

*Tēnā koutou katoa, ka nui te mihi ki a tātou katoa.
I te taha o tōku whaea ko Ngātōkīmatawhaorua te waka
Ko Hokianga nui a Kupe te moana.
Ko ōku maunga karangaranga ko Rakautapu me Whiria.
Ko Te Rarawa, me Ngāpuhi ngā iwi
Ko Ngai Tupoto, Ngati Korokoro, Ngati Wharara, Te Pouka ngā hapū
No Motukaraka me Pakanae ngā marae.
I te taha o tōku matua he Pākehā, Devonport
Ko Jade Le Grice toku ingoa.*

The accidental or deliberate loss of conception has never been an unknown phenomena to the Indigenous people here in Aotearoa. Māori women have been recipients of traditional methods of pregnancy loss – in living memory. Some are even keepers of this mātauranga, handed down to them from their ancestors.

As a psychology researcher, it is not my place to tell these secrets, of what could work, of how to prepare it, and of who to ask. My work is to bear witness to the stories of people who have faced complicated reproductive decisions, and choices – the issues they raise, and to consider how we might best intervene in this space. The lived experience of being Māori, in a colonial context, having conceived, and not being in a position – socially, relationally, financially, or physically – to bring a new being into te ao marama – the world of light.

Some might say – with conviction – that abortion is not tikanga Māori. But sometimes, we need to understand the limits to our own knowledge, especially when we have not walked in the shoes of someone faced with a decision to proceed or terminate a pregnancy. Every person's story is different, and every person's story is their own.

Women's self-determination, our rangatiratanga, has always been tikanga Māori. This stretches from individual will, bravery, and integrity – through to aspirations for collective agency and women's self-determination. Our pūrākau, waiata, and oriori are full of narratives on this theme.

On this theme, I bring my wāhine tūpuna with me, ancestresses who persevered despite the indignity of scorn for not being in the 'right circumstances' for bringing life into the world, under the shadow of the colonial church. I bring with me beautiful young Māori women, strong in their tikanga, te reo, and mātauranga – but who worried that having a pregnancy terminated diminished their cultural identity and feminine power. I bring whānau narratives of supporting a woman to have an abortion, of safeguarding the spiritual space, the movement between te kore and te po, ready for a more conducive time for life to be brought forth. Bringing new life into the world has to be at the right moment for a woman.

These stories illustrate how abortion is but one issue on a broader spectrum of reproductive justice. The term reproductive justice has a long history in African American communities in the United States of America. It is a concept that coheres with our struggles, activism, and resistance, as Indigenous people in Aotearoa. It is a term that goes beyond reproductive health, and moves us into considering our fundamental human rights, and areas of structural power, latticed by colonialism, race, class, gender, gender identity, sexuality, and embodiment – that can constrain or enable our decisions, choices, and what we deem is actually possible.

Reproduction is an area where Māori have been subject to colonial control, and where women have been subject to patriarchal control. From the struggle to be recognised as a mother, free from the surveillance of institutional authorities, like the state, the church, and the community who police

norms and values around appropriate femininity. To the struggle to not become a mother in complicated circumstances, the right to access contraception and termination of pregnancy – the right to make our own reproductive decisions, in the context of our level of support. A reproductive decision is a woman's to make, and everyone might have an opinion, but she is the one who has to live it. And as a consequence of having to navigate multiple sites of oppression, judgement, and stigma, some say these decisions never leave them.

At this precipice of abortion law reform, we have a clear opportunity to shift the constrained discourse associated with abortion – beyond binarised notions of pro-life and pro-choice – and open up a broader conversation about abortion care – how to facilitate spiritual, psychological, relational, and social pathways to healing te whare tangata, and meeting our individual and collective aspirations as Māori. It means we can shift our attention to wāhine hauora, and wāhine rangatiratanga in health services – to best meet the needs of Māori, as tangata whenua. Because we come from atua. We possess divine rights as Papatuanuku. We are the potential creators of life. And because we deserve so much more.

Ka nui te mihi ki Robyn Le Grice, Ngahuaia, Pio & Kiri Jacobs, Alison Green, Ngahuaia Te Awekotuku ki to koutou mahi o te hauora ngā wāhine!