

Political Critique and Genealogical Vision in Te Oriori a Rihi Puhiwahine, 1870s

Long before twentieth century scholars developed the language to describe ‘settler colonialism’, nineteenth century Māori writers, composers, and storytellers critiqued British imperialism and theorised colonial violence. In mōteatea, letters, and kōrero heke iho (narratives passed down), tūpuna Māori asked what British colonial settlement would mean for te ao Māori, the Māori world.¹ As they reflected on the changes wrought by imperialism, tūpuna offered guidance for future uri (descendants). This is an article about the ways that one wahine Māori critiqued colonisation and imagined Māori futures in the context of mid-nineteenth century colonial invasion. More specifically, it is an article about how Rihi Puhiwahine, a renowned composer, guided her descendants through a world disfigured by British imperialism.²

¹ See for more, Arini Loader, ‘Early Māori Literature: The Writing of Hakaraia Kiharoa’, in Mark Williams ed. *A History of New Zealand Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016; Bradford Haami, *Pūtea Whakairo: Māori and the Written Word*, Wellington, Huia Publishers, 2004; Lachy Paterson and Angella Wanhalla, *He Reo Wahine: Maori Women's Voices from the Nineteenth Century*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017; Tony Ballantyne and Lachy Paterson, ‘Introduction,’ in Tony Ballantyne, Lachy Paterson, and Angela Wanhalla eds., *Indigenous Textual Cultures: Reading and Writing in the Age of Global Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020: 1-28; and Jane McRae and Heni Jacobs, *Nga Moteatea: an Introduction*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011.

² For more on Puhiwahine’s life see *Waka Huia: Puhiwāhine* (Video). Television New Zealand, 1991.

In the 1870s, less than ten years after British troops invaded the Waikato, Puhiwahine addressed the colonial violence in an oriori for her future grandchildren.³ Oriori are a form of waiata (song) designed to ground children in their whakapapa, or genealogy—the lands, waters, and narratives that connect us to our ancestors.⁴ In her oriori, Puhiwahine welcomed her descendants into a world re-shaped by colonial settlement and led them on a return to their ancestral territories. Puhiwahine is well-known as a poet and composer of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, but also of Ngāti Maniapoto.⁵ Though Puhiwahine grew up on her Ngāti Tūwharetoa lands to the south, she understood deeply her connection to Ngāti Maniapoto in the north. After locating her grandchildren in te ao mārama, the world of light and the living, Puhiwahine directed them on a haerenga (journey) that would lead from the rohe (territory) of

³ For one discussion of Puhiwahine as a political thinker, see Hemopereki Simon, ‘Ngā Whakaaro a Puhiwahine: A Political Philosophy and Theory from the Mōteatea of Puhiwahine’, *Pacific Dynamics: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 4, 1 (2020), pp. 61-82.

⁴ For more on oriori see Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, ‘Te Ao Mārama: the Māori World View,’ *Tū Mai* 36.31 (2002); Robyn Kahukiwa and Roma Potiki, *Oriori: a Māori child is born*, Auckland, Tandem Press, 1999; Haami Hawkins, ‘Wayfinding kurahuna’, in Fetau Iosefo, Stacy Holman Jones, and Anne Harris eds., *Wayfinding and Critical Autoethnography*, London, Routledge, 2020, pp. 28–37. For more on whakapapa see Apirana Ngata, ‘The terminology of Whakapapa’, *Journal of the Polynesian Society* (JPS) 128 (2019), pp. 19–42; Nēpia Mahuika, ‘A brief history of whakapapa: Māori approaches to genealogy’, *Genealogy* 3, 2 (2019).

⁵ For more on Puhiwahine’s whakapapa see Pei Te Hurinui Jones, ‘The Whakapapa of Puhiwahine’, *Te Ao Hou* (March 1961), p. 14. In James Cowan’s notes, taken during his interviews with veterans of Ō-rākau, including my own direct tūpuna, Cowan noted that Puhiwahine’s mother, Hinekiore, was of Ngāti Paretekawa, the author’s Ngāti Maniapoto hapū. Hinekiore fought at Ō-rākau, according to accounts from Raureti Te Huia, provided to Cowan.

Ngāti Tūwharetoa, to the lands of Rangiaowhia and Ō-rākau, near the Waikato town of Kihikihi. As you approach your homelands, Puhiwahine told her grandchildren:⁶

Ka kitea mai kōrua e ōu kōrua kuia. ⁷	You will be seen by your elders,
‘Nā wai ēnei tamariki e haere nei?’	‘Whose children are those coming our way?’
Kiia atu anō, ‘Kei te raunatia’,	Tell them, ‘We are travelling around’
‘Ki Ō-rākau rā, ki Rangiaowhia rā’,	‘To Ō-rākau, to Rangiaowhia’
‘He koata-kaihe nā te pākeha’ ⁸	‘We are three quarter castes, made so by the white man
‘Nāna nei i huna iho ka ngaro te motu nei’	‘They who destroyed our lands and made us lost to it’ ⁹

In Puhiwahine’s world there was nothing normal about walking towards your elders and being greeted as a stranger, yet in the 1870s this is the future she imagined for her descendants. As the oriori continued, Puhiwahine directed her grandchildren to share their whakapapa with their elders. Tell them, she continued, that only now have you returned to

⁶ Pei Te Hurinui Jones, ‘A Grandmother to Be’, *Te Ao Hou* (1960), p. 17.

⁷ In the *Te Ao Hou* version of Puhiwahine’s oriori, this line ends ‘e ōu kōrua kuia’, ‘by your grandmothers’. However, in Pei Te Hurinui Jones’ personal copy of the *Puhiwahine* manuscript, housed at the University of Waikato, the line is annotated in pen. Someone, presumably Jones, has amended the line to read ‘e ōu kōrua koroua / kuia’. As such I have not specified the gender of the elders in the English translation.

⁸ As Jones noted in his writing on Puhiwahine’s oriori, ‘koata kaihe’ did not mean ‘quarter caste’ but ‘three quarter caste’. Jones, ‘Grandmother’, p. 19.

⁹ This is my own translation of the oriori, for Pei Te Hurinui Jones’ translation see Jones, ‘Grandmother’, p. 19.

your ū kai-pō, your deep homeland, to rest, to sleep, to return the placenta to the womb.¹⁰

Puhiwahine foresaw a moment of misrecognition between the elders and their descendants, but she also guided her grandchildren out of that state. Return to your lands, she told them, and by your whakapapa (your genealogy), ‘ka mātauria kōrua’, ‘you (two) will be known’.

In te ao Māori, a world structured by whakapapa, the dispossessing effects of British settlement on Māori land could not erase the fundamental relationship between children and their ancestors. In the oriori, by allowing whakapapa to determine their relationships to place, Puhiwahine’s grandchildren move from the state of being unknown (‘Nā wai ēnei tamariki e haere nei’) to the state of being known (‘ka mātauria kōrua’). In the short verse, Puhiwahine highlights the structural ways that nineteenth century settlers tried to re-organise Māori relations: the children were now ‘koata kaihe’; the land was ‘lost to us’ and destroyed.¹¹ But by the end of the verse the logics of colonisation have less meaningful organisational power

¹⁰ The exact wording is, ‘Kātahi ka hoki mai te ewe ki te rauru, ki te rua e moe ai, ki te ū-kai-pō’. Jones, ‘Grandmother’, p. 18.

¹¹ For more on the history of caste language in New Zealand, and on the lived realities of “interracial relationships,” including for descendants, see Angela Wanhalla, *Matters Of The Heart: A History Of Interracial Marriage In New Zealand*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013. The nineteenth century settler classification of Māori children as three-quarter, half, or quarter caste had implications for land, law, and subjecthood, and belongs to a larger historical narrative about settler government attempts to describe “mixed” Indigenous individuals out of the category of Indigeneity: Sam Iti Prendergast, ‘Mirage Upon the Land: The Disfiguring Impacts of Australian and New Zealand Settler Nation-Building on Indigenous Relations to Place and Kin’, PhD Thesis, New York University, 2023; J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

over how the children experience the world.¹² British imperialism could not dissolve the thick lines of relationality between Māori and our kin, but it could alter the way that Māori experienced our relationships to people and place.¹³ In mid-nineteenth century Aotearoa, the material realities of British settlement disrupted the landscapes of Māori life so that Puhiwahine’s descendants might return to their homelands and find that the structures of the colony mediated the possibilities for their return.

In this article, I ask what it means to take the oriori seriously both as a source of ancestral guidance, and as a source for understanding how wāhine Māori, like Puhiwahine, made sense of colonisation in the immediate context of land invasion. So far, historians have not included Puhiwahine’s oriori in histories of mid-nineteenth century invasion, or in scholarship on Māori political theorising.¹⁴ This is the case even though Puhiwahine critiqued those who had ‘destroyed the land’ and directed her uri back to Rangiaowhia and Ō-rākau, two deeply significant sites where my own tūpuna fought to protect Māori land and people in 1864.¹⁵ While historians include wāhine as actors in the events of ‘land war’, this article argues for

¹² Of course, race shapes how an individual experiences the world. In the oriori, however, Puhiwahine emphasises the power of whakapapa over the legal categories of caste.

¹³ For a more recent reflection on the affective legacies of British invasion in the Waikato, see Tom Roa and Joanna Kidman, ‘Te Waha Ngū: sitting with the silence’, in *Fragments from a Contested Past: Remembrance, Denial and New Zealand History*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2022, pp. 130–153.

¹⁴ Based on a survey of historical literature addressing either nineteenth century British invasion of Māori land or Māori political thought. While scholars recognise the significance of Puhiwahine’s compositions, her oriori has not yet been included as part of the corpus of her “political” works.

¹⁵ For more on Ō-rākau see Tom Roa, Corey Wilson, and Robbie Neha, *Ō-rākau: E whawhai tonu ana tātou, ‘we continue the fight’*, Ōtorohanga, Taarewaanga Marae Committee (2022).

understanding wāhine as more than participants: in compositions and writing, wāhine Māori theorised settler violence and produced visions for robust Māori futures.

Throughout this article I approach Puhīwahine's oriori as a site of rich nineteenth century wāhine Māori intellectual history. I use the term 'intellectual history' intentionally, despite the long association with European philosophy, to insist on the oriori as a political text—and one that demands multiple levels of listening, or interpretation. Importantly, scholarship on Māori intellectual history differs in subtle but significant ways from historical scholarship that focuses on recovering Māori texts and emphasising Māori textuality. Both forms of scholarship are vitally important. In past decades, scholars have highlighted the vast and diverse archive of writing produced by Māori in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often challenging the erroneous belief that Indigenous thought, history, and poetry is confined to oral narratives.¹⁶ When I use the term Māori intellectual history, I am referring more specifically to scholarship that engages directly with the ideas and theories that tūpuna produced as they sought to make sense of the world. In her expansive work on early Māori literature, Arini Loader argues for Māori intellectual history as a political project of reclaiming our "Indigenous intellectual sovereignty" by engaging with tūpuna in ways that

¹⁶ See as select examples, Jennifer Curnow, Ngapare K. Hopa, and Jane McRae eds. *Rere Atu, Taku Manu! Discovering History, Language & Politics in the Maori-Language Newspapers*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002; Mike Stevens, 'A "Useful" Approach to Māori History,' *New Zealand Journal of History* 49.1 (2015): pp. 54–77; Lachy Paterson, *Colonial Discourses: Niupepa Māori, 1855–1863*. Otago University Press, 2006; Ballantyne and Paterson, "Introduction," 2020; Paul Meredith and Alice Te Punga Somerville, "'Kia Rongo Mai Koutou ki Taku Whakaaro": Maori Voices in the Alexander Turnbull Library,' *Turnbull Library Record* 43 (2010/11): 96–105.

are fundamentally Māori.¹⁷ For Loader, as for scholars like Nēpia Mahuika, Alice Te Punga Somerville, Ammon Apiata, and Aroha Harris, among others, it is not simply enough to locate archival evidence of Māori writing and narrative and insist that the texts are important.¹⁸

Instead, to take our tūpuna work “seriously” is to engage with all of the world-altering, framework-shattering potential that tūpuna words reveal when we engage with them on our own terms, as mokopuna and whanaunga: researchers with a stake in the interpretation. In other words, Puhīwahine’s oriori is not just significant because it is evidence that wāhine Māori critiqued the colonial regime; it is significant because Puhīwahine’s critique offers an

¹⁷ Arini Loader, ‘He Pukapuka Tatakū i ngā Mahi a Te Rauparaha Nui: Reading Te Rauparaha through Time,’ in Tony Ballantyne, Lachy Paterson, and Angela Wanhalla eds., *Indigenous Textual Cultures: Reading and Writing in the Age of Global Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, p. 267.

¹⁸ For more on Māori intellectual history, especially via Māori literary traditions and writing, see, Loader, ‘Early Māori Literature,’; Arini Loader, “‘Kei Wareware’”: Remembering Te Rauparaha’, *Biography* 39.3 (2016): pp. 339-65; Haami, *Whakairo* (2004); Nēpia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019; Aroha Harris, ‘Theorize This: We Are What We Write,’ *Te Pouhere Kōrero* 3 (2009): pp. 83–90; Ammon Apiata, ‘He tangi mai i te puehu: He whakatewhatewha i te mahi whakamāori me te reo ā-tuhi a ngā tūpuna’, MA Thesis, University of Waikato, 2021; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, *Mana Wāhine Māori: Selected Writings On Maori Women's Art, Culture, and Politics*. Auckland: New Women’s Press, 1991; and Alice Te Punga Somerville, *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. See also Lachy Paterson, ‘Te Hokioi and the Legitimization of the Māori Nation’, in Brendan Hokowhitu and Vijay Devadas eds., *The Fourth Eye: Māori Media in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013: pp. 124–42.

under-engaged with framework for understanding what colonialism produced for mokopuna Māori who live in the wake of nineteenth century land invasion.

Genealogical consciousness

In her monograph *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen*, Hawaiian scholar Noenoe Silva argues for the resurgent political potential of understanding Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) writing as intellectual history. Silva traces the lives of two nineteenth and early twentieth century Kanaka Maoli writers who published their works in Hawaiian language newspapers.¹⁹ By paying close attention to ancestral texts and engaging in rigorous interpretation of long-archived works, Silva insists on nineteenth century Kanaka Maoli writing as a site of philosophical theorising.

In their writing and compositions, Hawaiian ancestors articulated what Silva refers to as mo‘okū‘auhau consciousness, or genealogical consciousness.²⁰ Nineteenth century Kanaka Maoli intellectuals ‘thought about the Kanaka descendants of the twenty-first century’, Silva stresses, ‘and they wrote with us in mind’.²¹ Māori scholars have long understood oriori and mōteatea more generally as sites for the transmission of intergenerational mātauranga (knowledge) and guidance.²² An oriori, in this sense, is always an expression of ‘genealogical

¹⁹ Noenoe Silva, *The Power of the Steel-Tipped Pen: Reconstructing Native Hawaiian Intellectual History*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, p. 1.

²⁰ Silva, p. 4.

²¹ Silva, p. 6.

²² Hawkins writes about oriori as a ‘koha for future generations’ in ‘Wayfinding kurahuna’, (2020), p. 36. For more on oriori as vessels for mātauranga see Apirana Ngata, ‘Ngā Mōteatea: He Oriori Mō Tūteremoana’, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 57 (1948), pp. 257–65; and Connie Buchanan’s interview with Paraone Gloyne, ‘Paraone Gloyne: Oriori

consciousness'. In recent decades, scholars like Hineitimoana Greensill have paid particular attention to the politics of aroha (love, concern, care) that shapes the genealogical consciousness of kuia (grandmothers) as they protect whenua Māori (Māori land).²³ In 2023, Greensill, speaking about her own grandmother, Tuaiwa Rickard, reminded listeners that in the mid-late twentieth century her grandmother's fight for whenua was always profoundly connected to whānau.²⁴ To fight for whenua was to fight for the future of Māori children. This 'whawhai' (fight, struggle) was rooted in the kind of deep relational aroha that holds whakapapa at its core.

Understanding Puhīwahine's oriori as a robust site of kuia theorising opens up new possibilities for understanding what colonial invasion meant for Māori in the mid-late nineteenth century. From Puhīwahine's position as a grandmother in the 1870s, imperial violence came into view on an intimate relational scale. Dispossession was not measured solely in acres of land or in literal death, but in the affective experience of walking towards your elders and being greeted as a stranger. Over the past decades, scholars have defined settler colonialism as an eliminatory force: a process whereby settlers in power seek to

feed the hearts and minds of our babies', *E-Tangata* (16 July 2023), <https://e-tangata.co.nz/arts/paraone-gloyne-oriori-feed-the-hearts-and-minds-of-our-babies/>.

²³ Hineitimoana Greensill, Mere Taito, Jessica Pasisi, Jesi Lujan Bennett, Marylise Dean, and Maluseu Monise, 'Tupuna Wahine, Saina, Tupuna Vaine, Matua Tupuna Fifine, Mapiāg Hāni: Grandmothers in the archives', *Public History Review* 29 (2022), pp. 54-66. See also, Leonie Pihama, Marjorie Beverland, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Ngaropi Raumati, Papahuia Dickson and Awhine Cameron (eds.) *Taku Kuia E: Honouring Our Grandmothers*, New Zealand: Tū Tama Wahine o Taranaki, 2023.

²⁴ Hineitimoana Greensill, talk delivered at Aotearoa Gender History Network Workshop, 21 February 2023.

replace Indigenous societies in pursuit of settler sovereignty over the land.²⁵ Puhiwahine describes the horror of settler colonialism differently. In the oriori, settler occupation of whenua Māori not only displaced Māori from our homes and desecrated our ancestral lands and waters, it ruptured the relational norms of te ao Māori, the Māori world.²⁶

In Puhiwahine's oriori, the politics of aroha are borne out in the instructions that she leaves for navigating the ruptures in kinship wrought by colonisation. The directions lead her mokopuna back to their whakapapa and back to the state of being 'known' by their kin. Listening for tūpuna guidance is central to Māori practices for understanding the past.²⁷ In her article, 'He aha te mea nui', Waerete Norman writes that 'to be Māori is to acknowledge tuupuna and keep them close to our hearts as a 'puna', a source of inspiration, wisdom, and knowledge'.²⁸ Norman was not writing metaphorically. Instead, she was pointing towards the vast archives of tūpuna Māori writing, 'te aho tuhi' (the tradition of writing), as a material way to engage with our tūpuna, their lives, their histories, and their emotions. If

²⁵ See as key examples, Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and sovereignty in Hawai'i*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1993; Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Studies* 8,4 (2006).

²⁶ Puhiwahine is not the only Indigenous woman to focus on the relational consequences of settler colonialism. See Dean Saranillio, 'Haunani-Kay Trask and Settler Colonial and Relational Critique: Alternatives to Binary Analyses of Power', *Verge* 4, 2 (2018), pp. 36-44.

²⁷ See Ranginui Walker, 'The Relevance of Māori Myth and Tradition', Michael King ed. *Tihei Mauri Ora: Aspects of Māoritanga*, Auckland: Methven, 1978; Margie Hohepa, 'Hokianga Waiata a Ngā Tāpuna Wāhine: Journeys through Mana Wahine, Mana Tane', in Leonie Pihama, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Naomi Simmonds, Joelinee Seed-Pihama and Kirsten Gabel eds. *Mana Wāhine Reader: A Collection of Writings 1987-1998 Volume I*, Te Kotahi Research Institute, 2019, pp. 110-13.

²⁸ Waerete Norman, 'He aha te mea nui?', in Pihama et al. *Mana Wāhine Reader* 2019, originally published 1992, p. 14.

grandmothers express their aroha by leaving directions for Māori descendants, then it is also a political act of aroha to listen to our tūpuna. Why, then, has Puhīwahine's oriori remained absent from histories of British invasion and from histories of Māori resistance, political thinking, and expressions of sovereignty?²⁹

Puhīwahine in 20th Century Print: Publishing the Oriori

There are many possible reasons to explain the oriori's absence in historical accounts of nineteenth century violence.³⁰ Among New Zealand historians of land invasion, the omission might be explained by the way that Pei Te Hurinui Jones' framed the oriori in the 1960s. Te Hurinui Jones, who lived from 1898 until 1976, was a prolific scholar, writer, translator, theorist, and political leader of Ngāti Maniapoto.³¹ In the late 1950s and early 1960s he published a series of biographical articles, chronicling Puhīwahine's life and compositions. In 1961 he published the articles as a manuscript, *Puhīwahine: Maori Poetess*. The oriori was among the last of the compositions to feature in the biography, reflecting the fact that it was one of Puhīwahine's later compositions. When Jones introduced the waiata he told his readers that an older Puhīwahine, 'happy in the thought that she was a grandmother

²⁹ It should be noted that Jones' essays about Puhīwahine are well-known and sometimes evoked as an example of Māori biographies centered on a wahine: see for example Paterson and Wanhalla, *He Reo Wahine*, 2017 p. 14.

³⁰ One possibility is that the oriori was only passed down within Puhīwahine's immediate whānau. At the level of my own marae the oriori is not well-known: either it was not handed down among our whānau or it was not passed down widely, though research within my own whānau is ongoing.

³¹ For more on Pei Te Hurinui Jones see Ariana Paul, Tama Potaka and Dr. Hēmi Whaanga, 'Note from the editors', in the 2013 print of Jones' twentieth century writings, Pei Te Hurinui Jones, *Te Tuhi Mārei-kura: A Treasury of Sacred Writings*, Hamilton, Aka and Associates, 2013.

to be, decided to compose a song'.³² Then, in the explanatory notes that accompany the oriori, Jones suggested that Puhīwahine's use of the term 'koata kaihe' and her description of the land as being 'lost to us' signalled that she, 'in common with others of the time, had become reconciled to a way of life in which Māori would play the lesser part'.³³ While Jones framed some of Puhīwahine's other compositions as responses to violence and land confiscation, he framed the oriori as a lullaby—a common translation for the word 'oriori', but one that elides the significance of an oriori as a source rich with whakapapa and direction.³⁴

Throughout the twentieth century Jones' commitment to collecting, preserving, and publishing tūpuna texts produced an archive of possibilities for future generations. The oriori is only accessible to me because Jones included it in his series of biographical articles on Puhīwahine's life and compositions. However, while Jones' twentieth century scholarship is a taonga in its own right, his framing of Puhīwahine as 'reconciled to a [new] way of life' deserves twenty-first century re-consideration.

Since Jones published his essays in the late 1950s and early 1960s, decades of wāhine Māori scholars have argued for the importance of attending to wāhine histories, philosophies, compositions, and atua.³⁵ In order for wāhine words to stand as sources of Māori intellectual

³² Jones, 'Grandmother', p. 17.

³³ Jones, 'Grandmother', p. 64.

³⁴ Paraone Gloyne critiques the nineteenth century settler understanding of oriori as 'lullabies' in Gloyne, 'Oriiori', *E-Tangata*.

³⁵ See as select examples, Te Awēkotuku, *Mana Wahine Māori*, 1991; Patricia Grace and Robyn Kahukiwa, *Wāhine Toa: Women of Maori Myth*, Auckland, Collins Press, 1984; Aroha Yates-Smith, *Hine! E Hine!: Rediscovering the Feminine in Maori Spirituality*, PhD

theory, we need to take seriously the ability of twenty first century wāhine Māori researchers to hear tūpuna texts in ways that may defy existing interpretations. This is especially important given that Jones' reading of Puhiwahine's waiata was shaped by mid-twentieth century assumptions about gender. While Jones recognised many of Puhiwahine's compositions as a response to the events of the nineteenth century—namely, the invasion of whenua Māori—he also placed heavy emphasis on Puhiwahine as a 'captivating, romantic' figure, sometimes referring to her as a 'coquette'.³⁶ The term 'coquette' was not an insult: Puhiwahine specifically composed at least one waiata that playfully catalogued 'her love affairs and her many flirtations'.³⁷ But because Jones frequently focused on Puhiwahine's 'affairs' and romantic relationships, the essays can obscure the political and philosophical potential of Puhiwahine's words, especially in waiata that are not explicitly about political conflict.

The question is how we might listen to Puhiwahine's oriori—through the temporal distance of decades and centuries, and the mediating effect of mid-twentieth century interpretations—in ways that honour the oriori's desire to be heard.³⁸ This is an especially important question

Thesis, University of Waikato, 1998; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Māori Women: Discourses, Projects and Mana Wahine', *Women and Education in Aotearoa* 2 (1992), 33 – 51; Aroha Mead, 'Sacred Balance', *He Pukenga Kōrero: A Journal of Māori Studies* 3, 2 (1998), pp. 22-27. See also, Paterson and Wanhalla, *He Reo Wahine*, 2017; Angela Ballara, 'Wāhine rangatira: Māori women of rank and their role in the women's Kotahitanga movement of the 1890s', *New Zealand Journal of History* 27, 2 (1993), pp. 127-39.

³⁶ Pei Te Hurinui Jones, 'Puhiwahine: Māori Poetess', *Te Ao Hou* (September 1959), p. 11.

³⁷ Jones, 'Māori Poetess', p. 10.

³⁸ For my earlier work on listening to women's narratives in the absence of the original aural records see, Sam Prendergast, 'Listening for Women's Narratives in the Harvard Project Archive', *History Workshop Journal* 86 (2018), pp. 205-203.

in the case of waiata that have not been handed down to the descendants of the places and people named in the composition. In my whānau, the oriori is not well-known, even though it explicitly names our places and tūpuna.³⁹ At least for now, we are reliant on Jones' published version of the waiata. In the section that follows, I reflect on my own process of learning to 'listen' to the oriori despite the distance of time and the absence of aurality. Throughout, I insist on the importance of engaging with ancestral kupu (words) despite limitations.

Listening to Puhiwahine in the Twenty-First Century

To ask how we might engage with Puhiwahine's nineteenth century words as a rich site of theory, critique, and guidance, I begin with a story. I did not know Puhiwahine's name growing up. Her waiata were not familiar, and I did not know her relationship to our hapū, Ngāti Paretekawa. In an ideal world, children learn oriori as songs passed down through whānau. In reality, I first read Puhiwahine's oriori in 2021 as a student in a te reo Māori immersion class. We were preparing kōrero ā-waha (oral presentations) about whakataukī (proverbs), and I was searching the online archives of *Te Ao Hou* for mentions of our whenua (land) and history. In March and April 1864 my tūpuna, Raureti Paiaka, Raureti Te Huia, and Te Huia Raureti—three generations of tāne (men)—stood alongside our whanaunga (relatives) at Ō-rākau to defend the whenua from further British encroachment: these were the final moments of the 'Waikato invasion'.⁴⁰ Like many of my cousins, I never heard about Ō-rākau as a child. I only learned about the violence later, as a young adult returning to my whenua after years spent living away from Aotearoa. Puhiwahine's words gripped me because her instructions read like foresight. How, I wondered, did this nineteenth century ancestor know what so many Māori would experience in the centuries that followed? When

³⁹ In the final verse Puhiwahine referred to Rewi Maniapoto and his cousins, rangatira of Ngāti Paretekawa. Jones, 'Grandmother', p. 18.

⁴⁰ Roa et al., 'Ō-rākau'.

Puhiwahine imagined her mokopuna walking towards their kuia and koroua and being greeted as strangers—‘whose children are these, coming our way’—she painted a scene that is familiar to many modern Māori.⁴¹ But instead of dwelling in the moment, or grieving it as an irreparable loss, she followed the scene with a direction: answer your kaumātua, tell them where you are going, tell them who you are, return to your ū-kai-pō (homeland), and be known.

In a recent conversation with Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Maniapoto historian, Nēpia Mahuika, Mahuika reflected on the importance of listening to mōteatea and oriori with the totality of our bodies—grounding ourselves in relation to the taiao, the natural world that connects oriori and mōteatea to whenua, awa, maunga, moana, and ngahere.⁴² When I learned about Puhiwahine’s oriori in 2021, I read the kupu as a literal instruction to return to my ancestral places: the maunga of Tongariro that connects my whānau to Ngāti Tūwharetoa, and the whenua of Rangiaowhia and Ō-rākau, where my tūpuna stood to protect our lands. Whenua is whakapapa in Puhiwahine’s oriori: her mokopuna tell their elders, ‘kātahi ka hoki mai te ewe ki te rauru...’, ‘only now has the placenta returned to the umbilical cord’, a return to the earth as ancestor. Returning to the whenua is important. But if we are thinking expansively about what it means to listen to oriori with our bodies—that is, from an embodied relationship to the worlds that our tūpuna described—then we might also ask what it means to listen to Puhiwahine’s oriori from the embodied experience of uri (descendants) living in a future world that Puhiwahine foresaw. More specifically, we can ask what it means to listen to oriori in the wake of nineteenth century imperialism.

⁴¹ Māori experiences of ‘disconnection’ are well-chronicled in twenty-first century news articles.

⁴² Conversation with Nēpia Mahuika, July 2023.

How might we listen to Puhiwahine's oriori by locating ourselves in the world she describes—that is, a world where the norms of Māori relationality are disfigured by colonial invasion? When I use the term 'disfigured' I am drawing on the vast scholarship that critiques colonialism as a *productive* force, rather than simply an eliminatory force.⁴³ In this context, the word productive does not have positive connotations. Instead, to understand colonialism as 'productive' is to understand it as a structure that alters the landscapes of our lives by deforming the land, rupturing kinships, and creating new social structures that reconfigure Indigenous worlds.⁴⁴ In his twentieth century work on the violence of colonialism, Frantz Fanon argued that colonialism's harm was not just located in the presence of foreign invaders, but in the more insidious ways that outsider understandings of land, relations, and

⁴³ See as select examples, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015; Ani Mikaere, *Colonising Myths Māori Realities: He rukuruku whakaaro*, Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2011; Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

⁴⁴ Puwahine is not the only Indigenous woman to reflect on the disfiguring impact of settler colonialism. See as other examples, Rachel Buchanan, 'The dementia wing of history', in *Cultural Studies*, 13, 1 (2007), pp. 173-186; Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Belonging to Country: Racialising Space and Resistance on Queensland's Transnational Margins, 1880-1900', *Australian Historical Studies* 43 (2012); J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics Of Sovereignty and Indigeneity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Haunani Kay Trask described the disfiguring impact of settler occupation on her home islands of Hawai'i in her famous essay, 'From a Native Daughter,' in *From a Native Daughter*, pp. 113-122. See for more Sam Iti Prendergast, Hineitimoana Greensill, Wanda Ieremia, and Mere Taito, 'He wahine māia, he wahine toa: A Gathering of Reflections on the Work of Haunani-Kay Trask', *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 46, 1 (2023), pp. 55-72.

social order come to shape life for Indigenous peoples.⁴⁵ Colonisation does not simply destroy Indigenous worlds, it alters them over time, until the structures produced by colonialism are so deeply rooted that they come to feel normal.

Puhiwahine's oriori, composed half a century before Fanon was born, provides imagery for this disfiguring impact of settler colonial nation-building: it is to be unknown on your own land; it is to return to your whenua and find that you are standing on a highway. When I returned to Ō-rākau in 2022, playing Puhiwahine's kupu over in my head, I wondered what she would make of the whenua in its twenty-first century state: tarmac, obelisks, and farmlands punched into the land. In the 2020s Ō-rākau is a heavily commemorated site—both in terms of literal ceremonies and in terms of historical research.⁴⁶ Ō-rākau marked the 'final battle' of the Waikato invasion, concluding in April 1864. And it was the site where Rewi Manga Maniapoto famously told British troops, 'ka whawhai tonu mātou, ake, ake ake', we will fight on forever and ever.⁴⁷ In ongoing work on Ō-rākau, I ask how national efforts to

⁴⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox, New York, Grove Press, 1963, pp. 1-52.

⁴⁶ For more on early twentieth century commemoration of Ō-rākau see Charlotte MacDonald, 'The First World War and the Making of Colonial Memory', *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 33, 2 (2015), pp. 15-37. See also Joanna Kidman, Vincent O'Malley, Liana MacDonald, Tom Roa, Keziah Willis eds., *Fragments from a Contested Past: Remembrance, denial and New Zealand history*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2022; Vincent O'Malley, "'Recording the Incident with a Monument": The Waikato War in Historical Memory', *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 19 (2015), pp. 79-97; Vincent O'Malley, *New Zealand Wars*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2019.

⁴⁷ Roa et al., *Ō-rākau* (2022). 'Ka whawhai tonu' has long served as a statement of political sovereignty for Aotearoa activists and Māori theorists. See Ranginui Walker, *Ka whawhai tonu mātou: Struggle without end* (Auckland, Penguin: 1990); and Melani Anae, *The Platform: The radical legacy of the Polynesian Panthers* (Wellington: Bridget Williams

commemorate the so-called ‘battle’ have altered the meaning of Maniapoto’s words. In the early twentieth century, settlers in the Waipā framed the word ‘whawhai’ as an expression of Māori bravery—a warrior’s willingness to die for the land.⁴⁸ But Maniapoto’s words can also be understood as an expression of aroha—a future-oriented statement of sovereignty directed to the descendants of our hapū and iwi. When Puhīwahine directed her mokopuna back to Ō-rākau, she did not know how the many layers of historicisation and commemoration would re-make the history of the land, but she understood that her grandchildren’s journey would be shaped by the structures of colonial nation-building. Listening to the oriori requires more than a literal return: it requires an openness to listening for the dangers Puhīwahine described in her vision of a world changed by imperial violence.

Interpretative ‘authority’: rangatahi readings of oriori

Remaining open to the many possible meanings of Puhīwahine’s kupu is an important part of recognising the oriori as a source of theory. Te ao Māori is not singular. Our tūpuna speak to us in different ways at different times: we hear their words in the context of our own lives.

Orioi, in particular, were intended to be heard at multiple registers—by infants, children, and

Books, 2020). There is some debate regarding who uttered the words ‘ka whawhai tonu’ and ‘ake, ake, ake’.

⁴⁸ This is evident in documents surrounding the 1914 commemoration of the battle at Ō-rākau, led by Waipā settlers. See for example, ‘The Fruit of Orakau’, *New Zealand Herald* (31 March 1914), p. 6. The writer emphasised the bravery and heroism of ‘Rewi and his tribesmen’ in fighting for the whenua despite the inevitability of colonial invasion. He also noted that the ‘courage of the Māori will not save him from extinction.’ In 1914 settlers extended an invitation to Māori in the region ‘to fittingly celebrate the great fight at Ō-rākau, and more particularly the fifty years of peace we have all enjoyed since.’ *Manawatu Herald* 3 March 1914, p. 2. O’Malley, ‘Recording the Incident.’

adults.⁴⁹ And yet one of the difficulties in engaging with oriori like Puhīwahine’s is a prevailing uncertainty about who has the authority to interpret tūpuna texts. In the couple of years I have spent working with the oriori—a blip in the more than one hundred and fifty year lifetime of this waiata—I have sometimes doubted my own authority to read, write, and talk about Puhīwahine’s words, even as I have let her kupu guide me back to my whenua and whanaunga (land and kin). In 2022, in a casual conversation with an east coast man I had only just met, I mentioned Puhīwahine’s oriori and its connection to my own tūpuna. The man, a stranger, listened for a minute, told me to leave mōteatea for the elders, and then returned the conversation to his own research. Ten years ago I would have taken the man’s advice: in some ways, he has a point. As a rangatahi researcher, a younger researcher with living kaumātua, there are real limitations to my interpretative authority, and to my own knowledge. When I took the oriori to my uncle, an expert in the mōteatea of our hapū and marae, he immediately heard our history in the kupu—telling me about our connections to Ngāti Tūwharetoa, and connecting Puhīwahine’s maunga to the tūpuna maunga (ancestral mountains) that surround our marae. My uncle, seeing the oriori for the first time, understood the words in a register that I cannot access because I have not lived his life.⁵⁰

There are obvious differences in the ways that a rangatahi (youth) and a kaumātua (elder) might understand the words. But rather than having these understandings compete, I want to suggest that we can live with a multiplicity of meanings and readings—perhaps even allowing them to shape each other. If we are to understand tūpuna words as living taonga then we have to sit with the reality that our readings and understandings might differ.

⁴⁹ Gloyne, ‘Oriori’.

⁵⁰ Conversation with anonymised kaumātua, Mangatoatoa pā, April 2023.

As relational texts—words of guidance passed down from elders to children—oriori call out for rangatahi readings, shaped by our relationships with te taiao and with whānau. As Aroha Harris reminds us in her oral history work with her nana, a researcher’s relationship to people and place shape how we read and interpret the past.⁵¹ In my ongoing work with Puhīwahine’s oriori, I am listening to my pakeke and kaumātua as they read and interpret the words for the first time. As my whānau reads, everyone focuses in on different kupu (words). For one uncle, the oriori took him to stories of our whakapapa. For another, the oriori raised questions for rangatahi trying to come home. For another, the oriori was a reminder of our tūpuna at Ō-rākau. It ought to go without saying that Māori interpretations of tūpuna words are not singular, homogenous, or stagnant.

In the same way that physical taonga live through their relationships with uri (descendants), taonga like Puhīwahine’s oriori come alive anew through intergenerational acts of listening.⁵² The word ‘listening’ here does not necessarily refer to the literal act of hearing the oriori sung as a waiata. Instead, to listen is to receive the kupu (words) in the context of our own relationships to the places, peoples, and histories contained in the oriori.⁵³ Others can and will understand the kupu (words) differently. My reading is shaped by my position as a rangatahi of my marae and hapū, where ‘rangatahi’ does not refer to biological youth so much as it refers to the relationship I have to my living pakeke and kaumātua. There is a specific type of interpretative power rooted in rangatahitanga (youth). The power does not

⁵¹ Aroha Harris, ‘History with nana’, in Chris Andersen and Jean O’Brien eds., *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies*. London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 128-134: 129.

⁵² Gloyne, ‘Orioi.’

⁵³ For more on the act of listening for ancestors see Harris, ‘History with nana,’ 2016; Noelani Arista, ‘Listening to Leoiki: engaging sources in Hawaiian history’, *Biography* 32.1 (2009), pp. 66-73.

come from expertise, but from an openness, ideally, to receiving guidance.⁵⁴ In the following section, I offer a reading of Puhiwahine’s oriori shaped by my position as an uri of Ngāti Paretekawa, and as a wahine in the constant process of returning to whenua, tūpuna, and whakapapa.

Locating the oriori: Te Ao Hou, 1960

Puhiwahine’s oriori was one of many waiata she composed throughout her lifetime. According to Jones, the mid-twentieth century series of *Te Ao Hou* essays contained all of Puhiwahine’s songs ‘so far as we have been able to trace’.⁵⁵ Other than *Ka eke ki Wairaka*, the well-known mōteatea included in Apirana Ngata’s *Ngā Mōteatea vol 1*, none of the other waiata had previously been published. In the archives surrounding Jones’ work on Puhiwahine, held at the University of Waikato, there is nothing to explain exactly how Jones learned about the oriori or the other waiata included in the collection. The most likely explanation is that the waiata were passed down to him by Puhiwahine’s whānau, who he had known since childhood.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ There is a whakataukī that describes the role of rangatahi in relation to elders: Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi, when the old net is broken, the new net goes fishing—or, more poetically, when the worn out fishing net lies in a heap, the rangatahi will take its place. For a discussion of this whakataukī in relation to Māori identity and rangatahi, see Tahu Kukutai and Melinda Webber, ‘Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi: Māori identities in the twenty-first century’, in A. Bell, V. Elizabeth, T. McIntosh, & M. Wynyard (Eds.), *A Land of Milk and Honey? Making Sense of Aotearoa New Zealand*. Auckland: Auckland University Press. 71-82. In her 2016 chapter, ‘*Te Ao Hou: Te Pataka*’, Te Punga Somerville notes that *Te Ao Hou* adopted this whakataukī as one of four metaphors to describe the publication’s role in te ao Māori.

⁵⁵ Jones, ‘Grandmother’, p. 64.

⁵⁶ As a child, Jones lived in the same town as one of Puhiwahine’s sons, George, and he knew Puhiwahine’s mokopuna. In the third installment of his *Te Ao Hou* series, Jones recalled that

Partly because of *Ka eke ki Wairaka*—a famous waiata aroha (love song)—scholars have tended to focus on Puhiwahine as a romantic figure, sometimes overlooking the zeal of her political critique.⁵⁷ In the earlier part of the nineteenth century Puhiwahine’s waiata narrated her own relationships and observations within te ao Māori, the Māori world. Settlers did not feature in the early compositions. But throughout the mid to late nineteenth century Puhiwahine composed multiple mōteatea critiquing colonial violence and the impacts of settler land theft.⁵⁸ In the 1880s, Puhiwahine was an active attendee at the Māori Land Court hearings. In Jones’ biographical work he describes an incident in 1885, when Puhiwahine attended a hearing at the land court in Otorohanga and expressed her disappointment at the behavior of her whaunanga (relatives). Before she returned home to her Ngāti Tūwharetoa whenua, Puhiwahine delivered a waiata that Jones described as ‘a song about land affairs’. In the waiata Puhiwahine criticised her male whanaunga for arguing over the land and treating it as a possession. The opening verse ends with a drawn out question: ‘Kāore i ara i ako ai ki te

he went to school with Puhiwahine’s grandchild, Teehi, in Ongarue. Towards the end of the Puhiwahine essays he mentions a conversation with Puhiwahine’s grandchild, Te Keehi, who shared ‘the fragment of a song’ lamenting colonial land greed: Jones, *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 20.

⁵⁷ *Ka eke ki Wairaka* is often sung at pōwhiri and other gatherings. In Margaret Orbell’s 1980s (and possibly early 1990s) research notes on waiata Māori, held at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, Orbell has annotated copies of Puhiwahine’s compositions, drawing on Pei Te Hurinui Jones’ *Puhiwahine* manuscript. There is only one annotation on the oriori, where Orbell noted Puhiwahine’s reference to writing, ‘Me tuhituhi atu ki te reta pukapuka,’ ‘Let it be written down in the letter book’: ‘Orbell, Margaret Rose, 1934-2006: Collection’ in the “Papers relating to Māori waiata” Manuscript Collection, Turnbull Library. For brief discussion of Puhiwahine as a political theorist, see Simon, ‘Ngā Whakaaro a Puhiwahine’.

⁵⁸ *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 19.

mahi Kawana’, ‘Will you never learn the ways of the governor?’ Towards the end Puhiwahine reprimands the ‘tama’, boys, for ‘te he o tō mahi’, ‘the wrongs of your actions’.⁵⁹

For Puhiwahine, by then an elder, the 1880s land court had entangled her relatives in the settler logics of land, leading Māori political leaders to ‘whaiwhai ki te reti’, ‘chase after rent’.⁶⁰ Recalling the words of her own elders, Puhiwahine urged her relatives to, ‘Nohoia, nohoia’. Jones translated the words to mean ‘settle, settle (upon the land)’, but they can also be translated more broadly as a call to stay, live upon, and know the whenua as an ancestor. When Puhiwahine called upon her whanaunga to ‘noho’, she was calling for not only a physical return to place, but a return to understanding the land as a relation.

Throughout the mid-late nineteenth century Puhiwahine’s waiata expressed both aroha for the whenua and anger at the changes wrought by colonial governance. In the final section of Jones’ biographical essays he included one final ‘fragment of a song’ in which Puhiwahine mourned for the land.⁶¹ Jones learned the kupu (words) from Te Keehi, Puhiwahine’s granddaughter. According to Jones, Te Keehi provided the kupu with the disclaimer that Puhiwahine ‘had suffered from some mental illness’ in her later life and composed the fourteen line fragment ‘because of this illness’. Jones was unsure of this interpretation. In the explanatory notes he suggested, ‘With all due respect to Te Keehi ... that these lines would fit in better with the Song About Land Affairs’.⁶² In the fragment, Puhiwahine describes herself standing and weeping as she looks towards the sky, ‘ki te ao rere mai / I aku mātua’, to the

⁵⁹ *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 19.

⁶⁰ *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 19.

⁶¹ Jones, *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 64.

⁶² Jones, *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 64.

‘cloud floating hither / from (the abode of) my elders’.⁶³ The verse then turns to address an unidentified ‘koe’, ‘you’. ‘What is it that I did to you’, Puhiwahine asks, ‘that made the lead fly towards my belly?’ For you, she continues, ‘He kai te whenua / Te pau i a koe’, ‘the land is a food / you have not yet fully consumed’.

Ngau atu rā koe	Take a bite
Ki te puke i Tararua	From the peak of Tararua
Kia ngata ai hoki tō puku	To satisfy your stomach
Kia ora ai hoki koe	So that you may live. ⁶⁴

Intentionally or not, the words echo a karakia that Puhwahine may have known. In Te Rangi Hiroa’s *The Coming of the Māori* he includes part of a karakia intended to provide relief from stomach pain. The words read, ‘he aha rā te kai / I haere ki roro, ki tō puku / Tutu ai / ngangana ai’. ‘What was the food / that entered your stomach / causing trouble, causing disturbance’.⁶⁵ In Puhiwahine’s fragment, whenua satisfied the puku (stomach) of the settler, so that the colony might survive. Te Keehi was born in the 1870s and lived until 1966.⁶⁶ Her explanation of Puhiwahine as ‘mentally ill’ exists in the context of the mid-twentieth century, when there was a tendency to read wāhine rage as wāhine madness.⁶⁷ From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, Puhiwahine’s rhetorical demand that the unidentified ‘you’ should bite off the top of her maunga (mountain) reads more like a critique of land greed than

⁶³ Jones, *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 64.

⁶⁴ Jones, *Te Ao Hou* (June 1960), p. 64.

⁶⁵ Te Rangi Hiroa, *The Coming of the Māori*, Māori Purposes Fund Board, 1949, p. 492.

⁶⁶ ‘Mrs Te Keehi Kati’, *Te Ao Hou* (June 1966), p. 3.

⁶⁷ The literature is extensive. See Ani Mikaere, ‘Maori Women: Caught in the contradictions of a colonised reality’, *Waikato Law Review* 2 (1994).

a sign of insanity. In the mid-late nineteenth century Puhiwahine was concerned with settler consumption of the whenua, and she expressed this concern across multiple waiata. She was an explicitly political composer, and the oriori exists within the context of Puhiwahine's political consciousness.

Returning to the Oriori

So far, my reading of the oriori has focused in on a single verse—the moment when Puhiwahine instructs her mokopuna to return to their elders in the rohe (region) of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and announce their journey to the lands of Ō-rākau and Rangiaowhia. I emphasize this verse because it contains the most direct example of Puhiwahine's critique. But her engagement with colonial violence begins much earlier in the waiata, framing the return to land in the broader context of death, change, and loss.

In the first verse of the oriori, Puhiwahine opens with a moment of genealogical doubt. After welcoming her mokopuna into te ao marama (the world of the living and of light), she poses a question: 'E kore pea kōrua e rite hei rīwhi..'. In Jones' translation the words read like a lament. 'Alas', he writes, 'I doubt you two will be deserving heirs of mine, after I am gone'.⁶⁸ There are many ways to read the kupu (word) 'rite', which Jones translated to mean 'deserving'.⁶⁹ One alternate meaning is 'to be ready' or 'prepared', in which case the line reads, 'maybe you will not be ready to take my place', or 'perhaps you will not be prepared to

⁶⁸ Jones' translation was shaped by his familiarity with Shakespearean literature. Bruce Biggs, 'Jones, Pei Te Hurinui', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, first published in 1998. Te Ara: the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

⁶⁹ In a newspaper article published in 1899, the kupu 'rite' was used in relation to the word 'rīwhi' (heir) to describe an individual's readiness to succeed another: 'Meiha Mea', *Jubilee: Te Tiupiri* (3 August 1899), p. 8.

succeed me’. When I read the oriori for the first time I passed over this line, misreading it, perhaps, as the timeless concern of a grandmother who wonders whether her mokopuna will ever be able to carry on her work. But as the oriori progresses, the meaning of the words come into focus. In the line that follows, Puhiwahine describes herself as a faded person, ‘kua kore tēnei’, ‘I am nothing’, ‘kua iti noa iho’, ‘just an insignificant thing’. Perhaps Puhiwahine was referring to her eventual death, here, rather than reflecting on her status as ‘kore’, ‘nothing’. However, in the mournful line that follows—‘kua ngaro te tangata, e’, which Jones translated to read ‘and men (who were men) have passed away’—Puhiwahine tells her mokopuna that they are entering a time and place shaped by loss. Together, the opening lines welcome the children into a world they may not be prepared to navigate, where their grandmother had been rendered a faded thing, and so many had passed away.

The opening verse of the oriori nods to Puhiwahine’s concern about the future her descendants will inhabit. Her expression of doubt, captured in the word ‘pea’ (maybe, perhaps), is unusual. It does not appear in her other compositions, and in the context of the oriori it introduces an undertone of uncertainty. In the final line of the verse, ‘kua ngaro te tangata e...’ Puhiwahine introduces her mokopuna to a world that reeled with loss and dispossession, emphasised with the word ‘ngaro’. In the nineteenth century, as in the twenty-first, ‘ngaro’ had multiple meanings.⁷⁰ In her work on wāhine writing, Norman writes that the kupu (word) can mean ‘lost to sight, lost to the tribe, dislocated from that tribe, or even death itself’.⁷¹ During Puhiwahine’s lifetime Māori composers and writers also used the term to

⁷⁰ For discussion of the word ‘ngaro’ and its meanings, see Roa and Kidman, ‘Te Waha Ngū: sitting with the silence’ (2022). Throughout, Roa critiques the overly simplistic translation of ‘ngaro’ into the English word ‘lost’, acknowledging that ngaro can refer also to the unseen.

⁷¹ Norman, ‘He aha te mea’, p. 16.

mean ‘extinct’, as in the phrase, ‘ka ngaro, i te ngaro a te Moa’, roughly translated to mean, it will vanish as the moa bird has vanished.⁷² In the context of the oriori as a whole, the words ‘kua ngaro te tangata’ tell us about the future that Puhiwahine’s descendants would inhabit. ‘Perhaps’, Puhiwahine told her grandchildren, ‘you will not be ready to inherit’ a world where your grandmother has become ‘iti noa iho’, ‘a diminished thing’, and so many have departed, ‘kua ngaro’.

Jones did not explain Puhiwahine’s use of the word ‘ngaro’, but the term appears twice more throughout the oriori. In the second verse Puhiwahine directs her mokopuna on a haerenga (journey), beginning with a direction: ‘Hohoro te korikori, tū ake ka haere’, ‘Hasten to move, arise and be on the way!’ The children travel through their ancestral places until Puhiwahine directs their gaze towards ‘ngā kūrae rā’, ‘the headlands in the distance’. There they will see Pūkawa.⁷³ In the final line of the verse Puhiwahine laments, ‘He tanumitanga waka nō te iwi kua ngaro, i ...’ Jones translated this line creatively, using it to describe the waters by Pūkawa as, ‘The busy canoe inlet of departed tribes, ah, me’.⁷⁴ An alternate translation might read, ‘The departing waka of those who have died’. Given the historical context, the word ‘ngaro’ might have been a nod towards the recent events of invasion. When rangatira gathered at Pūkawa to name a Māori king in 1857, they could not have foreseen the scale of devastation that would follow in the decades to come as colonial troops invaded the whenua. In the first verse, ‘kua ngaro te tangata’, the people are lost. In the second, ‘kua ngaro te iwi’,

⁷² The moa is an extinct bird. The well-known saying is recorded in 1800s newspapers. See for example, ‘He moa pea, he aha ranei’, *Haeata* (1 July 1861), p. 4.

⁷³ In 1856 rangatira Māori gathered at Pūkawa and proposed Pōtatau Te Wherowhero as the first Māori king.

⁷⁴ Jones, ‘Grandmother’, p. 18.

the iwi are lost. And in the third verse, discussed already in the opening to this article, ‘ka ngaro te motu nei’, the island or the land is lost at the hands of the Pākehā.

In the first two instances of the kupu, ‘ngaro’, Puhiwahine uses the word to describe the world to her mokopuna. In the third and final use of the term, Puhiwahine places the kupu on the lips of her descendants. As you approach your elders, she instructs her grandchildren, tell them you are ‘koata kaihe’, made so by the Pākehā, ‘nāna nei i huna iho ka ngaro te motu nei’, ‘they who destroyed the land and made it lost to us’.⁷⁵ It is impossible to know with any certainty how Puhiwahine imagined twenty-first century Māori would understand this line, but when I read the word ‘koata kaihe’ for the first time, I recognised humour in Puhiwahine’s decision to describe her own grandchildren with the colonial language of caste. Puhiwahine was known for playing with the English language. In other waiata and mōteatea she included loanwords and Pākehā concepts that located her and her contemporaries in the context of colonisation. She was a sharply humorous and playful composer.

While Jones understood Puhiwahine’s use of the term ‘koata kaihe’ as a sign of resignation, we could also read it as a sign of defiance and ridicule. There is an accusatory tone to the words ‘koata kaihe’. Tell your elders that you are ‘koata kaihe’ *made so by* the Pākehā. The line is laden with critique, but it also rings with humor. At the time of composing her oriori Puhiwahine was not a victim to te ao Pākehā, the Pākehā world. In very literal terms, the Pākehā man who ‘made’ her mokopuna ‘koata kaihe’ was not an anonymous settler but her husband, John Gotty, who she mourned for years when he died in the late 1800s.⁷⁶ In broader

⁷⁵ This is Jones’ translation: Jones, ‘Grandmother’, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Jones was especially interested in John Gotty’s supposed relationship to the German poet Goethe. Pei Te Hurinui Jones, ‘Puhiwahine: Māori Poetess: Epilogue’, *Te Ao Hou* (March

political terms, the Pākehā who rendered her grandchildren three-quarter castes were the Pākehā who sought political re-organisation of the land.⁷⁷ In te ao Māori, whakapapa cannot be rendered partial. No amount of ‘intermarriage’ can disrupt the tether that connects you to tūpuna, including to whenua.⁷⁸ In the oriori, the term ‘koata kaihe’ appears, but it holds no organisational power. Instead, by whakapapa, the children return to the land and become known. Puhīwahine diminished the organisational power of the term ‘koata kaihe’ and re-emphasised the relational power of whakapapa to return her mokopuna to their elders.

Listening for the humor in Puhīwahine’s oriori can help us to engage with her kupu (words) as a form of guidance. Oriori contain literal instructions: return to your tūpuna whenua, be known by the earth. But they also contain philosophical directions. For Puhīwahine, the direction was not simply to return to land but to return to an understanding of the world where whakapapa holds the edge. That is, at least in my reading, she does not simply lament

1961), p. 12. See also Alice Te Punga Somerville, ““Enter the ghost of Goethe”: Comparison and Literary Studies in the Pacific,” *Comparative Literature* 75.3 (2023), pp. 266-282.

⁷⁷ Although it is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that Puhīwahine was, in Jones’ words, ‘well-versed’ in the language and practices of nineteenth century land law: Jones, ‘Grandmother,’ p. 64. In the 1870s Puhīwahine likely understood the association between blood terms, like half-caste, and land law. In the nineteenth century, settlers employed the language of caste as a method for re-organising the land. In the process, they introduced language and logics that contradicted the logics of whakapapa: Iti Prendergast, ‘Mirage Upon the Land,’ 2023. See also, Wanhalla, *Matters Of The Heart*, 2013.

⁷⁸ Though caste labels of course had a bearing on how people experienced the world. See Lachy Paterson, Hāwhekaihe: Māori Voices on the Position of ‘Half-castes’ within Māori Society’, *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 9 (2010): 135–55; Wanhalla, *Matters Of The Heart*, 2013. Sam Iti Prendergast, ‘Blood, DNA, and Māori Belonging,’ (conference presentation, delivered at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference, Hamilton, Waikato, 2019).

the idea that Pākehā have rendered her grandchildren quarter castes and made the land ‘ngaro’, lost. Instead, she ridicules the imagined power of settlers to re-shape the world. Despite the destruction, she tells her descendants, you will tell your elders your whakapapa, you will tell them only now have you returned to your ū-kai-pō, and by this you will return. Puhiwahine’s directions reminded her uri that in order to return to the state of being ‘known’ by our tūpuna, we must return to an understanding of the world as being fundamentally organised by whakapapa.

Conclusion

I have shared Puhiwahine’s oriori in multiple forums over the past three years, sometimes in entirely Indigenous spaces, sometimes in rooms almost entirely devoid of Māori, sometimes alone with whānau, and sometimes in conversations with kaumātua. So far, no one has questioned the authenticity of the oriori, or its significance as a tūpuna text. Occasionally, however, people have balked when I describe the oriori as ‘political’. Importantly, it has never been my own kaumātua or whanaunga who grimace at this reading (at least, not so far). Instead, the discomfort comes from those scholars who wonder about the historical accuracy of insisting that Puhiwahine critiqued ‘settler colonialism’. Nineteenth century Māori did not use the modern-day language that many Indigenous scholars now employ to describe colonial imperialism. Even so, the oriori offers direct insight into the ways that Puhiwahine understood the violence of colonial settlement and its consequences for the future of te ao Māori, the Māori world. The oriori is Puhiwahine’s attempt to understand how land invasion and colonial settlement would re-structure the relations between her uri, their elders, and the land.

In my ongoing work with Puhiwahine’s oriori and other tūpuna works of intellectual theory, I am tracing the methods tūpuna Māori employed to ridicule, belittle, and undermine the

colonial state's claim to organisational power over Māori land and relations. For New Zealand historians, taking Puhiwahine's oriori seriously means moving beyond acknowledging the presence and the importance of nineteenth century Māori writing and compositions, to instead ask how Māori critique, imagination, and theory might unsettle dominant understandings of the past. For Māori more broadly, there are tactics to be learned from the willingness of tūpuna to ridicule colonial logics for understanding and organising the whenua. There is even more to be learned from engaging with the ways our tūpuna imagined pathways out of dispossession. In works of kuia guidance, we find rich theories for negotiating the world.