

## Papatūānuku

Karlo Mila

I love that I've read  
that Tangaroa was your first lover.  
That despite the weight  
of being primordial parents,  
you lived other lives.

I imagine  
the ways  
you might have dissolved  
in that salty saline water  
where the edges of your bodies met.  
The pull of those tides.

And then Rangi,  
within that stifling, sensuous,  
co-dependent embrace  
– and beyond it –  
the demands of children!  
*All that longing.*

But I love best  
that your bountiful body  
is everything we land on, stand on,  
ground in.  
You, woman,

are our go-to.  
 The earth under our feet.  
 The goddess that is all maunga,  
 all muscle, all soft slopes, fertile flat surfaces.

You, Mother,  
 are home.

Papa – foundation, base in 26 of Austronesian languages  
 Tū – to stand, arise, erect in 45 living languages  
 ā- Nuku – land, island, sand in 20 Fijiac languages.  
 Papatūānuku – Goddess of all goodness.  
 Giving to us all, even the unworthy.  
 The absolute unconditional of you.

I could write about how we defile and despise you,  
 commercialise and divide you.

But that would be about us,  
 not about you,

Your serene resilience  
 rules supreme  
 in the face of what we chuck at you.

I could write about how violently the whakatauki changed  
 – at the end of guns of an army of empire –  
 from men dying and losing themselves completely  
 – over women and land –  
 Mā te wahine, mā te whenua, ka ngaro te tangata.  
 To a legally binding adage whereby we all,  
 – women and land – become the property of men.

Whereby the conceit of 'dominion over' dominates.  
 But that would be about them, not about us.

'Dominion over'  
 doesn't feature  
 in any of our epistemologies.  
 There are no single male creators  
 in any of our cosmogonies.

A man couldn't create on his own.  
We made sense of our universe coming about  
through co-creation, pro-creation, copulation  
where immensity and space were pulled to each other  
begat children . . . the amino attraction  
of male and female elements.  
We are a family of relatives.  
That includes the trees, the rocks, the sky and you,  
Papatūānuku, are the mothership  
of all the female elements.

And as much as “the man” tries to bind you,  
bend you to his will. You will resist.  
That is one of your many legacies.

When we love on you, we love on ourselves.  
When we pause, in the busy noise of our days  
and look to you, we look to ourselves.  
We when we nurture, tend and care for you,  
We care for all of us.

In a world of lost goddesses,  
my own Tongan darling  
more lost than most,  
Hikule'o, elder sister of Maui and Tangaloa,  
desecrated, defiled, burned, beaten,  
still found with the noose around your neck  
scattered sculptures overseas  
the only proof of your presence  
in museums and mausoleums.

Hikule'o, even in Wiki  
they've made you a man.  
But the curves of your breasts  
your beautiful belly,  
your unmistakable fertile places  
endure beyond that lie.

When we honour you,  
we honour ourselves,  
we honour women

in all of our fullness,  
wildness, wholeness,  
power, tapu and mana.

Papatūānuku  
– all of this –  
– all of us –  
– always.

And when my flesh returns  
to your soft soil, I too will become  
a part of you, a sacred offering,  
and then, a sigh among many others,  
that sweeps through the essence  
of your many mauri.

– all of this –  
– all of us –  
– always.

