

A black and white photograph of a palm frond, showing the intricate, feathery structure of the leaves. The frond is positioned diagonally across the frame, with a prominent central rachis. The lighting creates a strong contrast between the dark background and the lighter, textured surface of the palm leaves. The word "IRARERE" is overlaid in a white, serif font, centered horizontally and slightly above the middle of the image.

IRARERE



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# CONTENTS



**02** Whakataukī

**04** Prologue

**16** Dedication

**20** Gigi Pikinga

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**26** Whati Te Wake

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**32** Rawiri Keelan

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**37** Peter Tumata

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**44** Awatea Kake

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**49** Piripi Gordon

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**56** Varron Armstrong

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**61** Aniwa Koloamatagi

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

**68** Tangaroa Paora

*Portrait One*

*Portrait Two*

*Poem*

# WHAKATAUKĪ

Ko te piko o te māhuri, tērā te tipu o te rākau  
The way in which the young sapling is nurtured determines  
how the tree will grow.



## Hā

Within Māori ways of knowing our journey in life begins not at birth, but in the void of potential. From there we progress towards hā, our first breath, when we inhale the essence of the world. This first breath is innocence, it knows no judgement. As descendants of our atua (gods) and tūpuna (ancestors), we arrive as a pure addition to the cosmos.

As Māori, we acknowledge that everything and everyone has whakapapa (genealogy) that can be traced back to the beginning of the universe. Our purpose in the world is to be good and just humans, children, friends, partners, parents, or allies, who are of service to our people.

## Gender and origins

In Māori narratives, Tāne-mahuta (the God of the forest, birds and insects) played a significant part in the creation of the world and our existence. Originally, he and his brothers lay dormant in the pō uriuri (the forever darkness); trapped inside the embrace of their primal parents, Ranginui (the Sky Father) and Papatūānuku (the Earth Mother). Tāne-mahuta was responsible for the separation of these original deities because he and his brothers wanted to live in te ao mārama (the world of light). This separation marked the beginning of the cosmos and its associated worlds.

Following this, Tāne journeyed far and wide to seek the female essence, where life might be created, and in Kurawaka (the land of the red clay), he fashioned from Papatūānuku a female figure, against whom he pressed his nose. With hā (his breath), he gave her life. Her name was Hine-ahu-one (the female fashioned from earth), and as a result of their copulation, the first human being, Hinetītama, was born. This fusion of the male and female was the beginning of our people.

For Māori, tuakiritanga (identity) is defined by whakapapa. Tacit and explicit knowledge lives in

the land and waters of the earth, and in the wider physical and metaphysical cosmos. However, our journeys are determined by how we choose to live and how truthfully we seek authenticity. Our journey has already been sewn into the strands of time. Hā is our first sign of life, and also our last expiration. However, for Māori, this demise is not the end but only a continuation of a journey within te ao wairua (the spiritual world). Hā is the first and last action in physical life; our bodies return to the whenua and become as one again with Papatūānuku, our wairua ascends to the peak of Ranginui in its journey to the heavens, and our mauri (lifeforce) remains as cosmic energy in the universe (because we are one and the same).

We are hā, we are Hinetītama, we are from Hine-ahu-one and Tāne, we are the children of Ranginui and Papatūānuku, we live in the world. Hā ki roto, hā ki waho. We breathe in and we breathe out. Within this is the balance of being, we are Indigenous, Māori, and our authentic selves.

## Ira

For Māori, Ira is our vessel of connection to the physical and spiritual worlds, and also to the past and future. Within this connection we are forever moving along the strands of time and space. As humans we are made up of irarua (a binary gender), constituted of both masculine and feminine traits. This dynamic is not male or female but a relationship between

both. Many takatāpui have an innate understanding of irarua and are able to manifest this through performance; not as a parody but as a fluid, authentic expression of identity.<sup>1</sup> When such performance is practiced physically and connected spiritually, it is known as irarere.

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1. The term takatāpui traditionally refers to an intimate relationship between people of the same gender. In contemporary society it is often used to describe Māori individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

## Process

In giving voice to this phenomenon, this book reveals reflections in photographs and poetry on the identities of nine tāne Māori (Māori men) who understand themselves as takatāpui. Each tāne is presented as a pou (pillar), and his portrait is made up of three parts. The first is a photograph that records how he ‘passes’ in society. The second captures how he expresses himself ‘authentically.’ For the photoshoots conducted by Marcos Steagall, each tāne chose how he was attired and adorned himself. Two interviews with him explored perceptions of being Māori, takatāpui, and the nature of his essential essence. The interviews also inquired into iwi and

hapū knowledge related to historical manifestations of takatāpui, its cultural and spiritual nature, and the role of performance in self expression.<sup>2</sup> By creatively editing transcripts of these interviews, I constructed a poetic portrait of each tāne. Each word used in a portrait was spoken by the individual, and the tone of the poem sought to give literary form to his expressed identity. Thus, the poems sought the essence of ira (the life principle that each person possesses), by drawing from the breath of speech.

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2. The full transcripts of these interviews are available in the doctoral thesis, *Takatāpui Beyond Marginalisation: The Nature of Performance in Exploring Gender Roles*, which contextualises this work.

## Poupou

The takatāpui tāne, as poupou (pillars), support the walls of a whare takatāpui (house of takatāpui). In their authentic form they are irarere (fluid-gendered), and irarua (bi-gendered).<sup>3</sup> As such, they provide support for takatāpui and the communities they serve.

Being poupou, they keep the whare (house) standing strong, ensuring

shelter for those who enter. They connect to the environment because they stand on the earth of Papatūānuku and they face ngā hau e whā (the four winds), beneath the watchful protection of Ranginui (the heavens).

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3. This book is concerned with the portraits of nine takatāpui tāne. These tāne identify as male, but their takatāpuitanga is central to being male.

# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Shaun Jacob Hindt (Ngāti Tipaa,  
Ngāti Te Ata, Hāmoa).



I knew of you  
 My sister's friend  
 University,  
 Hakas  
 Singing

I came out  
 I found Ahakoa  
 I saw you first  
 I felt safe ... instantly.  
 From there,  
 Inseperable  
 If not at hakas  
 At home,  
 Lunch  
 ... and dinner

Three topics  
 of discussion  
 Hakas ... typical,  
 Men ... new for me  
 ... But not for you.  
 I listened  
 I learned  
 ... I love

You  
 My boo  
 Hi boo  
 Love you boo  
 My guide

Gone too soon  
 I cry when I remember ...  
 Your voice  
 Our Shaun  
 Your time

Gone.





They/Them, Non-binary,  
 He/Him, She/Her, That  
 Bitch.  
 Enough!  
 Boy no!  
 Girl no!  
 Just changing, being and  
 existing  
 Growing upwards.

When I was young,  
 I wanted to be in  
 kapa haka.  
 But I would not take off  
 my t-shirt.  
 I would not slap  
 my chest.  
 I refused.  
 I could hear the girls  
 screaming out  
 those notes  
 and I thought, "Gurl! I  
 can sing better  
 than you."

I grew up engulfed in all  
 things Māori.  
 We teased each other.  
 I teased you about your  
 ugly big black feet  
 and you teased me  
 because I was a limp  
 wristed girl.  
 Backhanded  
 acknowledgements.  
 We all had shit going on.  
 I was no different.

But I will not be placed  
 in your confinement.  
 You cannot contain  
 my spirit,  
 I am the architect of  
 my life.





Māori,  
I am, Northern and  
beautiful.  
Marae baby, pā baby  
I learn everything.

I would learn the poi  
And teach  
Compose waiata  
Choreography,  
Actions,  
Lyrics.

Still love it  
Still a fan  
An avid follower

I am not just talking poi  
I am talking about  
kōrero tuku iho  
More than gender  
Our entire being  
Ira tangata is infinite

I connect  
Today I wear red  
bands gumboots  
Tomorrow, lipstick  
And that is fine.

I love it.





Ra  
Born  
No assistance  
Came out like an eel

Eclectic  
River  
and Ah  
On the spectrum  
Coping with change  
Tai timu, tai pari  
Can get muddled  
Sometimes clear  
Adapts,  
Changes.  
Varies in flow  
Ah as in ahhh  
You never know  
Ah as in randomness

Anaura Bay  
With my Nanny  
Raised with her  
Five houses  
Five nannies  
Raised by all

Strong sense of who  
I was  
Already well grounded

Not as Māori  
Not as takatāpui  
Simply Rawiri  
Not accustomed to males

Father's side,  
Tū mai koe, tū māro  
Te mana o te whānau  
Hapū, Iwi

Mother's side  
Tū mai koe,  
Lift your chin up  
Representing you  
Backed by many

As Rawiri  
As Gemini  
Drawn a circle around  
the world  
Influence is global  
Tired but never rests  
Ready to go home  
Serve and care for  
the people  
In the kitchen with  
the nannies  
Gossip, Kai, Waiata  
I cannot wait.





Descending from my  
tūpuna  
Cultured  
Direct  
Compassionate

I was denied  
to sing the soprano note  
I had to prove a point

A flower in the  
thorn bush  
I realised  
I need this  
I need to reconnect.

That is me

My takatāpuitanga  
Looking to the past.  
Back far enough  
We existed.

Pushed to the back  
Stories were lost  
I never used to identify  
As Takatāpui

I am normal  
I am Māori  
Māori meaning natural

the natural state  
of being.





Ngāti Whātua, Waikato,  
 Bit of Te Arawa,  
 Bit of Taranaki,  
 Bit of bloody Coast,  
 Te Whānau-a-Apanui,  
 Te Whakatōhea  
 But Ngāpuhi tūturu

I feel  
 Reserved,  
 Māori,  
 Spontaneous!

Male has mauri  
 and wairua,  
 within that is a bit  
 of femininity,  
 Mother, grandmother,

It is part of their  
 ira tangata,  
 Who identify as woman,  
 Their mauri and wairua,  
 Carry aspects of tāne,  
 Father, grandfathers,  
 Both, all genders.

I identify as a  
 male firstly,  
 don't really put a name  
 "actually, I'm into both."  
 I love the poi,  
 Performing quads,  
 In my element  
 A significant impact  
 it was a beautiful thing.

That's me right now.





Takatāpui or gay  
That is how I identify.  
Open-minded,  
Authentic and  
Outrageous!

Kapa Haka,  
My life  
Photos of me in my tāne  
clothes  
Doing the haka  
Doing poi  
He kāpō te aroha  
Love is blind.

Performing as a boy

When I have to.

I don't quite have the  
oomph to change.

But I think, really?  
Are we still talking  
about this?  
This is still a thing?  
I, being Māori  
The crux of everything  
My life is Māori  
I love my people

Be myself  
Conquer  
Live and exist.





My marae,  
My tūrangawaewae  
On a farm,  
In a community,  
My home.

Big, Bold and Intuitive!

With haka,  
Singing always has been  
a thing  
Encouraged to use our  
voices  
Through conversation  
Through waiata  
To tell my story and  
stories of my home.

Te ao haka  
Being in awe  
The simplicity,  
Complexity, haka is  
My place to be creative

Feel free  
Tau and safe.  
Poi or taiaha,  
A sense of belonging  
Māori, proud to be

Spirit in itself,  
We are male or female,  
I still respect you  
As anything else.  
Spirituality can be fluid  
Your wairua  
Being in this world.  
Māori, a true example of  
the blend  
Our unique selves.

If its hey girl, then it is  
hey girl,  
If its hey bro, then its hey  
bro back.  
Taku ao, he hectic.





I am Te Rarawa,  
 Te Aupōuri, Waikato  
 Tainui, Tonga  
 Born in the hood  
 On a Tongan whāriki on  
 the floor.

I am Loud,  
 Liked,  
 Powerful.

I started to ruku hōhonu  
 It was just huge  
 A safe space  
 Living my best life  
 Takatāpui, I am,

Call me what you want  
 As long as you are  
 calling me.

In full geish  
 In full drag  
 I felt that was who I am  
 As Aniwa.

Drag  
 Makeup  
 Quite passionate -  
 Being a little fag  
 In, on, around  
 these streets.

# Tangaroa Paora

*Fluid, Ungendered, Another*



I am fluid  
 Ungendered  
 In another space.

A coming of the new.  
 I am Irarere.  
 A frequency  
 Unseen.  
 Creating balance,  
 A consciousness that can  
 be felt.

Performing poi  
 I am introverted.  
 Normal  
 Sometimes lost.  
 Exploring spaces,  
 ... gender  
 ... fluidity.  
 Navigating a place in the  
 world.

Discovering.  
 Being.  
 Me.



# WHAKATAUĀKĪ

Irarere i te pō i te ao, kia ira tangata i te wā;  
Fluidity is constant, flowing through people and time.

(Tangaroa Ihaia Pirihongi Paora)

