



***Where The Rēkohu Bone Sings* by Tina Makereti. Auckland: Random House (2014). RRP: Pb, 280pp. ISBN: 9781775535188. Reviewed by Jani KT Wilson.**

I liken *Where the Rēkohu Bone Sings* to a completed piece of tāniko (traditional fine-finger weaving); tāniko consists of the meticulous separation of muka (flax fibres) threads

which are dyed into natural bronze hues, dried, and then spun back together again to construct a flawless, striking, and historically-based fabric. In this case the weaver, **Tina Makereti**, portrays three complex and diverse characters, over three generations, and entwines them in and out of each other using intimate whakapapa threads.

The earliest account of Imi's life starts when the Taranaki tribes overpowered the Moriori on Rēkohu (the Chathams), including the moment when Imi himself is murdered. However, his wairua doesn't depart from his body, and he is immobilised from transcending into the next world. Consequently, Imi exists as a voice-over/apparition, proffering his descendant's historical context. And Imi's whakapapa thread interconnects the other characters, and controls the dexterity of the overall piece in spite of extending across distinct timelines and narratives.

A generation later in Waimua, Mere falls in love with Iraia, an older orphan-boy assigned to serve her father, Tū, as his taurekareka (servant). Impulsively, the couple flee the hapū strictures, and head to Wellington. They find a home and work, and after some months, are ecstatic to find Mere is hapū; but the joy is fleeting. Iraia, like many coal-workers of the time, succumbs to the plague, forcing Mere home to face Tū alone, and – even worse – hapū to his servant.

Another few generations along, Lula loses her mother, Tūi, who takes with her dark secrets of a childhood in Waimua. At the tangi, it is explained that as a child, Tūi was perpetually mocked for being the descendant of a Moriori. Thus, having been incessantly teased for being fair-skinned – the opposite of her dusky, Taranaki-centred twin brother, Bigsy – Lula closely identifies with her guarded and largely uncommunicative, late mum. The twins are bequeathed a dilapidated whānau estate on Rēkohu, and

returning there forces them to cartograph their Moriori whakapapa connections to Imi, Iraia and Mere, and to question their taha Taranaki.

The language Makereti utilises in *Where the Rēkohu Bone Sings* is familiar to me, and this makes it delicious reading; I didn't want to put it down. In my opinion, this text raises the bar in Māori fiction writing. Ngā mihi maioha ki te kairaranga o tēnei taonga tino rawe rawa atu (Respectful acknowledgements to the weaver of this incredible treasure).
