, I found material published by Tapatoru – a Wellington-based transgender advocacy network. On their website, Karen and Peri Te Wao use kupu Māori to describe the key population of concern for Tapatoru; where,

“[t]he Tapatoru network website refers to Māori trans people as *Whānau*, and the term “*Whāngai* ... to describe non-Māori trans people, and also those who support and advocate on their behalf” (Kereopa, 2014, p.3).

Doing this emphasised the Māori research value of ‘aroha ki te tangata’, allowing people to determine their own spaces, and to meet on terms that help them feel comfortable and safe (Smith, 1999; Cram, 2001; Smith, 2006; Penehira, 2011). Writing whānau and whāngai instead of ‘Māori trans’, ‘non-Māori trans’ or ‘allies of Māori transgender people’, prioritised family – it was important to identify whānau and whāngai as family members who we include in our whakapapa. I was particularly intentional, because although within my own adopted family I have always been very loved, I know for many Māori transgender people this is not always the case. Consistently threading ‘whānau’ and ‘whāngai’ throughout the report, I was able to align readers with Māori values, signifying the need to have good health outcomes for all our relations.

Not long after submitting the report, a small amount of funding was allocated to support me in the establishment of Te Rākei Whakaehu a small organisation in the Waikato who have been active in trying to improve the wellbeing of Māori transgender, and indeed all takatāpui living in the Waikato rohe. Since the establishment of Te Rākei Whakaehu, its board has begun to network within the sexual and reproductive health sector and are active members of the POSH network (Promoters of Sexual Health in the Waikato), as well as PASHANZ, a national network of Promoters Advocating for Sexual Health Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2015 Te Rākei Whakaehu won the Oliver Davidson prize for best presentation at the *New Zealand Sexual Health Society Incorporated Annual Conference*, held in Taupo, and in 2016 assisted Te Whāriki Takapou towards *He Pūkenga Kōrero: Rangatahi and sexually transmitted infections in the Waikato*. In this project, Te Rākei Whakaehu recruited and interviewed rangatahi takatāpui for focus group interviews to ascertain barriers to good sexual health literacy for rangatahi Māori.

It was incredibly difficult to recruit participants for this project and also another, *Te Aho Tāhuhu: A rangatahi suicide intervention programme* that was funded by Te Puni Kōkiri. Although Te Rākei Whakaehu secured funding for *Te Aho Tāhuhu*, at the end of 2016 we exited our contract with Te Puni Kōkiri, in part due to difficulties surrounding recruitment and also due to the limited capacity of Te Rākei Whakaehu in terms of transpower, or people within the not-for-profit organisation able to support the project. Working through these projects we realised how fragmented our community actually was and so we went back to working in a 'grass roots manner', building our capacity from te pā harakeke outward; first strengthening the ability of people in our community to work with us.

Through writing *Establishing an advocacy and support network for Whānau and Whāngai in the Waikato*, I attempted to find ways to transform research from static formulas toward powerful incentive for change – using emotive phrases, I storied data as people and in this, practiced collective forms of mana motuhake. The most powerful part of the process for me, was connecting with other genderfluid and transgender identifying people. Their stories were often hard to hear, in part because in many ways they mirrored my own, but also because each articulated extreme lengths and harsh lived realities as measures to simply fit in and feel valued. Writing the report enabled what Archibald (2008), Cariou (2016), Kovach (2012), Lee (2009), Smith (1999), Wall Kimmerer (2013), and Walters (2014) argue are ways to story-tell with the aim to create good futures beyond intergenerational and collective trauma. I felt a lot of responsibility because I knew that an affective report could elicit good ways toward advocacy and support for whānau and whāngai in the Waikato. Doing so enabled a standing-place, as asserted by Walters (2014), from which to assist in a collective process to transform Māori transgender historical trauma. *Establishing an advocacy and support network for Whānau and Whāngai in the Waikato* acknowledges that Māori transgender bodies hold stories that need to be performed as forms of ritual, even in text, to release hurt and transform our communities (Begay, 2001; Kingsley, Townsend, Phillips & Adouls, 2009; Ferreira, 2006; Walters, Mohammed, Evans-Campbell, Beltrán, Chae & Duran, 2011).

## One track mind – specs on the brain

I enjoy colour.

I am lucky to have been blessed with a skin-tone that goes with almost anything – it's

one of the few things I have always appreciated about myself.

When I make art, my love for colour comes to the surface and seeps through the

depths, especially when I use pinks, azures, bright greens, reds and dark blues.

On a visit to Hawai'i I was challenged on my use of it –

... the feedback was that it was predictable in many ways ...

Late in 2015 I began a suite of collage digital image works with muted rather than saturated colours. It was a challenge to filter out an aspect of my process that felt precious, because it was like denying something integral to my identity by editing highly saturated colours out. But doing this felt appropriate, because in having written the report for Te Puāwai Tapu, I realised that even though I had been making art to address deep issues, I was still feeling denied and unable to communicate how much I was really hurting.

By this stage of my project, I was getting a surer idea of how to put my thesis together which is no easy task when feeling silenced. I knew that I wanted to progress through each stage of the raranga process because it was a mode through which I had begun to live. To create the collaged images for this suite, I thought about the stories I wanted to tell. I had begun to identify a checklist of requirements to create the works for this series, which became fairly concrete – in many ways I had narrowed my process down to its mutest and most finite points, simplifying my process.

Works in this series had to be narrative – they had to convey the layered stories I wanted to express in my thesis and the states I wanted to transform from; they had to fit within the HD video dimensions of 1280 x720 pixels I had been working with; they had to use grey as their baseline colour, and; they had to be made in the sequence I wanted to convey my pūrākau through each chapter. Exploring the use of text through both my blog and writing research made me really want to include text in the works, so I returned to a strategy I had used in the past where I would include lyrics from songs I listened to whilst making. Frames that surrounded works, as well as frames within works had become something I had begun to explore, with the images I was creating but also in the traditional sense as the boundary between the creative work and the real world. Finally, I decided to put myself back in the image and for the most part, I used a series of photographs I had taken of myself in California during a stay in 2013 – when I took these I used a timer with multi-burst settings so most of the self-images used for this suite of works were taken in less than ten seconds total. These images reflected a time when I felt safe, content and grounded.

With quite a standardised process, the kohikohi of images became simple – when I wanted to have studio time I would look through images I had gathered in previous days and select those that I could connect with in really feeling ways. Some of the images chosen depicted places where I felt happy, at other times they were landscape shots that reminded me of times when I was pensive. Whakariterite of these using the concrete process I had devised using *Photoshop* was quite straightforward. As with previous works, I adjusted the brightness and contrast filters, as well as the vibrancy filter for every image that was to become part of the assemblage – for the most part I would select about five images to work with. I then transferred these onto a *Photoshop* canvas and arranged them in ways that seemed harmonious – the canvas measured 100.84cm x 56.73cm, which maintained 1280 x 720 pixel dimensions. I used a slider to desaturate the images I was using – desaturating each until last parts of hue remained in each image, making monochromes and greys. Once I constructed a landscape image I liked, I would search through the self-portrait images to find one that might resonate with the pūrākau I wanted to tell – and at the same time too, write down whatever song-lyric text was bouncing around in my head. In some ways it felt random just grabbing snippets of here and there and putting it into a work in the hope it would tell a specific story, however, I was pretty firm on whatever narrative I wanted to describe – really I was just being open enough to accept the things that came through as being right. Having gathered and prepared the text, the self-portraits and the background landscapes allowed me ‘signposts’ I could use to map out my pūrākau – I shifted everything around on a canvas until it blended and gave me a path.

Whilst moving things from place to place on the *Photoshop* canvas, I also changed the blending options to allow what I was creating to change. Because I had muted the colours so much, the blending options worked in different ways and so often I would achieve outcomes I couldn't predict, which was nice because I kept getting surprises. On making the first image, *you'll never find*, the only place for the figure to fit in a harmonious way was to shift it onto the margin between the image and the solid colour border I had created. I had been experimenting a lot with frames inside an image and so the notion of a figure, or part of the image seeping outside the frame made sense. I decided then that for all of the works I planned to create in this suite, part of the figure would always be between the image and its frame.

I never liked having my art in frames. Ever. For some reason framing my work always made me feel like I was putting a part of myself into a coffin-like-box. For these works it felt important to put myself into that box, but also show my crafty escape.

Making beautiful images was not an important goal in this suite of works – rather I was using the process of making to resolve my personal internal puzzles – the works changed many times and I expect they will continue to change. I didn't want to be precious about how they looked, but instead wanted to focus on process, they were not intended as works to stand on their own but were small parts of a much bigger picture, story, theoretical discussion and healing performance ceremony. Making for me shifted through this project and I became more focused on ideas about journey rather than constructing perfect and resolved artworks. I believe that making art is about helping make myself better, more resolved and coherent, rather than the things I make. To me, art is like a mirror and I want to use it to transform, but often that takes a degree of transgression. Deciding not to fully resolve works for others was difficult – I received quite hurtful and negative feedback about their perceived lack of resolution and some other artists told me I should stop making images altogether. However, this is what *karakia whakamutunga* within a *raranga* practice is all about – getting to a place where I can accept what I have created, let it go of what others may think and still feel ok, because I actually did the work. Sometimes weavers create *kete* that are imperfect and even ugly, but they still hold potatoes and function as they should. These works will never be resolved because I will work on them in years to come – however, they help me resolve this thesis and my resoluteness to do so.

My intent has been to not overly explain these works, because each chapter theorises how they have come about. However, I will give a brief description about each of the works:



Nopera, T. (2016) If you leave [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

In 2009 I created an image titled *GAYMES GAYMES GAYMES* which was used in the Te Ara Online Encyclopedia to help describe 'Hokakatanga' – Māori sexualities. The artwork referred to being between two genders. For *If you leave* (2016), I gathered images from the same place as those used to create *GAYMES GAYMES GAYMES* (2009), at Pukeroa Pā, deciding that this would be a good means to depict the intent of this thesis. Although the image was initially desaturated with only a vague blue-grey hue, the blending options changed the colours completely. I was listening to *If you leave me* (1981) by Mental as anything and used some of the lyrics within the artwork.



Nopera, T. (2016) You'll never find [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

In *You'll never find* (2016), I used four images gathered by me on a flight over Te Moana Nui a Kiwa on my way to Hawai'i. I always feel quite nostalgic but also full of expansive ideas when flying. When tones were desaturated the dominant monochrome of blue was present. Whilst making this work I was listening to *You'll never find another love like mine* (1976) by Lou Rawls, which was written in the year I was born. In this artwork, I wanted to depict a sense of journey toward moemoeā, although instil within it the sense of hopelessness I had been dealing with on beginning my PhD project.



Nopera, T. (2016) *Arawai Moana* [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

Whilst staying in a hotel in Waikiki I looked out to Diamond Head and imagined what the eruption may have looked like to create the giant crater overlooking the beach – thinking about the prayers ancient Hawaiians may have made in witnessing the catastrophe. For *Arawai Moana* (2016) I used images gathered from the hotel windows of buildings and landscapes surrounding me. The dominant monochrome was orange. At the time I had been listening to Miike Snow's *Cult Logic* (2009).



Nopera, T. (2016) *God help this divorce* [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

I used two landscape images gathered in Mismaloya, Mexico to create this digital collage as well as a self-portrait torso image gathered whilst staying there – copying it three times to infer gathering past, present and future experiences. Even though I desaturated the colours, when I applied a blending option, in places the colours really popped which I enjoyed. I was listening to *God help this divorce* (2012) by Miike Snow, thinking about ways to move beyond and ‘divorce’ myself aspects of my past.



Nopera, T. (2016) A bad name [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

*A bad name* (2016) was created using images gathered at Mauna Kea on the Big Island of Hawai'i. I created the image to convey whakariterite – being ready and prepared for a journey of change. The self-portrait image used was the only one in the series that inferred readiness. Aspects of the background include the caldera of Kilauea, and I also used an image gathered whilst driving up Mauna Kea which blurred from a central point. I was listening to *You give love a bad name* (1986) by Bon Jovi when making this image. In applying the blending option the colours shifted from a greyish monotone toward a broader range of hues.



Nopera, T. (2016) drink on my mind [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

The images used toward the digital composite *drink on my mind* (2016) were gathered in my village of Ohinemutu, at a place that used to be Ruapeka Pā, as well as a cloud formation image gathered in California. According to pūrākau, Ruapeka sunk and became a boiling lake due to misdeeds by my ancestors living there. I considered this a good place to help convey ideas about whakapapa and working through my own misdeeds and self-destructive patterns. I inverted a self-portrait image and added wings that a friend gathered from a hawk that had been killed and left to die on the side of a highway in California. At the time I had been listening to *I'll drink to that* (2010) by Rihanna.



Nopera, T. (2016) let it buuuuurn [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

I only used two images to create *let it buuuuurn* (2016), one of the view from my home in Rotorua and the other a self-portrait gathered whilst staying in an Auckland hotel. I used a blending option to inverse the colours on the greyscale landscape and over exposed the self-portrait image, changing it to red to help it contrast against the background. I felt that keeping it simple to work things out was something I strived for throughout my project and wanted to use this image for the chapter on mahi raranga. I used lyrics from *Set fire to the rain* (2011) by Adele in this image.



Nopera, T. (2016) Poutama [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

*Poutama* (2016) is a composite digital image created using three images – the background is an image from Te Arikioa (Sulphur Bay) which has been copied and mirrored, an image of a pencil drawing and a self-portrait image that I copied nine times. I placed the self-portraits in an ascending pattern to replicate a poutama pattern, used to describe the journey of a man through life and onwards toward afterlife. The dominant colour was green once desaturated and at the time of making the image I had been listening to *Climb every mountain* (1965) sung by Julie Andrews. It seemed appropriate to create an image that referred to overcoming drug addiction as part of my own whakatutuki.



Nopera, T. (2016) *They can come true* [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

The background landscape images for *They can come true* (2016) was created using images gathered in Waikiki – as with *A bad name* (2016), the blending option used added more hues into the greyscale composite that had been created. I inverted three self-portrait figures and combined them to reference Botticelli's painting *Primavera* (c.1482). In Botticelli's painting, the three graces represent three feminine graces of chastity, beauty and love. I wanted to convey a sense of completion and community efforts through this image and used song lyrics from Billy Ocean's *Caribbean Queen* (1984), which I had been listening to at the time of making.



Nopera, T. (2016) *Queendom* [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

*Queendom* (2016) was created using images gathered in three places, Naknek in Bristol Bay, Alaska, Ohinemutu and Boca De Tomatlan in Mexico. The two figures in the image are silhouettes of Anna Hoover and her husband Eddie Clark, whose images I gathered whilst they fished the Naknek River one winter. The Ohinemutu image depicts my ancestral meeting house named after my ancestor Tamatekapua who captained Te Arawa across Te Moana Nui a Kiwa to where my tribe now lives in Aotearoa. I used the image gathered in Boca de Tomatlan because it reflected a time where I was making new plans and feeling quite engaged working in a sexual and reproductive health space. The image is intended to convey the birthing of new ideas and I have used lyrics from Diddy's - Dirty Money featuring Skylar Grey titled *Coming Home* (2010).



Nopera, T. (2016) hideaway [digital image] 100.84cm x 56.73cm

The final image used in this thesis is a composite of images gathered in Whaingaroa, Aotearoa. I had been given an opportunity to spend quiet time living with a good friend and her partner; my friend also completing her PhD at the same time as I, and also working in the sexual and reproductive health sector. I decided I wanted to create an image that could refer to the quiet contemplative space necessary for writing a PhD thesis and also a coming together of many ideas and versions of self-perception. At the time I had been listening to *Hideaway* (1995), a favourite clubbing track that I have always enjoyed, written by De'lacy.

The images in this series have been created specifically for this thesis. However, to create them I have travelled through many countries to collect the information that informs them. In doing this, I have been able to gather many memories and re-collect aspects of myself that I had forgotten or mis-placed. The images in this series are relational, because they have entailed participatory and interactive engagements, they are open-ended, process-based and in-progress rather than resolved and easily saleable (Beech, 2011; Bishop, 2004; Choi, 2013; Patrick, 2010; Rottner, 2011; Watson, 2015). These works go beyond Bourriaud's description of relational objects because they are embedded with a cultural knowledge framework that does not question the role of artists in enabling collective making processes. The role of Māori makers is affirm the connectedness of Māori communities. The ways in which these works have emerged engage a network of relationships that Bishop (2004), Choi (2013), Patrick (2010), Rottner (2011), and Watson, (2015) envision for relational aesthetics – they are created through a relational process that questions power imbalances not only within contemporary art, but within society at large.

I have intended to expose readers to the intersecting hardships of life for Indigenous people, whilst at the same time attempting to normalise the agency we create for ourselves through our values. I could not have travelled through the world to collect images for these works if I did not embody the values of Māori culture. Where others might have used money to travel and experience the world, I used the faith that my body's knowledge of my ancestors would get me to where I needed – people hosted me because I had a lot of good energy to share. In this way I directly contributed to change through reciprocal actions, and as a result was able to create images for this thesis in the relational manner espoused by Choi (2013) and Watson (2015). So whilst this thesis and the artworks that are part of it may seem like the work of an individual, they are really the work of a collective knowledge network. This thesis remembers and re-stories many pasts to help give form to many yet unseen futures. In this way, these images as part of this thesis represent Steyaert & Van Looy's (2015) participatory forms of dialogue that communicate theory, practice and reflection. They affirm Bronwyn Carlson's (2015) stance that Indigenous people and the knowledges we have nurtured can help solve the pressing problems of today.

## **Trouble on the horizon – eyes on the prize**

The journey toward making the image works for my thesis, in many ways meant that I had to map out my own personal narrative, through the lens of Māui pūrākau. At the same time I was organising my chapters and formulating which discussion would go where – there was a lot of back-tracking involved and in a few instances, the images created didn't quite match the chapter themes. Once I had all the works developed to a point where I felt comfortable, I analysed ways in which the works would help to guide the journey through my research project, although doing this made me realise that the creative works I had made throughout my PhD, didn't go deep enough. The works I created referred to a pathway through the many negative influences I attempted to resolve, but they only skirted around the sexual and gender trauma I have experienced.

To a large degree I felt that my personal trauma stemmed from social stigmas embedded in Western cultures surrounding sexual expression, and repressed approaches to interpreting these things increased discrimination against the communities I am part of. I began to have a vision of three works I needed to create, but to make these images I would need to enact a performance ceremony to help me address this stigma and discrimination – the performance was to be intimate, involving myself and a photographer. The vision was crucial to the works from this series because I felt they were messages from my ancestors – why else would they become so prominent in spaces where I consistently acknowledge ancestors? Every day as I walked past one particular pou, or carved post, created in my village by my tupuna Tene Waitere, I started to consider creating a scene which grew stronger and stronger as weeks and months passed. When I walk through my village I always say 'kia ora' to my ancestors – remnants of their lives are embedded in the buildings that surround my home; in every spot there are reminders of very old stories that detail their achievements and failings. From April 2016, I had begun to work more in the sexual and reproductive health sector, collaborating and sharing ideas with health clinicians, researchers and also at organisational governance levels – liaising with policy makers and people representing the Ministry of Health gave me opportunities to understand the barriers that transgender people and people living with HIV are victim to. I felt that to convey the transformative potential of raranga, I had to be honest about the 'trouble' I wanted to move beyond.

As already discussed in earlier chapters, I worked a lot with Rotorua based artist Riley Claxton through my project – Riley is a really good friend to me and I have always appreciated the openness he and his partner Angela Frank have offered when talking about art and life issues. I began to talk with Riley about the images I was envisioning and eventually, he and I set a date for a photoshoot, utilising the pou in Ohinemutu village carved by Tene Waitere.

The pou has historical significance because it was created to hold a wooden bust of Queen Victoria. Throughout my life there had been a lot of political activity involving the pou where slowly it moved from a very central place to the peripheries, primarily because atop rested a dead queen of England, set to gaze over and above us for the rest of our days. When I was in late teens the bust of Queen Victoria completely disappeared – someone had decided to remove and hide it in protest against ‘the coloniser’. Eventually a few decades later it was recovered, but the bust was never replaced atop the pou.

Riley and I spent a lot of time in the lead up to the performance talking about the three images I wanted to create. They were not based on artists’ works or images I had been looking at, but rather emerged from visions and dreams I had been having. The dreams I was having were uneasy, dealing with the types of embodied sexual and reproductive trauma I was hearing a lot about. I wanted to utilise the eerie calm that inhabits my village in the evening – when all the tourists have left and there are only the sounds of bubbling hot pools and hissing steam that vents from the ground. At first when I talked to Riley about using fake blood and performing genital mutilation, he commented that it was a departure from the ways I had been making previously. However, I felt like my research journey was coming full circle, as if the works I had spent nearly four years creating were getting me to a point where I would feel confident enough to create quite direct work that could expose deeply hidden realities. After many months of planning the time came to perform and gather images.

The performance was by no means public, even though it was in the most open space in my village, near the atea, the space of challenge in which people gather before entering our ancestral meeting house. Because it was in the evening, I knew most of my relations would be inside and so no one would see us. The steam creates clouds everywhere and so using LED lights which I spray painted to diffuse and tint the light, Riley and I set quite a mysterious scene. Riley is really good at taking cinematic images and so using lights was a good means of making my home seem alien – I wanted to create a scene that does not exist in the postcard images of my home. Before Riley and met, I shaved and put on more make-up than usual, dressing myself in a red cardigan, a red woollen hat and harakeke accessories that I had woven years earlier. The props I used for the images were a toy rifle, a large knife and a batch of fake blood that I eventually poured between my legs.

I suppose for someone not from Ohinemutu, night time can be daunting. With the steam, the graveyard and so many intricately carved traditional Māori buildings it might seem a very sacred place, which of course it is. However, the sacred spaces in Ohinemutu are also part of my home – they are the forms, figures, boiling vents and concrete statutes that I have played amongst my entire life. For me, it represented the kind of disjuncture I really wanted to express through image – the space between sacred, unspoken and normal; between ceremonial ritual and oppressive habit; between personal and public, childhood and adult; the crown and Māori, and; the space between masculinity and femininity. Riley felt uncomfortable taking the images because the scene appeared so heavy, but after having a good talk, saying a karakia and burning some sage gifted to me by a Dakota friend, Riley felt a lot better. For me, it was important to use the gifted sage because after being sexually assaulted in San Francisco, sage was the medicine used to help me feel safe on my return home to Aotearoa. The only other medicine I ever used to heal from that particular incident was making art, and so it was important to include Riley in a ceremony where I enacted a pathway to heal. The photoshoot lasted about 45 minutes. I had a pretty good idea already of what I wanted to achieve and so I directed Riley with instructions about where to be and what kinds of images to gather, whilst Riley directed me on where to look, what kinds of facial expressions worked best and how to maintain good angles in relation to the light. I was really uncomfortable, in part because it was getting cold, but also because I felt quite exposed – I am modest with my body but for the images I wanted to perform, I had to let self-doubt and dysmorphia go. As well, the fake blood had been made out of icing sugar and red food colouring, it was sticky and had started to congeal with the red glitter I had also poured liberally between my thighs – I felt incredibly gross, especially whilst performing doing gross things to my body.

From all the images gathered that night Riley and I selected the three, from a total of 75. I had a very clear idea of what I wanted each image to look like and so Riley and I gathered images until we were able to depict these – for each image I performed in front of the camera, warming up until I ‘arrived’ at the image I had in my head. The entire shoot took approximately 45 minutes. For the first of the three images, I wanted to depict ideas about the loss of Māori men through colonial wars, and the disabling impact upon knowledge transmission between men and young men about Māori forms of masculinity. For the second image I wanted to convey ideas about gender dysphoria and self-body mutilation, part of the narrative I wanted to express for this image was to describe the internal mania of living between genders where mind and body are at a mis-match. For the final image, I wanted to convey ideas about death and rebirth. ‘Black lives matter’ had been prominent in social media at the time and it had made me think a lot about how important Māori lives are – so many of our young men are ending their own lives, and with suicidal tendencies something I have always fought to overcome, I was grasping for hope through the creation of an image.

I printed these at slightly larger than A3 on Kodak endura – it is a metallic photographic paper I have used in the past that really enhances colour saturation. Rather than create photographic images in the same vein as those being created for my thesis, using muted colours, I wanted to focus on the use of reds and pinks to describe the visceral nature of the dreams I was having. These works were intended to be highly polished for a public exhibition. I exhibited the three untitled works at a group show of artists, alongside Rotorua artists Chanz Mikaere, Riley Claxton, Don Overbeay and Mark and Paul Rayner from Whanganui. The exhibition was called *Trans* and ran from August 2016 to December 2016 – each artist was given the opportunity to express ‘trans’ in ways that made sense to them. At the opening I performed as myself, speaking about my own work and the artists in the show through the theme of loss. After doing this I attempted to sing a rendition of Donna Summer’s *State of independence* (1982) which I listened to through headphones whilst swinging poi – the audience were excluded from hearing the music I sang along to. I chose the song because when I worked in Sydney in 1999, the manager of the gay club I worked at would play it before opening the club, as a way to signal moving from calmness to a long and often debauched busy night – for me, the song represented a calm before a storm, although the lyrics describe higher states of spiritual consciousness through a relationship with ‘God’. It interested me that Donna Summer had renounced her history of disco music on becoming Christian. I didn’t warm up for the performance, nor did I plan in advance the exact things I would say, although I had picked some key terms to help me devise a performative presentation: loss, uncertainty, vulnerability, fear, anxiety and hope.

My intent to karakia whakamutunga for my project, was to reflect on the self-conscious and awkward person I felt I lived as before beginning my PhD – I wanted to give audiences a sense of what I wanted to transform from through my research, and this was something I communicated to audiences as part of my performance at the opening of the exhibition on August 19, 2016.



Nopera, T. (2016) Untitled 1 [Kodak endura print], 56cm x 72cm



Nopera, T. (2016) Untitled 2 [Kodak endura print], 72cm x 56cm

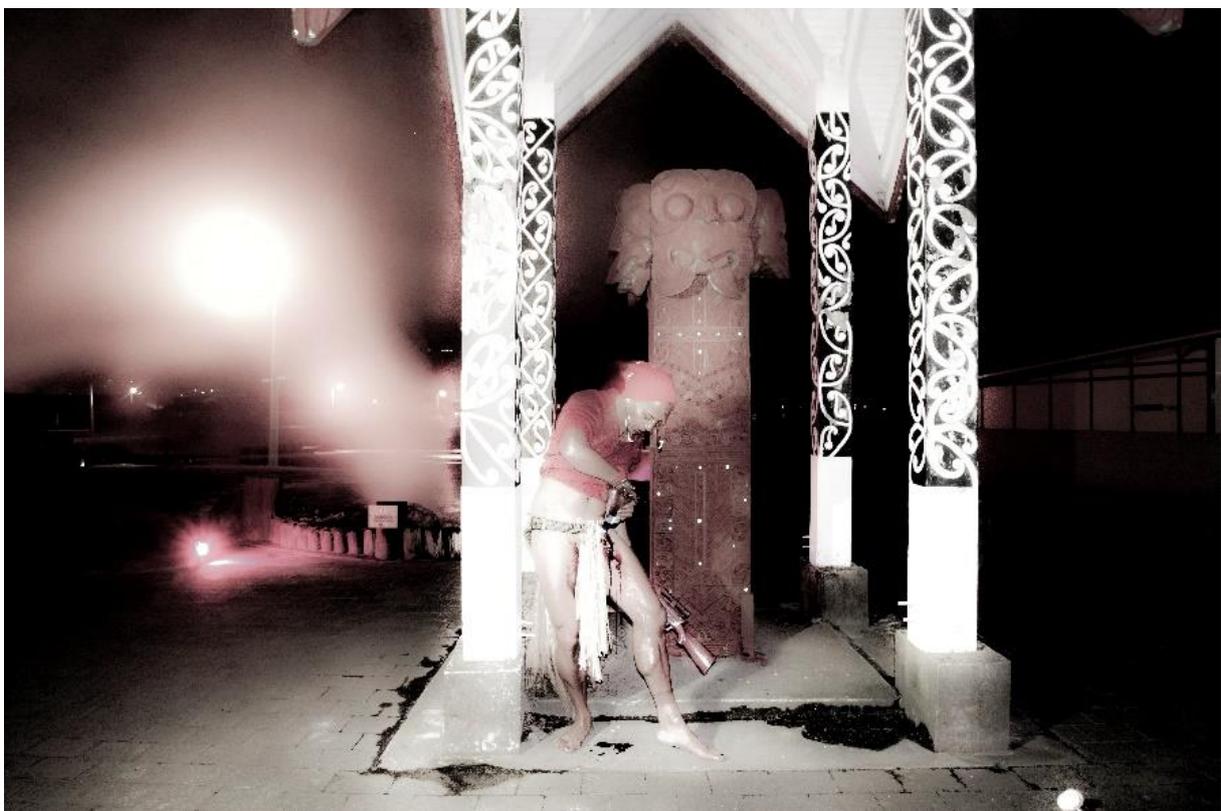


Nopera, T. (2016) Untitled 3 [Kodak endura print], 72cm x 56cm

As well as the works exhibited at Helium Gallery, I also created a short animated video using the images Riley had gathered. At the time, resolution of the video work wasn't the primary objective. I was interested in applying the automated batch animation process I had developed in the first year of my project to the images as a way to create a secondary image-based performance. To make the video, as with other works I adjusted the contrast, brightness and vibrancy of each image, but I also completely removed the colour in all but a few images – for those images I desaturated the hues but left tints of colour as I had done with the images for my thesis. I did this because the content of the images is highly emotive. I wanted a way to maintain the seriousness I attempted to communicate, but at the same time enable a degree of distance so that I could analyse what messages surfaced through the video without feeling overwhelmed by them. When I had studied at drama school between 2001 and 2003, it had been impressed upon me not to use coloured lights because colour is evocative, and that to really test the cohesiveness of our ideas, we should always try to work with the tonality offered by white light. After the initial processing of images, I batch edited them to create an animation in *Photoshop*. The work is very raw and after making it I felt confronted by it.

The final video work titled *Trouble* (2016) (Appendix L) could be regarded as a one-liner, which is feedback I have received. There have been viewers who have been upset by its seemingly graphic content. I argue however, that what I perform in the images is far less graphic than what is screened on mainstream television daily – there are clues throughout that the blood is not real, that the props are toys and that the maniacal faces I pull throughout are too clownish to be anything other than performance. The fake blood refers to the extreme decisions transgender people are often faced with to help their bodies match their feelings of gender identity, and the loss of mens blood through wars fought for English and American power. I have been critiqued on the 'shock art' tactics used in the work, with the comment that using this tactic is the domain of 'white' artists who may have neither the communal accountability nor the refined critical lens that a person studying toward a PhD should have. However, I assert the need to voice the extreme social and environmental barriers that limit Māori transgender people's ability to self-perceive tino rangatiratanga (Birkenhead, A. & Rands, D., 2012; Delahunt, Denison, Kennedy, Hilton, Young, Chaudhri & Elston, 2016; Dudding, 2017; Gender Minorities Aotearoa, 2016; Negin, Aspin, Gadsden, & Reading, 2015; Pega, Reisner, Sell, Veale, 2017; Quill, 2016; Reisner, Poteat, Keatley, Cabral, Mothopeng, Dunham & Baral, 2016; Reynolds, 2012; Richards, Arcelus, Barrett, Bouman, Lenihan, Lorimer, & Seal, 2015; Scott-Jones, 2017; Witten, 2007).

The otherworldly setting of the video exacerbates actions in the video, and when I have played it to audiences I have described the location as my back-yard, which it is really. The strategy I have employed to counter criticism surrounding *Trouble* has been to speak directly to issues with audiences whilst the work is played. I tend to think of my work as parts of whole, so of course, without the context provided by this thesis and the other works developed as part of this project, it can appear in any of the ways critiqued. However, it was a work I was compelled to create and I do not hide from the responsibility I feel to Māori people trying to make sense of their genders, their lost histories and the violating feeling of colonial trauma. I feel that to make art where audiences have the luxury to slowly read messages and ponder abstract ideas is a colonising agenda in itself – it implies that art should be something able to be managed and consumed. If I have the capability to communicate directly with audiences through art, the severity of emotions and experiences I contend with, then I feel that I should be as direct as possible to help resolve issues with clarity and expedience. For the untitled image works, the owner of Helium Gallery commented that the most common response by viewers was that I have muscular legs and a beautiful body, which shows the degree of exoticisation I experience as a transgender Māori person.



Nopera, T. (2016) *Trouble* [digital video still] 1280px x 720px

## **Take me to the see – to swim in being**

The overall finding for this research project is that raranga offers a beneficial process toward healing – raranga can help a person gain agency in their lives by giving direction to multiple and conflicting strands of lived experience.

As a Māori person, a transgender person, an HIV positive person, an impoverished person, an addicted person, an artist, a scholar, a researcher, a brother, a son, a nephew, an uncle and an aunt, life can feel confused. However, making and thinking through raranga as part of my daily practices, I can begin to excel at life and help those around me. I believe that the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies at the University of Waikato are well placed to deliver a program that could uniquely harness the capacities of artists and thinkers towards the empowerment of Māori and Indigenous people. The University of Waikato is grounded in Māori ways to interpret knowledge which makes high-level Kaupapa Māori research feel normal and right. To create the kind of creative practice PhD programme that could support this kind of transformation, the Faculty needs to create a communal space where students can present their works to each other, get good peer feedback and enhance the richness of their experiences and ideas. This would transform the entire Faculty's ability to engage with Māori and Indigenous research. The creative processes Māori artists use are already embedded with collective values – creative practice research creates a culture where research is an embodied process. Consideration needs to be given for the multiple ways that creative students might be able to conduct their research. Every artist has unique ways, so it will be important for the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies to create negotiable research pathways – this will nurture the capacity of creative practice research. Students definitely need supervision from knowledge keepers with creative practice research expertise – it is not the same as solely theoretical research at all, it requires unique criteria for engaging the research process, including assessment and evaluation. An active and well-designed creative practice Kaupapa Māori program, focused on transformation, can evolve the imagination and profundity of knowledge gifted by our ancestors. Every practitioner brings a unique relationship to research through their processes, so there should be a well-rounded discussion on entering into the program on how the Faculty can best support its students. Planning sessions early on in the research journey could maximise the potential of incoming students to exponentially increase positive change for our communities.

There needs to be a clear process for Indigenous candidates and supervisors to communicate and feel respected in their cultural knowledge and values, with flexible dates for submission to account for the complexities of life as a marginalised 'other' within often hostile Western academic environments. There should be ways to help all participants feel and be safe in their creative practice research, and this includes encouraging funding pathways, otherwise it's bad art and that won't sell.

For me, feelings of poverty have been a major contributing factor to negative patterns. Throughout this project a lack of funds has been a constant research constraint – I have been advised not to write about poverty because the financial burden of a PhD is relatively well known. However, poverty is a social determinant of sexual and reproductive health and in the context of this research it is important to highlight it as a daily reminder of the connection between theory and practice, where making is about survival. PhD research funds for parts of my study have alleviated the daily pressures, but have not taken away the psychological impacts of sexual and reproductive unhealth. I began this project with an intent to create two performance works, one digital and one live. I envisioned these works because I could create them without money which is always the place I dream from – I knew that all I really needed to make the works I envisioned was confidence and self-love, which for me at the outset of this project was a distant illusion. Working toward a healthier perception of self and confidence has taken a lot of patience, to grow, learn, grow some more and find ways to accept the things that make me who I am. I have done this work not to achieve a PhD, but as a way to help me transform so that I can feel wellness. When I began this project, my intent was to use it as a way to filter thoughts about transitioning my body from one gender to another. The biographies of two incredible Māori women who underwent gender transition, Carmen Rupe (1988) and Georgina Beyer (1999) explain the emotionally empowering feelings they experienced through this process. Both women achieved many things that contributed to social change in Aotearoa, and I have benefitted from their bravery.

I know what wellness feels like because sometimes I'm right in it, I feel good, I feel free and the people who I care about are there feeling the same with me. Indigenous realities, especially for those amongst us whose gender identities are fluid, can be pretty hard. The world outside our bodies is often not nice to us, it is full of images that twist and turn our minds, making us feel crazed at best or addicted and suicidal at worst. For a long time I haven't really felt all that well, even though at 41 years of age I look well. I don't look like I have HIV, but every day when I take my pill I am reminded of the ways I sought out death as a young person.

I left my body open to harm to help numb a lot of things I was unable to cope with – it scares me to think about the kinds of experiences I let myself fall into, they are like bad dreams even though they really happened. It's hard to let go the impact of those experiences long enough to feel good.

I will not cut up my body. I will not entrust it to Pākehā psychologists and doctors who will trap me into thinking there is something wrong with me that I need to change. My problems exist because the world is stuck in ways of thinking about bodies and sexuality that are colonising, damaging and wrong. I have been traumatised continually because of this. I will not let a colonised world traumatise my body again. This research project has helped me to feel love for my body and to have respect for the magic it creates. I have become the expert in how to love myself – nobody else can do that work for me.

Through this project I have begun with image, and have used image to identify parts of myself that I keep hidden. There is a lot of power embedded within image and often, without us really even realising, the images that surround us enforce quite rigid and oppressive controls. It's a sad reality, because as an image maker I know that assembling images is powerful, it connects me to life and death and the sexuality that drives my passion to continue beyond this life. Making, although very special, is one of those things that if done with conscious intention, can transform a mundane and difficult life into a continuous stream of special experiences – being aware of creative actions is a privilege that I want to share and help others know how important they are. The conscious intent that is part of raranga helps bring clarity to the world I inhabit, it assists me toward balancing many opposing dichotomies. Often, the clarity extends to a world I inhabit but never really see – there is a whole version of myself that I am encouraged to deny, and I know this is the same for nearly every single person on our planet. We are stuck in repetitive cycles that spin, reproducing a continuous state of denial and submission, but if we are enabled with simple ways to see our ability to create beyond this, we collectively have a lot of power to make things change – we can embody new repetitive cycles that give us the necessary focus to constantly uplift our realities.

But making is not enough, we actually create all the time and never account for the things we manifest from nothing. If we commit to making then we should also commit to ways that account for what we always achieve – making someone smile is an incredible achievement and yet how often do we acknowledge that power of creation? As individuals, we need to get conscious to become collective.

Through my project I have loved the ability to transform through kaupapa Māori theory – I never knew how much knowledge my ancestors kept safe for me until I had a means to theorise the things that for most of my life, lay dormant in my body. Denying my genderfluid nature by conforming to alien colonial norms kept so many important abilities asleep within me. I used to think I was sick and that my mind was corrupt because I felt feminine when I looked so masculine. Raranga shifted my mind into my hands and when I witnessed what they created without me really knowing, I couldn't argue that my hands were sacred – they held so much pure knowledge that turned big grass into beautiful objects. How can I be sick if I'm producing beauty?

It's hard in today's world to remember our inherent magic, our amazing ability to take our surrounds and make positive contributions, because so much of our lives today are non-existent – we live virtual realities. However, artists and thinkers today are using virtual realms to experiment with alternate selves. Today's artists use virtual spaces to consider how they actually perform in reality and this helps us account and be accountable, so that we count. When I inhabit virtual spaces to gain a good sense of my lived reality, I make it come full circle, I don't want to live as a digital bit or byte because that's not going to change anything. For me, haka in its fullest sense allows me to reweave the virtual body I perform, so that I can perform in viscerally embodied ways. It's not easy, but if I want to live a good life then I need to be in my body as much as I am in my head – they're necessary parts of each other. Through practice and thinking about what I practice, I have formulated a theory that reconnects me to my body and the network of relations that enable my body. Raranga in this thesis is not just creative practice, it is creative practice living, it is a methodology for transformation.

My investigations have led me to all kinds of places, places that I never dreamed I would go. I still can't believe I am writing a PhD, after all the hellish living, after all the drugs and alcohol, after all the abuse, after all the suicide attempts, after all the things that made me feel unable to cope – I can honestly write that raranga saved my life. Somehow, I have woven myself into an academic. It's practice more than anything that has helped me perform convincingly in the spaces I now occupy. I didn't know how to write research, but I did know how to write poetry – practicing creativity and learning to craft it through my life has given me strategies to try things out and find ways to make things work. Those ways might not ever be the norm, but when you have very little you work (work) or you die trying – persistence for me has helped me become better than I ever imagined I would be.

People today have amazing access to knowledge and tools, which for the most part fits into our pockets. We use these things towards servitude, but they are the perfect tools we need today to serve our own empowered ends. When I was a child and my dad brought us a Beta video instead of a VCR by mistake, I didn't ever consider that one day I'd be able to make my own video with a tiny phone. We make video all the time today, but do we really reflect on how amazing it is to see ourselves in the world, by our own making? Video is like a million images squashed together – a million renditions of reality that we probably don't analyse enough – if we really looked at our videos rather than consider them as fanciful, we might actually see the world around us and acknowledge abundance amongst all our dire issues. If we all took stock of the worlds in our pockets we might see the planet we hide away and the resources that if shared, could help every single person to live full and happy lives. It is hard to confess to ourselves all the things we ignore, but we have the means to do so today, in ways that do not necessarily need to inflict further harm on ourselves. Technology provides a way for us to blur and abstract so that when we have time to slow down, we can process our realities in manageable ways.

Colonialism takes our ability to do these things away – it is an outmoded design that restricts our power flows toward a selfish few. When I worked through the section in this thesis on the statistics for gender and sexuality diverse people, I felt ashamed that I live in a world that does damage to so many people, and that the damage is persistent and frequent. Why should people experience such harm and pain? For those in our world who suffer, I encourage you to make art, to think of making as birthing something that has never existed before. Making heals because from loss and nothingness, we have the potential to manifest whatever we are able to think of in our minds. What stops us from healing ourselves through making, are internalised controls – they keep us from considering the journey through our bodies into the realms of our ancestors; into the infinite energy of our planet; into the universe beyond, and; the journey all the way back into the nothingness that birthed everything. Every time we create we undertake this journey, but we are colonised into believing in our finite limitations. What I love about my culture is that it is filled with story. When I tell myself ancient stories I can see myself a thousand years ago – I see parts of myself navigating a world where colonisation as we know it today did not exist. Because I see this I am able to 'trick' myself into knowing beyond my colonised self. When I do this I see myself and know I need not be ashamed nor feel stigmatised for the things that have happened in my life that make me human. I connect to my ancient and eternal self.

Tricks are good like that, and I have used plenty of tricks in this research to emancipate emotion from what I considered as cold dead spaces – mostly the dead spaces within. I have used storytelling methods in multiple forms of texts to begin performing what it is to be alive and empowered, even though often I didn't believe my own story. Eventually though, by storytelling over and over I began to believe in myself and changed into the story I wanted to live. Doing this has begun to help me move past the damage lodged in my heart and every day, I feel a little bit stronger – the trauma of generations becomes my power. But it's no good to keep this power to myself, because then I simply deny my ability to be part of something far more powerful and connected. By delving deep into myself I have found a way to replicate the things I admire most in others, like Katie who practices gathering toward political activism, like Dan who practices awakening others at rest and like Tanu who practices empowering the youth of his community. By searching through raranga I have begun to occupy and inform the spaces that control the life outcomes of others like me, I bring trouble to the surface, I expose it and I help toward solutions.

For the most part, even though this research is framed within an academic context, the knowledge within is pretty simple – raranga as methodology helps me think about the things I already do and know and gives me a logical pathway to understand why I do, or how I do, or what I when and even if I can? Raranga sets in motion an ability to dream and then make dreams tangible. There's no way my ancestors could have travelled the expanse of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa without a good way to dream. They dreamed big and they carried their thoughts far, so far away from their homes, and yet what they carried with them connects me to everything. My ancestors really did carry a big dream, the dreams of many people, generations and energy extending back to before time existed. When I think of how infinite my ancestors dreams were and continue to be through my body, I surge with excitement – I know if I can work through the things that can feel difficult in life, then I can dream just as big.

When I was a child my sisters and I loved musical movies. *Grease* was a favourite, as was *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* too. As a kid, when no one was watching, I would swirl around singing into one of my sisters' hairbrushes, being free in the world and feeling good enough to sing my emotions without restraint. To me, that was the ultimate, to be able to fall into musical-land when the mood struck and to be famous and glamorous and drive away singing in a flash car.

I have created a performance artwork to convey this sense of freedom. I am a guerrilla performance artist and I have been developing the two performance works briefly mentioned earlier for four and a half years. One is a digital performance using video and the other is live. The video work is a music video using elements of the video works and images described through this thesis; the other is a live sung performance enacted as part of a durational guerrilla occupation of public space. The video performance work contributes to the discussions and writing that is part of my blog *hukacanhaka.com*. To create this work I have invested my research funds towards travel to many parts of the world, enabling me a vantage into the experiences of people from other Indigenous cultures but also a detached analysis of my own culture and way of life. Making art has always been low cost for me – I haven't ever sold art so to spend too much money on making it seems a waste of valuable resources. To develop this project I have had to learn to budget for making – it has been a requirement, especially as the first in a program of studies, to make work that can sit comfortably in gallery spaces, contextualised through catalogues and peer-review. To do these things goes against the ways I like to make – when I am at my creative best I am not thinking about what the needs of institutions or audiences are, I am simply present in my return journey to Te Kore, so that I can bring back taonga.

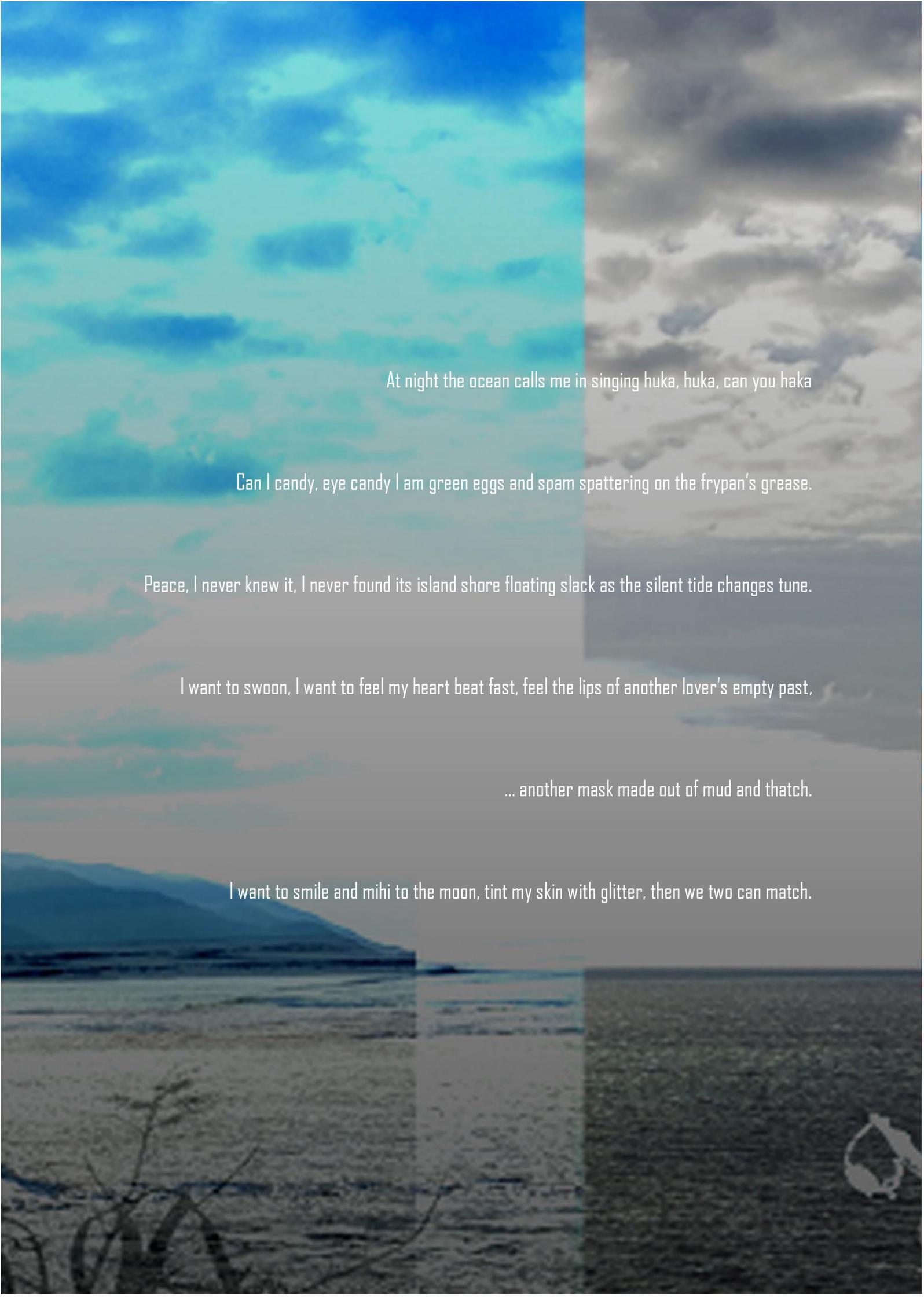
By the end of this project I expended my entire funding budget on creative works to meet the requirements of my developing program and this put a lot of pressure on my ability to contribute to the needs of my whānau in the final months of writing my thesis. However, I thought ahead because the final performance work requires no budget at all. The performance draws on a 2008 performance titled *Unidentified* (Appendix M) – a durational performance where I attempt to construct a dwelling on the street. The performance was developed to convey ideas about placelessness, where through the making process I encouraged passers-by to assist in building a small dwelling and engage in conversation whilst making. For the version of *Unidentified* I enact to complete this PhD I shift between constructing a space out of both ordinary and special objects that are part of my life, whilst I sing and dance with my poi. Rather than *Unidentified*, the performance is titled *Tāwhanga* (Appendix N). The performance does not require me to book space nor spend money I do not have. For my final examination I intend to find a space on campus at the University of Waikato and begin my work. The performance is a ceremony intended to heal the space around me. I aim to help people feel comfortable and at ease to be themselves.

The final performance work is indicative of the confidence and healthy self-perception that has grown through the creation of works for this PhD, and also the theory that I have investigated to contextualise them. I budgeted quite well for this project and have presented multiple creative outcomes, in many cities and in many different spaces. I now have the opportunity to reset and begin again. The performance work I aspire toward is my means of starting from scratch, without the fear, anxiety and loss I have sought to transform from through performing *huka*. Through *huka* I have found a way to consider gender transformation, and I feel ready to begin a journey that transitions my gender to a balance between masculine and feminine – grounded in an awareness of how to do so beyond the limitations and harsh realities of colonial processes. I know hardship because I have lived it, but through creative practice research about raranga I now know how what kinds of performance can help me move beyond it. The belief in change was all that was ever really necessary to see that I could make things to heal my reality – and that my friends, is how taonga can help us to perform tino rangatiratanga.

Arohanui ki a koutou, you deserve to love yourself :).







At night the ocean calls me in singing huka, huka, can you haka

Can I candy, eye candy I am green eggs and spam spattering on the frypan's grease.

Peace, I never knew it, I never found its island shore floating slack as the silent tide changes tune.

I want to swoon, I want to feel my heart beat fast, feel the lips of another lover's empty past,

... another mask made out of mud and thatch.

I want to smile and mihi to the moon, tint my skin with glitter, then we two can match.



**Chapter 9.**  
**He Moemoeā Ano**

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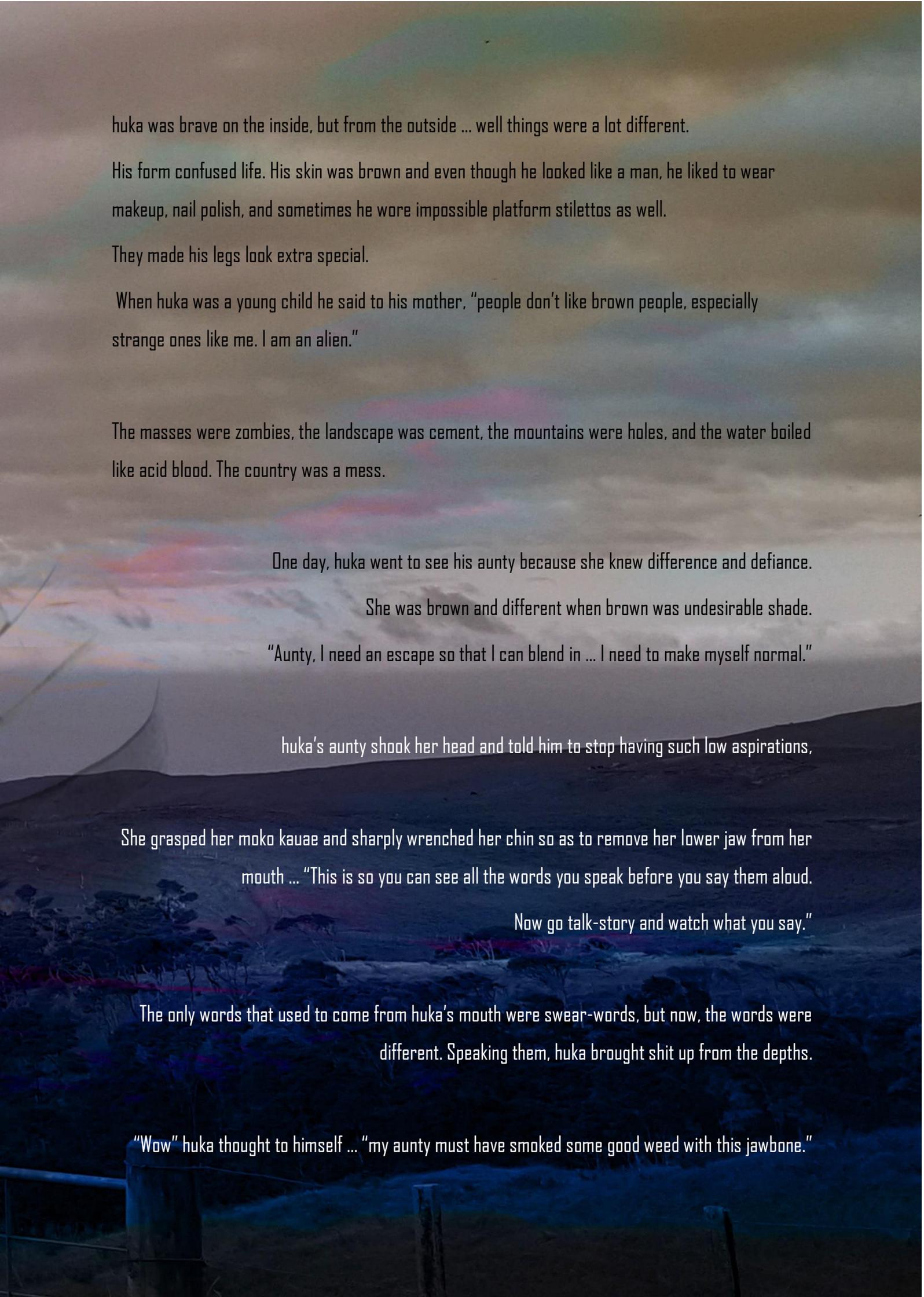




hideaway to m



make me run away



huka was brave on the inside, but from the outside ... well things were a lot different.

His form confused life. His skin was brown and even though he looked like a man, he liked to wear makeup, nail polish, and sometimes he wore impossible platform stilettos as well.

They made his legs look extra special.

When huka was a young child he said to his mother, "people don't like brown people, especially strange ones like me. I am an alien."

The masses were zombies, the landscape was cement, the mountains were holes, and the water boiled like acid blood. The country was a mess.

One day, huka went to see his aunty because she knew difference and defiance.

She was brown and different when brown was undesirable shade.

"Aunty, I need an escape so that I can blend in ... I need to make myself normal."

huka's aunty shook her head and told him to stop having such low aspirations,

She grasped her moko kauae and sharply wrenched her chin so as to remove her lower jaw from her mouth ... "This is so you can see all the words you speak before you say them aloud.

Now go talk-story and watch what you say."

The only words that used to come from huka's mouth were swear-words, but now, the words were different. Speaking them, huka brought shit up from the depths.

"Wow" huka thought to himself ... "my aunty must have smoked some good weed with this jawbone."