

Aria



Jessica Hinerangi

A first book of poetry and a Māori coming-of-age story.

Where is my tongue?
On display, a trophy of war.
Where is my tikanga?
Kept in the basement.
Where is my mana?
Locked in the museum.
And where are my whānau?
Scattered like dandelion seeds,
from the grating city,
to the harnessed horizon.

Drawing moko kauae on Barbies. Reading Ranginui Walker in rāhui. Spitting on the statue of Captain Cook. *Āria* is a first collection of poems by Jessica Hinerangi in which the author reconnects with her tūpuna and with te ao Māori.

He kākano ahau i ruia mai i Rangīātea
ā, ka tipu tonu.
Tihei, mauri ora!



Jessica Hinerangi Thompson Carr is of Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine, Ngāpuhi and Pākehā descent. Born in Ōtepoti, she has a degree in English and art history with a masters in Māori ekphrastic poetry. She is a poet, journalist and illustrator, working primarily on Instagram under the name @maori_mermaid. Her previous work has appeared in *Landfall*, *Starling*, *The Big Idea* and *The Pantograph Punch*.



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*Dedicated to any displaced or whakamā
mokopuna trying to reconnect with who they are.
Your tūpuna are right beside you.*

Hā

Kia pupuri te manawa
o ōku tūpuna.
Kia whakamana i taku ārero,
mā te reo taketake i tukua mai ai e rātou.
Kia mau, kia ita,
ki ngā taonga tuku iho ā rātou mā.
Ahakoa ngā piki me ngā heke,
ka whakatutuki i tā ōku tūpuna
i wawata ake ai.
He kākano ahau i ruia mai i Rangiātea
ā, ka tipu tonu.
Tihei, mauri ora!

Breathe in, breathe out.
I shall carry the strength
of my ancestors before me.
And my tongue shall be strengthened by the ancient reo
I have inherited because of them.
I shall hold on tightly,
to the many sacred gifts passed down by them.
And despite the rises and falls of hardship,
I shall fulfil the dreams my ancestors have for me.
Because I am a seed that was planted in Rangiātea,
my growth is inevitable.
Tihei, mauri ora!

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1. Pōtangotango



Dear Tūpuna 1

I am well. Eating lots of pasta and vegetables, going for walks in the ngahere, socialising with other artists, swimming in emerald lakes, visiting whānau.

I hope you're ok with the mahi I'm doing. I assume you'd let me know if you weren't. Every day I'm trying to pry open my superlunary skull to make way for your messages and magnetic vibrations. Like a dam bursting under pressure, or the tooth snapping away from my koro's jaw when he tried to eat a brandysnap at Christmas, my little human head cracks from the weight of your tohu and tāwara. I am afraid of us sometimes. I am especially afraid of the missionaries, the lawyers, the traitors to the cause. They seem to overshadow the nurses, the guides and the gardeners. I avoid talking to you, but I know if we're ever gonna get anywhere, I have to listen. There is violence in me. There is rage. There is shame. Witi Ihimaera once said to suck it out, like snake venom. Suck and spit, suck and spit. Can we heal together? Perhaps now you're an ancestor you feel differently about what went on out here?

Once, I confided in my mother about my panic attacks. How I had to walk out in the middle of every lecture. How I visited the emergency room most weeks because I thought I was dying. She told me it was intergenerational trauma triggering my fight or flight. I remember telling a friend this and they laughed at how non-clinical it sounded.

I am a hypochondriac and I am testing out different kai in the car beside the hospital every day; waiting for an allergic reaction I will never have. The ultimate test will be when I try kawakawa berries for the first time in Whatamango Bay – there is no hospital near there. What if my body rejects the fruit, and that is like Papatūānuku saying that I am not good at being Māori.

People say Māori love this and Māori eat these things and you can't be Māori and not love kina . . . I don't like kina so how can I be Māori? I have the palate of a child and the nervous system of an old white woman. I watched shows like *House* and *Shortland Street* way too early so now I think I'm sick all the time. I grew up asking my parents every night before bed if I have any 'signs or symptoms'. When I finally had something wrong with me, the doctor said it was stress and I believed him because I do worry too much and I was trying not to be the annoying hypochondriac everyone expected me to be.

In the weeks before surgery I kept my pepeha on a piece of paper in my bra and waited for permission from you. I hoped we'd meet up while I was under. Instead, it was just dark and all I felt were tubes and a rib cage that grated against itself like dry sea shells. In recovery I watched too much TV. While infomercials played I noticed the tī kōuka out the window, and they were nodding their heads, nagging me to go outside. I miss warmer winds.

My matakite friend keeps asking if you've visited me yet. I wonder if there is something wrong because I haven't seen any glowing figures beside my bed as of late. I saw my great nanny once during a meditation. Then again, I guess she was just me. But you are me anyway, I am you, so it works. I am visited in my facial expressions, my thought patterns, my inner dialogue. I only just saw a photograph of my great-koro for the first time and he has my koro's ears. Ahakoa he iti, he pounamu. I treasure all the little things that connect me to you, e te tūpuna.

I have begun to write our names again. On papers and drawings, I've started introducing myself at parties and functions, cafes and classes, with the names that were left behind in time. They had to be left so that you could fit into the Pākehā world.

A name holds mana. We hold the name as we hold tā moko, as tā moko holds whakapapa, as whakapapa holds our babies, as our babies hold our breath, as breath holds mauri, as mauri holds what is true. Ahakoa he iti, he pounamu. When I was little I didn't really know our names, I thought we only had two. Now I know, I walk with them again, I walk in them again.

When Mum taught us we were Māori, I assumed we were Kāi Tahu because we were born in Ōtepoti. Before I learned the word colonisation, I just thought perhaps we were all from where we were born. I didn't know we were actually from Taranaki and Hokianga, and then beyond to Hawaiki. I didn't know about urbanisation. I didn't know we had been dislocated long before I formed a blur inside the tummy. I was ten when I clicked that we had left so long ago, and though you're on Māori land, you're not really home. Not until you look at the photographs and trace the maps with your stubby little fingers, and learn about Parihaka and the dog tax, the eruption of Mt Tarawera, and the Native Schools Act.

I dream of eels every few weeks. I've said it before, I'll keep saying it, because Whiteness makes Māoriness feel so thin and frail sometimes. I worry a lot. But I'm learning to let my whakapapa speak for itself. My Pākehā identity sits with my Māori and it's awkward. Sometimes one doesn't like to give room to the other. In order to get the dishes done and bring the firewood in, I have to disassociate. Balancing the Pākehā 'how can you help yourself?' with the Māori 'how can we help you?' is a study of how we bleed out into each other.

I've noticed that my bedroom mirror has three sides. I've ploughed my flesh and boiled my cells, ready to sew and serve, white high neck lace over a collar bone as restless as winter waves beyond a dark harbour, green and red port lights piercing the narrowing eye sockets, sunken blue prints. I glance starboard to the first face of my Māori grandfather, who peers back at me, uncertain, or very certain, I can never tell, to the second face of my Pākehā grandmother who is bookended between tarot cards and spiked trifle pudding. I have many faces, all of which star their way back to Rarohenga, where the ocean is red and the first karanga squeezed itself out of the taiawa of Papatūānuku with a vibrato that caused tectonic plates to shudder. My bedroom mirror has three sides. The two it took to make me, and the one that shimmers in between. I am learning every day how to receive your aroha.

With love,
your mokopuna.

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Tihei, mauri ora!

‘This is a book full of aroha and manaaki for those who are travelling the pathways Jessica herself has struggled along – a love letter to those coming along after, and those walking alongside. To me, every single word of every single poem will be like a rongoā to its readers.’

– HINEMOANA BAKER



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