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# Tātara e maru ana: Renewing Ancestral Connections with the Sacred Rain Cape of Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua

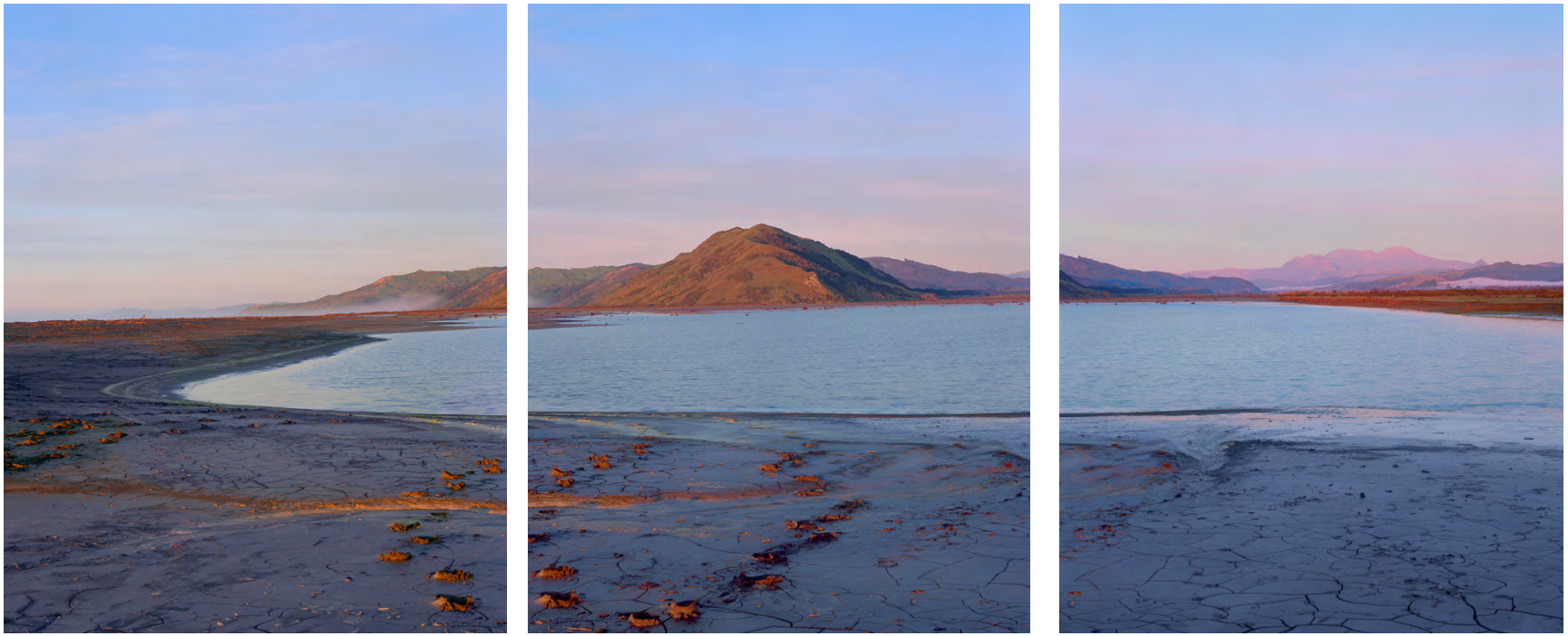

Figure 1. Natalie Robertson, *Tera te haeata e takiri ana mai! Behold the first light of dawn! (Waiapu Ngutu Awa, 7th August 2020)*, triptych, 2020. C-Type photographic prints, each 100 x 79 cm. Courtesy of the artist

**Abstract**

*This photo essay is based on the artist's doctoral research and exhibition* Tātara e Maru Ana—The Sacred Rain Cape of Waiapu*. The PhD thesis interrogated the history of photography in Ngāti Porou to show how lens-based image-making can enact Mātauranga Waiapu: cultural knowledge systems specific to this place and oriented to the restoration of the Waiapu River and the wider taiao or environment. The creative works in the project critically adopt the strategies of landscape photography to activate transformative relationships among iwi and hapū in recognition of the degradation of Te Riu o Waiapu by settler colonial practices of deforestation.*

**Keywords:** *photography, Māori, Mātauranga Waiapu, landscape photography, deforestation, settler colonialism, New Zealand*

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|---|---|
| Ko Hikurangi te maunga | Hikurangi is the mountain |
| Ko Waiapu te awa | Waiapu is the river |
| Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi | Ngāti Porou is the tribe |
| Ko Pōhautea te maunga | Pōhautea is the sentinel hill |
| Ko Takā te awa | Takā is the stream |
| Ko Te Whānau a Pōkai te hapū | Te Whānau a Pōkai is the subtribe |


Figure 2. Natalie Robertson, *Te Riu o Waiapu, Whites Aviation, 1958 / 2020*. Inkjet print on silver gloss paper, 52.5 x 61 cm. Courtesy of the artist

I neherā, i mea atu a Tāmokai o te hapū o Te Aowera ki tōna whanaunga a Kōkere "Hoake tāua ki te Waiapu tātara e maru ana". Ko te whakatauaki nei e whakahuahua ana i te tātara, he momo kākahu i hangaia mā te harakeke, he whakatauaki e pā ana ki te huhua o te wao i te Riu o Waiapu, he wāhi i roto i te Tairāwhiti. Kei roto i ngā kupu o te pātere a Arapeta Awatere e whakaū ana I te kōrero mo te huhua o te takiwā nei te Riu o Waiapu: Kei Waiapu te tainga o te riu o Horouta. Ko te iwi tēnā ko Ngāti Porou, Tātara e maru ana. Ko ngā kupu nei, he kōrero mo te taunga o te waka tapu a Horouta ki Waiapu, i reira i whakangitia hoki te waka. Mai konei, ka timata ko te orokohanga o te iwi nui tonu a Ngāti Porou. E rongonui ana hoki te waka tapu a Horouta mo te haringa mai o te kūmara ki roto i te takiwā o Waiapu. E ai ki a Tā Apirana Ngata:

"...ahakoa te poupou, te pākarukaru, me te hūkerikeri o te rere o te awa o Waiapu ka hua tonu he whenua pai mo te whakatipu kai i ngā tahataha o te awa, ā, ka hua tonu he parehua, he whenua pai mo te whakatū pā. Nā wai rā ka pupū ake te tini me te mano tāngata i reira, nā koia te taketakenga mai o ngā kupu a Tāmokai o te hapū noho waenga parae a Te Aowera, Hoake taua ki Waiapu ki tatara e maru ana."

Nā te whakahuahua o wēnei kupu ka puta te whakairo i a Tāmokai mo te whenua haumaru mo ngā uri whakaheke. Ko te Riu o Waiapu hoki taua whenua haumaru, nā āna kai maha, nā āna puna wai, nā āna whai rawa katoa, me āna tikanga, kawa huhua katoa. Ko te īngoa taketake o Waiapu ko Waiapu Kōkā Huhua, he kōkā nō te tini me te mano, he wahi i noho ai ngā ariki mareikura maha hoki. Heoi, i wēnei rā, nā te whakatopetope ngahere i ngā rau tau kua pahure e raru ai te taiao o te awa. Nō reira, i whakaritea te Runanga Nui o Ngāti Porou me ngā hapū o te Riu o Waiapu I tētahi rautaki mo te whakaoratanga o te awa e kīa nei ko Waiapu Kōkā Huhua. He mahinga tahi hoki i waenganui te Kaunihera o Turanganui a Kiwa me te Manatū Ahuwhenua i runga i te whakairo kotahi mo te orangatonutanga o te whenua, o te awa, me ngā uri. I tōku rongotanga atu mo tēnei rautaki a Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua, i puta mai te whakaaro i au me pēhea te tangata e mōhio i ngā rerekētanga mai ngā rautau ki mua tae rāno ki wēnei rā ina kāore i a rātau he rikoatatanga whakaata? I roto i te 2012 Waiapu River Catchment Study Final Report, i meatia atu ngā hapū i ngā tūmanakotanga mo te taiao, ko te whakamahinga me te kaitiakitanga o ngā puna wai rarowhenua. I meatia hoki ngā pakeke o te takiwā nei e pā ana ki ngā wā o te tuna, arā i te wā i reira ngā tuna i roto i ia puna wai, ko te mahi a te tuna ko te whakapai i te puna wai. Ko aku mahi i te taha o toku hapū o Te Whānau a Pōkai i Tikapa Marae ko te tohu i ngā puna wai Māori, me ngā wāhi whai take, me te rikoatangia a ataata nei i te āhua o wēnei wāhi mā te whakamahi i ngā kōrero tukuiho me ngā tuhinga a te kōti whenua. Ko wēnei whakaahuatanga me ngā whakaaturanga katoa he whakautu mo te rautaki Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua.

E pēhea ai tātau rapa i te tūmanakotanga me māriutanga roto i ngā parekuratanga nui? Nā te rahi o te horowhenua i Waiapu Awa, e kore e tutuki ai te mahi whakaora i te awa i roto i te tipuranga kotahi, engari i roto i ngā tipuranga maha pea e taea te tutuki. Heoi, e taea pea te whakaora i ngā puna wai Māori me ngā kōawaawa i roto i te hā-awa i te wā iti noa. Ka tipu mai te hihiritanga me te manawanui i roto i au i roto i ngā kōrero a ōku pakeke e pā ana ki ngā tikanga o te whakamahi i ngā puna wai Māori. He mea nui te tirotiro haere i ngā wāhi whai take e whai pānga ana ki te wai no te mea ka whakaatutia te mātauranga-ā-iwi a ngā tīpuna mo te taiao, mo ngā tikanga o ngā wāhi-ā-iwi. Ko te tieki me te manaaki i te wai te hua mo te huri atu ki tēnei momo āhua whakaaro.

Nā te tūmanako nui, i kitea e au i tētahi reo whai āramatanga taketake ake ki te Tairāwhiti, he reo e whai panga ana te haeata o te rā. Ko te īngoa o Porourangi Arikinui tētahi o

ngā tauira o tēnei reo taketake, i whānau mai a ia i roto i te ata wherowhero, ā, ka tapaina ko tōna īngoa tūturu ko Porou-ariki Mata-tara-a-whare, te tuhimareikura o Rauru. Ko wēnei korero mo te rā me mārama he kōrero tuku iho no mātau. Koia nei aku whakaaro mo te tango whakaahua. Koia nei tētahi o ngā whiti ō roto i tētahi o ngā haka taparahi i roto i te Tairāwhiti a Kura Tiwaka Taua, ko wētahi o ngā kupu i tangohia mai tētahi oriori mo te waka tapu o Tākitimu e whitu rau te tawhito. I roto i ngā kupu a Ngāti Porou, nā te kupu 'te haeata' ka whakamōhiotia te tino whai pānga o te ata hāpara me ana hīhī e pā atu ana ki te Maunga Tapu a Hikurangi. Koia nei te kitenga i arahi atu i ngā whakaahua o te ata. Ka whiti te rā i waenga nui te ngutu awa o Waiapu kia taea atu ōna hihī ki te taumata o Hikurangi, e rua noa iho ngā wā ka kitea whānuitia ngā hihi o te rā i runga i te mata o te maunga, i te Mei me te takiwā o te Hūrae-Akuhata. I hopungia ngā whakaahua tokotoru me te whakaahua ata wherowhero i te ata o te 6 o Akuhata 2020. I roto i ngā whakaahua tokotoru, he nekenga wā iti kei waenga i ia whakaahua, ā, ko te rā me ōna hihī e pā mai ana i te mata o Hikurangi i te whakaahua taha matau, ko te whakaahua o Pohautea Maunga kei waenganui, ka waiho atu ko te ākau ki te taha mauī. Whakamahia e au te kāmera rīpene Linhof Technika e 5"x4" te matanga mai te tau 1953, he kāmera whai pērō me te uhi i runga i te mataaho. He tukunga pōturi tēnei, ā, ko te nuinga o ngā whakaahua pango me te mā kua whakaahuatia pēnei, i te mea me noho ora tonu te tōrarotanga i roto i ngā rautau kei tua i a tātau.

I roto i tēnei whakaaturanga, ka whakamahi au i ngā whakaahua tawhito o te Riu o Waiapu nā ngā kaiwhakaahua o mua i hopu ki te whakaahua atu i ngā rerekētanga o te taiao me te āhua o te whenua i roto i ngā tau kua hipa. E whakaahuatia ana awau I wēnei rā mo ngā tipuranga o mua, ngā tipuranga o naianei, me ngā uri whakaheke. He hiahia oku te whakamahi i ngā pukenga kei au hei whakatinana atu i te aroha mo te whenua, te awa, te moa, mo te hau kāenga me ngā tāngata e rite nei ki au, te hunga e whakaoratia anō ngā hononga whakapapa. He uri au nā Porourangi rāua ko Hamo te Rangi, ko te whakaihihihi ōku ake hononga ki te whenua me te awa te whainga matua, mā te ako, mā te tipu mai te rekereke ki runga me te taka me te rere ki rō wai.

E whakairingia ko te kōruru mai te whare tīpuna o te marae a Tikapa-a-Hinekōpeka, a Pōkai, i runga ake i te whakaahua o Pohautea Maunga i te taha o te ngutu awa o Waiapu. I te ata o te 6 o Noema 2020, nā te pāpā te Ati Rīkona a Morehu Te Maro (e mōhiotia whānuitia ko Papa Boycie) i whakatapungia, i whakatūwherangia hoki te whakaaturanga

nei. A muri iho, i pōwhiritia mai ngā kaimahi o te Whare Pupuri Tāonga o te Tairāwhiti ki te kite atu i te kōruru katahi anō ka riro i a rātau ki te manaaki me te tieki. Koia nei te kōruru i whakairingia ki runga te whare tipuna o Pokai, he momo whakairo nā te tipuna a Iwirākau, tae rānō ki te tau 2018, i te wā i whakairingia ngā whakairo hou i runga i te whare, nā Lionel Matenga i tā. Kua whakaaengia a Papa Boycie kia whakairingia tēnei kōruru, kia whai wāhi ai ki tēnei whakaaturanga. Tiro whakawaho ana ki te taiao e kitea nei e ia i runga i a Pōkai.

—Natalie Robertson, November 2020

Translation into te reo by Hunaara Waerehu


Figure 3. Natalie Robertson, *Waiapu Ngutu Awa, Whites Aviation, 1951 / 2020*.
Inkjet print on silver gloss paper, 60 x 61 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 4. Natalie Robertson, *A Red-Tipped Dawn—Pōhautea at Waiapu Ngutu Awa (7th August 2020),* 2020. C-Type gloss photographic print, 79 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Centuries ago, Tāmokai of the inland Te Aowera people spoke to his kinsman Kōkere and said: “Hoake tāua ki te Waiapu tātara e maru ana—Let us go to Waiapu, where the rain cape is thick.” This proverbial reference to a woven rain cape, usually made of harakeke (*Phormium tenax*), speaks of the shelter provided by the richly forested Waiapu valley, here on the East Coast of Aotearoa. The image of prosperity is reinforced at the end of the first verse of the Horouta Waka pātere composed by Arapeta Awatere: “Kei Waiapu te tainga o te riu o Horouta, Ko te iwi tēnā Ngāti Porou, Tātara e maru ana,” which refers to the Waiapu where the emptying of the Horouta canoe took place, and to the beginnings of Ngāti Porou around the river, where they lived in great numbers. The Horouta waka is renowned for bringing kūmara to Waiapu, where this prized crop was extensively cultivated. According to Tā Āpirana Ngata,

> the Waiapu River in its lower reaches made up for its steep, broken and sometimes violent course by the great extent of cultivable land on both banks backed by terraces suitable for pa sites. Hence the great development of the population there, which drew from Tāmokai of the inland Aowera tribe the cry, Hoake taua ki Waiapu ki tatara e maru ana.

When Tāmokai spoke about returning to his homelands of Waiapu, he imagined a sanctuary, a safe haven for rising generations. With abundant food cultivation, freshwater springs, ample material wealth, and a flourishing culture, Te Riu o Waiapu was indeed a haven. Today, the Waiapu River is in the midst of a century-long catastrophic environmental disaster due to deforestation. Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua is an ancestral mother of many; a river of many female leaders. In response to mass erosion, Te Runanganui o Ngāti Porou iwi and hapū have set forth a one-hundred-year plan for the revitalisation of the river called Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua, in partnership with the Gisborne District Council and Ministry of Primary Industries. They agreed on a shared vision for the restoration of healthy land, rivers, and people.

When I first heard of the Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua plan, I immediately wondered how would people one hundred years from now know what changes had occurred unless there was a visual record? In the 2012 Waiapu River Catchment Study Final Report, hapū identified “desired state” environmental indicators including that “Underground springs are used and protected.” Elders speak about times when there was “a tuna in every puna,” an eel in every spring to keep the water clean. Assisted by oral histories and land court records, I work with my

Te Whanau-a-Pokai hapū around Tīkapa Marae to locate freshwater springs and other sites of significance and markers in the land, to visually record their current state. This series of photographs and video is a direct response to the Waiapu Kōkā Hūhua plan. How do we find hope and optimism in the face of unimaginably large disasters?

The scale of the Waiapu River erosion disaster requires many generations of restorative work. Yet healing the tributaries and freshwater springs of the catchment is conceivable in shorter timeframes. Our elders, who once used freshwater springs maintaining strict tikanga (protocols), retell stories that inspire me. It is imperative to find collective ways to activate change to uplift the mauri (lifeforce) of the water in their lifetimes. Investigating ancestral places associated with water is important because they reveal the cultural and ecological mātauranga-a-iwi (tribal knowledge) of our tīpuna (ancestors), within tribal organizational boundaries marked by genealogies. A measure of a return to this way of thinking is that water is looked after. Seeking hope, I identified a distinctive eastern Tairāwhiti language of light, where the rising sun is of particular importance. For example, Porourangi was born in the crimson red-tipped dawn. His full name is Porou-ariki Mata-tara-a-whare, te tuhimāreikura o Rauru. This observance of the quality of light is a part of our history. I apply this thinking photographically.

> *Tera te haeata e takiri ana mai i runga o Hikurangi!*
> *Behold the first light of dawn is reflected from the crest of Hikurangi!*

The above line from an East Coast men's ceremonial haka taparahi (haka performed without weapons) called Kura Tiwaka Taua is adapted from a portion of the ancient Tākitimu canoe chant that is over seven hundred years old. In this Ngāti Porou version, the word "te haeata" communicates the significance of first light as it strikes the ancestral mountain Hikurangi. This observance has guided the dawn photographs. The sun rises directly through the Waiapu River mouth to touch the summit of Hikurangi unimpeded by hills only twice a year: in May and again in late July to early August. The triptych (Fig. 1) and the red-tipped dawn photograph (Fig. 4) were taken at dawn on August 6, 2020. In the triptych, there is a small lapse of time between each image, as the sun first strikes Hikurangi in the righthand photograph, then Pōhautea in the centre, and the coastline on the left. For these, I used a 5 x 4" 1953 Linhof Technika sheet film camera—the type with bellows and a hood

over the viewfinder. This is a slow and deliberate method. The majority of the black and white photographs in the series are made in the same manner, as I want the negatives to still be here in one hundred years.

In this exhibition, I also draw on historical photographs of the Waiapu valley, taken by earlier photographers, to illuminate past lives and landscapes in the spiral of time. Today, I photograph for past-present-future generations, beyond my own lifespan. My desire comes from a wellspring of aroha for whenua, awa, and moana, for the people who are the hau kāenga living "at home" and for those like me, who renew ancestral connections. As a Ngāti Porou person, I had to begin with myself, re-invigorating my relationship with land and river, by learning from the ground up and being in the flow of the water. The weather-worn kōruru carving from the Tīkapa-a-Hinekōpeka Marae whare tūpuna Pokai is mounted above the sentinel mountain Pōhautea at the Waiapu River mouth. On the morning of November 6, 2020, this exhibition opened with a blessing by Archdeacon Morehu Te Maro—widely known as Papa Boycie. Afterwards, Tairāwhiti Museum staff invited us to view the kōruru recently placed in their care. For over one hundred years, this Iwirākau-style whakairo adorned the apex of Pokai, until Tīkapa Marae was restored with new whakairo by Lionel Matenga in 2018. Papa Boycie has permitted this kōruru to take up a new role here in this exhibition, looking out across the many of the same landscapes he could see from atop Pokai.

—Natalie Robertson, November 2020

Figure 5. Natalie Robertson, *Puna wai, Kuri a Pāoa*, 2020. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

**Te Waipuna—Kawenga Wahi a Te Aowhiua**

It is late summer, so the stock have all been sold. The paddock has just a few cows browsing in it. I can't see the large creamy bull that kept me from coming here in spring. Ngaire said he was nothing to worry about. I said, "Well, he is your bull." A woman named for the water—Te Wai—asserted her boundary on the place where the water runs down the hills from this freshwater spring named Te Waipuna. I am her direct descendant.

"Te Hikapohe sent his sisters to make Waipuna the boundary of their land on the north. Hunaara used the proverbs:
'Kātahi ngārara kopai ara i ngā wāhine nei.'
'He atua whakahaehae ngā wāhine nei.'"[1]

He then threw a stick on the karaka trees and said, “I will give up the land but will hold the trees.” This was Hunaara’s last attempt on the land.

I squint my eyes to make out the steps into the hillside and the depressions in the earth that are clues to its former use as a pā. Hineauta once lived here. Tamaureriri, the beneficiary of her land, carved a large house called Te Kura Makahuri, after his ancestor, which stood in the vicinity. The Pōhautea case left a trail of names, but with no map we are left to walk the land and guess. Is this her pā Katapeka? Is this near the spring Ngākōhuruamomona, from which the water was drawn in her day?

As the daughter of Takimoana, Hineauta was highly tapu, an illustrious wahine who exercised mana over land and sea in the Tīkapa area. Apirana Mahuika said that the rocks just offshore in the shore break are named Ngā Toka a Hineauta for her. It is a place where a mussel species called “hanea” grows. I have eaten these sweet mussels. Today, they struggle to filter out sediment carried into the ocean from the river. The wīwī grasses are growing here in abundance, reminding me of the tribal saying “He wīwī, he nāti, he whanokē.” But even the blades in a single clump of this wetland grass far outnumber the people living around here today. Thriving on water, they are my best indicator of a freshwater spring.

Figure 6. Natalie Robertson, *Puna wai on Taumata o Tūwhata, Kawenga Wahi a Te Aowhiua*, 2020. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 7. Natalie Robertson, *Te Waipuna—Kawenga Wahi a Te Aowhiua,* 2020.
Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 8. Natalie Robertson, *Puna wai (possibly Ngākōhuru-amomona) in the vicinity of the former site of the marae of Hineauta, Kawenga Wahi a Te Aowhiua*, 2020. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 9. Natalie Robertson, *Puna wai and pear tree (possibly Puna-a-Hinemahi), Kawenga Wahi a Te Aowhiua*, 2020. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 10. Natalie Robertson, *Puna wai, from above Takā stream*, diptych, 2018. Inkjet prints on gloss paper, each 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

The puna gravity-feeds two nearby homes with beautiful fresh, cool water. There are other puna nearby, but none like this, with its ferny fringe. One seeps out of dark moist recesses in a rock wall on the face of a hill, oozing down into a wetland. Another is subterranean, emerging at ground level into a swamp where kahikatea stand. This puna pours into a stream called Takā.

In our pepeha, we say, "Pōhautea te maunga, Takā te awa, Tīkapa te marae."

Across Takā is a larger spring on a place called Koira, across the hillside from our marae. Koira is where my ancestor Te Wai lived. Wai puna, puna wai. Tīpuna. Mokopuna.

My grandfather was a water diviner, perhaps a gift inherited from Te Wai. The waters from Koira flow into Te Rapa stream, then into Takā. Ngāiwi, the stream at the back of Tīkapa Marae meets Takā, each acting as natural boundaries for our tīpuna and their cultivations. These springs were the source of life for the people living here. Not far downstream all become part of Waiapu, the river below.

From our marae, I can see the moana. The ocean waves break at the river mouth just past Pōhautea, merging wai māori and wai tai. Two waters, ngā wai e rua, sustaining our spiritual and bodily wairua. This place is a portal, Te Tomokanga o te Ngutu Awa o Waiapu.

> Ka noho Wai-nui, ka noho i a Rangi,
> Puta mai ki waho rā Moana-nui a Kiwa;
> Ka maringi kai raro ko Para-whenua-mea,
> Nā Moana- nui, ē, nā Moana-roa, ē!
>
> —Waiata 234: "He Oriori Mo Te Whakataha-Ki-Te-Rangi," na Tupai (Te Whanau a Kai, Turanga). Na H. Te Kani Te Ua nga kupu, nga whakamarama, na Henare Ruru etahi o nga whakamarama.[2]

Figure 11. Natalie Robertson, *Puna wai, Whakaumu*, 2020. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 12. Natalie Robertson, *Te Puna o Te Ao Te Huinga and kahikatea trees, Tīkapa-a-Hinekōpeka I*, 2019. C-Type photographic print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

**Te Puna a Te Huinga—Tīkapa a Hinekōpeka**

It is autumn. I am looking for the freshwater spring in the paddock across the road below the marae at Tikapa. It is marshy, my gumboots are sinking ankle deep into the ground.

I can see where the old concrete well is, but can't see the water for all the weeds.

What does this spring look like? There is no deep pool of blue-green water, clear as quartz crystal. It doesn't announce itself as a spring.

Outside of the well, I step into the swampy weeds. I find the water. I slip and am up to my knees in it, all muddy and wet, but I manage to save my camera.

There are cows in the paddock. This is no longer used for drinking water. Rain tanks now provide water for the marae.

Figure 13. Natalie Robertson, *Te Puna o Te Ao Te Huinga and kahikatea trees, Tīkapa-a-Hinekōpeka II*, 2019. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 14. Natalie Robertson, *Te Puna o Te Ao Te Huinga and kahikatea trees, Tīkapa-a-Hinekōpeka III*, 2019. Inkjet print on gloss paper, 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

**My Eyes Are Paua Shells**

It feels like eons since my eyes were in the ocean—they are yearning for the sting of saltwater.

My eyes are paua shells that once husked the black muscular foot inside, a delicacy so desired by my numerous offspring. This black foot surrounded jaws—a radula with thousands of tiny, hard teeth—that once gnawed seaweed from rocks. That tasty meaty muscle has long since been eaten by one of my grandchildren—only the glistening shell remains. Born of the moana, my green-blue-mauve eyes can hear the moods of the ocean better than my wooden ears. I stare at the horizon, as if looking with longing might pull me closer to where the river meets the sea—Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa.

Deeply set into my head, my eyes can see under water, even though I stand here forever on land. The swirling, light-reflective colours of paua, with its substrate of pearly shell, are like my psychedelic visions of the aqueous realm. My eyes have no lids, so at dawn they reflect the first sun rays from the east, and in the last light of dusk they gaze unfocussed at the distant sea. In the hours of darkness, they become mata-a-ruru, the watchful eyes of the morepork. When the moon travels underground on the darkest nights, my eyes still glint like whetu, the stars of the ancestors in the heavens.

Somewhere far beneath my timber feet is another ocean, a subterranean aquifer filled with water that can remember the ancient times when only birds, bats, reptiles, and insects lived on this land. The artesian groundwater remembers the vibration from the felling of forest trees a hundred years or more ago. I too, am made from a tree, a totara that comes from another mountain far from here, a place where tall trees still stand. My name is Rākairoa.

I am the long-awaited adornment for my parents Pōkai and Pōhatu. My sister Te Aokairau and I stand here with our backs to this house looking in the same direction every day, ready to welcome our many descendants home. Some of our children stand behind us: Putaanga, Huanga, Rakaimataura, Hinepare, Tangihaere o Taina, Hiakaitaria, Tukiumu, Rakaitemania.

The faces of their siblings are carved into the window frames of this house, named for their great-grandfather, Pokai. Down the road and across the Waiapu River, they are also the ancestral bodies of other houses.

The land here looks so different from when we were alive. As we look across at the scalped hills, we all yearn for the trees that once formed the rough coarse cloak covering the land. The birdsong was deafening in those times. Korimako, tui, kereru, hihi, and kokako were all lead singers in the dawn chorus that now is just a faint echo of the past.

Someone once cried, “Hoake taua ki Waiapu, ki tātara e maru ana.” “Let us go to Waiapu where the rain cape is thick.”

I look across the dusty quiet road to the upright kahikatea trees standing like sentries among the wetland swamp of wīwī grasses. From where I stand, I can hear the wind in their leaves, dulled a little by my wooden ears. These trees are at least a couple of centuries old. Perhaps they were saplings when I was a girl. Or perhaps their seeds were in the ground, dropped by the parent trees. I like to think that they remember me when I was human flesh.

In those days, my sister and I lived among the podocarp forest, ferns and shrubs of this land—karaka, tāwhara, rimu, pukatea, mānuka, kānuka, kahikatea, and so many more—feeding on their berries, flower bracts, fruits, and fern roots. Sometimes we named our streams for the staple food gifts they gave such as Waiaruhe—the fern root waters—or for the trees that held medicinal healing such as Mangapukatea—the stream where the Pukatea grows.

He mokopuna, he tipuna—a grandchild is a fountain
for ancestral knowledge, a living spring.

My beloved mokopuna Te Ao o Te Huinga, the eldest son from my daughter Rakaitemania and her tāne Iwirakau the carver, settled here when he was young. The waterways across the road from here came to carry his name—Te Waiwhakateretere Ara o Te Aotehuinga for the stream, Te Puna o Te Huinga for the freshwater spring, and also the storage pit for the kumara, Te Rua o Te Huinga.

When Te Aotehuinga was an old man, he returned, died, and was buried here by the stream, and Te Waipai a Te Aotehuinga is his tohu, his marker there. He has another one on Pōhautea, the low-lying mountain that guards the river mouth. None of these names or markers can be easily found today.

The land has changed so much since those times, but the sound of his name is in the wood sap, the bloodwaters of the trees. But human blood has memory too. We ancestors can speak through our mokopuna as our blood continues to flow through them. This is what I am doing now, awakening those names.

The dispossessions and disruptions of the colonial times caused the names of these waterways to be lost to the winds, but since I began standing here at the front of this house, watching over the trees and waters, my descendants are coming out of their clouded amnesia. They weren't forgetful but the colonial trauma of their grandparents' grandparents overshadowed everything and the stories of the land went underground, buried under a world of pain.

What remained here among the trees, in the bush, in the streams, in the springs, in the hills, and in the lengthening shadows at the end of the day, were kēhua—ghosts. Ready to frighten the children and strike fear into strong men in the dead of night, the kēhua became more alive than the people who lived in fear. There is even a place here called Whare a Kēhua—House of Ghosts.

When my mokopuna had to run through the bush in the early dawn to turn on the water pump at the freshwater spring across the hill behind where I now stand, he was reminded to run fast lest the kēhua get him. He sprinted like the wind, his short legs leaping across the paddocks and through the bush.

When my mokopuna felt her head pushed down into the freshwater spring by invisible hands for using the wrong utensil to collect the water, she screamed for her life.

When my mokopuna rode his horse to the river mouth and heard the raspy whispering of the karaka trees, his mother told him it was the ancestors' spirits rustling the leaves on their way to their leaping off place.

Is it any wonder that they cut down the bush and set it ablaze, burning the hiding places of kēhua, smoking them into oblivion? The only large trees left standing were those who had housed the bodies and bones of the dead, those trees for whom the ghosts would demand payment should they be touched. A few sacred trees had personal names—many survived the clearances but later they became casualties of careless helicopter spraying.

The land became barren. Even tī kōuka trees high on hilltops that indicated where fishing grounds were when at sea were not spared. The amnesia of the people is slowly lifting and their collective memory is returning, as they find ways to listen to us old people who are no longer walking among them.

Today, most of those trees are gone and the birds with them, but the cicadas remain. Their summer song is so loud with their wings rubbing together. This surviving family of kahikatea trees talks among themselves and they too lament the passing of their elders. There aren't as many of the family as there once was. The young ones aren't surviving and the oldest tallest ones have long since gone.

So it's just them, keeping their feet wet in the swamp the way they like to. Did you know that they are the oldest member of the ancient podocarp family and were around when dinosaurs roamed during the Jurassic times? They are one of the big five podocarps along with tōtara, rimu, matai, and miro. I wonder if their roots tap into the underground sea of freshwater? I imagine that their long fingers are touching, sending subterranean messages to each other about the water. Is there enough for a long summer? Is there too much in a rainy winter?

The relationship between the underground oceans and the highest rain clouds is intimate, one dependant on the other. As I stand here, I remember the times of my human flesh which depended on the freshwater. I also depended on the lungs of the earth—trees and wetlands—for the very air that I breathed. Now that I am made of the trunk of a tree, I have come to think like a totara tree.

My eyes may remember the ocean but my red totara heart remembers the forest. Connecting the underground artesian aquifers with the uppermost clouds above, are these rākau morehu—survivor trees—standing between the earth and the heavens leaping across the paddocks and through the bush.

**Te Puna o Rangitāuaki—Te Rimu**

The artesian spring water at Te Rimu bubbles up from the earth into a shallow gravelly pool surrounded by native trees. Climbing over the stile, I push back branches to get through onto a track that accesses it. By the puna wai, the air is sweet and earthy. It is the only one around here still surrounded by trees, protected from cows. This is a puna manawa whenua, an unfailing spring. In turn, we must not fail it. It is our oasis.

Puna—wellspring; manawa—heart; whenua—land.

The wellspring heart of the land. The name of this puna was lost to our tongues, even as we drank its precious cool water. I felt parched for our mother tongue. Have you ever had that feeling that your tongue was thick and dry, when you couldn't reply to an elder in our language? I have. I found the name of the puna wai on an old map. I say it over and over so I don't forget—Te Puna ā Te Rangitauāki. Speaking the name of the wellspring heart helps quench a deeper thirst.

Figure 15. Natalie Robertson *Te Puna o Rangitauāki, Te Rimu*, 2018. C-Type photographic print, 79 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 16 (left). Natalie Robertson, *Waiapu Bridge pier, ki uta*, 2020. C-Type photographic print, 66.7 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist
Figure 17 (right). Natalie Robertson, *Waiapu Bridge pier, ki tai,* 2020. C-Type photographic print, each 66.7 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 18. Natalie Robertson, *Buried house—Barton's Gully (Mangarārā stream flowing into Waiorongomai river)*, 2018. C-Type photographic print, 66.7 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 19. Natalie Robertson, *Waiapu River at the base of Kai Inanga Hill, with dolosse,* diptych, 2020.
Inkjet prints on gloss paper, each 50 x 60 cm. Courtesy of the artist

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**Notes**

[1] Te Harawira Whanautau, cross-examined by Mohi Turei, April 4, 1878. Waiapu Land Court Minute Book 3: Omaewa, 1878, The University of Auckland, New Zealand, microfilm reel 1317, 399.
[2] Song 234: "A Lullaby For Te Whakataha-Ki-Te-Rangi," by Tupai (Te Whanau a Kai, Turanga). Text and explanations by H. Te Kani Te Ua. Some explanations by Henare Ruru. In Apirana Ngata, "Nga moteatea: he maramara rere no nga waka maha—The songs: scattered pieces from many canoe areas," in *Nga Mōteatea—The Songs Part 3* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press 2006), 221.