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**Te Mōhiotangaora:  
Within the Knowing Healing Begins**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Masters of Social Sciences in Māori and Indigenous Studies**  
at  
**The University of Waikato**  
by  
**Tracey Moana Witehira**



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the intersection of the colonized self and the Māori self, examining how these dual identities coexist within the same physical, mental, and spiritual space. Grounded in Māori ontology and wellness (Durie, 1998), the study uses an interdisciplinary approach that combines academic analysis, creative writing, pūrākau<sup>1</sup> (Lee, 2009), journal reflections, and artistic practice to explore two distinct ways of knowing that operate within this duality.

In this academic study, the colonized self is defined as a Māori woman shaped and constrained by the effects of colonization (Gemmell, 2013; Mikaere, 2003). Conversely, the Māori self represents the awakened Wahine Māori who has embraced mātauranga<sup>2</sup> Māori. She actively learns, embodies, practices, and lives Māori values and traditions as part of her everyday life. However, the Wahine Māori is not entirely free from the ongoing impacts of colonization, given the long history of conflict between Māori and European peoples in Aotearoa.<sup>3</sup> The colonization of New Zealand, marked by the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, resulted in the systematic loss of cultural markers central to Māori identity (Jackson, 1998, 1995; Walker, 1990). Furthermore, government policies have contributed to the marginalization of Māori culture in areas such as family, education, religion, and loss of language (Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1999).

Through this creative practice research, the practice of raranga whatu is explored using both traditional and contemporary techniques, contributing to the development of mātauranga Māori art forms (Campbell, 2019; Smith, 2019). This study examines how the process of weaving supports one woman's journey of reclaiming and empowering her Indigenous identity. Whatu<sup>4</sup> raranga<sup>5</sup> serves as a transformative practice, embodying the duality of the self within a uniquely Māori space of being. Within a Kaupapa Māori<sup>6</sup> framework, the process of restoring cultural connections has

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<sup>1</sup> Pūrākau is a Māori narrative or story. In this thesis it is my personal life experiences.

<sup>2</sup> Mātauranga refers to the body of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that is unique to Māori culture, encompassing traditional, historical, and contemporary knowledge systems.

<sup>3</sup> Aotearoa is the common Māori name for New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup> Whatu is the off-loom process of twining muka the inner fibres of the harakeke leaves.

<sup>5</sup> Raranga is the weaving of the leaves of the flax plant.

<sup>6</sup> Kaupapa Māori is a set of principles that align with Māori values, aspirations within Māori knowledge systems. The process has enabled me to navigate my positionality within this academic paper.

supported the reawakening of Mana Wahine<sup>7</sup> identity and the reclamation of Māori spaces, as recognized and embodied by kairaranga<sup>8</sup> (Campbell, 2019; Pere, 1991; H. Smith, 2019; Yates-Smith, 1980).

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<sup>7</sup> Mana Wāhine encapsulates the inherent power, dignity, and authority of Māori women, as derived from whakapapa (genealogy), cultural roles, and spiritual connections.

<sup>8</sup> Kairaranga is a group of weavers who work with natural fibres to weave baskets from leaf textile.

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Theo, Keanu and Chelsea my children, I hope I make you proud as your mother. To my mokopuna my future, believe that you can make all your dreams a reality.

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Finally, I am grateful to Ziggy my cat, who stayed by my side through countless hours, whether I was working on my laptop or weaving my kākahu. Her presence often felt comforting and, at times, even ancestral.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Aims of Research.....	<b>12</b>
Research Questions .....	<b>13</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: WHATU THREADS</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Chapter Outlines .....	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: WEAVING THE THREADS OF TE WHAKAMATARA METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>18</b>
Te Whakamatara Methodology .....	<b>19</b>
Whatuora Methodology.....	<b>20</b>
Kaupapa Māori Principles.....	<b>22</b>
Mana Wahine Theory.....	<b>24</b>
Te Pā Harakeke.....	<b>25</b>
Pūrākau .....	<b>26</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: WEAVING THE THREADS OF IDENTITY</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Raranga Whatu.....	<b>29</b>
Harakeke Metaphor and Taonga .....	<b>30</b>
Opposing Threads in Creative Practice.....	<b>38</b>
Te Mōhiotangaora .....	<b>43</b>
Mana .....	<b>44</b>
Mauri .....	<b>45</b>
Wairua.....	<b>46</b>
Ceremony .....	<b>47</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: WEAVING THE THREADS OF HERSTORY</b> .....	<b>49</b>
University Expedition .....	<b>50</b>
Colonized Māori Woman .....	<b>55</b>
Wahine Māori .....	<b>58</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: WEAVING THE THREADS OF KĀKAHU</b> .....	<b>60</b>

Kākahu Whakapapa .....	61
<b>CHAPTER 6: THE CREATION THREADS OF TE MĀHANGAORA .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Harakeke Harvesting .....	67
Harakeke Dyeing .....	71
Whatu Threads .....	74
Binding Feathers.....	76
Tāniko.....	84
Iho and Aho Whiri .....	85
Order in the Chaos of Making.....	87
<b>CHAPTER 7: TE MĀHANGAORA EMBRACED BY ATUA WĀHINE .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8: WEAVING THE THREADS OF WHANAUNGATANGA .....</b>	<b>98</b>
Master Thesis Exposition.....	98
Art Exhibition.....	100
<i>Weaving All Whatu Threads of Knowing.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Glossary of Māori Terms .....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>References .....</i>	<i>110</i>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1. Bloodline fibres of Papatūānuku my earth mother. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	9
<i>Figure 2. Kairaranga whatu threads of knowing. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	14
<i>Figure 3. Undoing and reweaving the threads of knowledge. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	18
<i>Figure 4. Whatu Threads of Identity. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	28
<i>Figure 5. Raranga Wānanga Putiputi. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2019).</i> .....	35
<i>Figure 6. Pūrākau Threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	49
<i>Figure 7. Kākahu Tūpuna Threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	60
<i>Figure 8. The Creation Threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).</i> .....	66
<i>Figure 9. Harvesting, cut on an angle away from the center shoot (rito). Photograph by Witehira, T. (2019).</i> .....	67
<i>Figure 10. Harvested harakeke. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2019).</i> .....	67
<i>Figure 11. Bundles of unblemished to weathered harakeke leaves. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> ..	69
<i>Figure 12. Whenu marked with a line where the shredding starts. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	70
<i>Figure 13. Pull whenu through the shredding tool. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	70
<i>Figure 14. Finished shredded whenu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	71
<i>Figure 15. Shredded whenu ready to dye. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	72
<i>Figure 16. Harakeke in pot of boiling water with commercial dye. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	72
<i>Figure 17. Dyed whenu drying in ventilated area. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	73
<i>Figure 18. Dyed bundles of harakeke ready to raranga whatu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	73
<i>Figure 19. Aho tapu, the first sacred row of whatu in my kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	74
<i>Figure 20. Aho whatu threads diagram, In Tamarapa, (2019, p. 81). Whatu kākahu = Māori cloaks (Revised edition.) Te Papa Press.</i> .....	75
<i>Figure 21. Aho rua whatu threads diagram. In Tamarapa, (2019, p. 81). Whatu kākahu = Māori cloaks (Revised Edition.) Te Papa Press.</i> .....	76
<i>Figure 22. Aho rua weft with two aho weft threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).</i> .....	76
<i>Figure 23. Mullard duck. Retrieved from: <a href="https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/mallard">https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/mallard</a>.</i> .....	77

Figure 24. Pheasant bird. Retrieved from: <a href="https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/common-pheasant">https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/common-pheasant</a> .....	77
Figure 25. Loose pheasant and duck feathers ready to bind together. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).	78
Figure 26. Apply a little water to make sticky soap substance. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	79
Figure 27. Apply sticky soap substance to the quill feathers. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	79
Figure 28. Wrapping motion of sticky soap around the quill feathers to bind. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	80
Figure 29. Finished binded group of three feathers. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).....	80
Figure 30. Feathers in groups of three bound together. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).....	81
Figure 31. Place feathers in line with aho and whatu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	82
Figure 32. Turn binded feathers quill up into next whatu weave. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).....	82
Figure 33. Whatu one whenu between each feather placement. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	83
Figure 34. Two completed rows of whatu feathers in kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	83
Figure 35. Tāniko rows in kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	84
Figure 36. Iho is the arch plait that becomes the kākahu wings in my kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	86
Figure 37. Iho Whiri is the three plait. It represents my connection to Papatūānuku. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).....	86
Figure 38. Thinking through the chaos. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	87
Figure 39. Messiness in the raranga whatu process of Te Whakamatara. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	87
Figure 40. Atua Wāhine feathers and fibres. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	88
Figure 41. Papatūānuku - Whero. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).....	91
Figure 42. Hineahuone - Waiporoporo. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023). ....	92
Figure 43. Hinetītama - Kāriki. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).....	93
Figure 44. Hinenuitepō – Purū. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).....	94
Figure 45. Hineteiwaiwa - Kārikiōrangī. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).....	95
Figure 46. Colonized Self. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	96
Figure 47. Māori Self. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ....	96

*Figure 48. Te Māhangaora, Colonized Self and Māori Self, merge together in full flight. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024)..... 97*

*Figure 49. TUKUNA KIA RERE 3MK. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024)..... 98*

*Figure 50. Ngā Ara Auaha Exhibition 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ..... 100*

*Figure 51. Back view of Te Māhangaora. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ..... 104*

*Figure 52. Side view of Te Māhangaora. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ..... 104*

*Figure 53. Te Māhangaora Mana Wahine. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024). ..... 105*

## INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. Bloodline fibres of Papatūānuku my earth mother. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### *-Woven Hope-*

*Transforming from broken too whole again, a quiet dance to mend the fear. A journey of growth, guided by intent, restoring balance where chaos reigned. Weaving new beginnings from sorrow to strength, a tapestry of wisdom regained. Each pattern tells a herstory of healing and hope, threads of resilience woven anew. I transform my pain into beauty and light, and in my journey, I share it with you.*

## Pēpeha

Ko Puhunga rāua kō Hikurangi ōku maunga

Ko Te Hue Hue rāua kō Waiapo ōku awa

Ko Mamari rāua kō Horouta ōku waka

Ko Tikitiki rāua kō Mataraua ōku whenua

Ko Te Hue Hue rāua kō Ngāti Putaanga ōku marae

Ko Ngāi Tawake rāua kō Ngāti Putaanga ōku hapū

Ko Ngāpuhi rāua kō Ngāti Porou ōku iwi

Ko Ngatihaua Paora Witehira rāua kō Miriama Hirini Wikaira ōku tipuna

Ko Hapuku Niha Tehuakore Karaka rāua kō Reremoana Wawatai ōku tipuna

Ko Nikora Witehira rāua kō Maru Marie Karaka ōku mātua

Ko Tracey Moana Witehira tōku ingoa.

This pēpeha is a customary practice introduction in the Māori language. My pēpeha<sup>9</sup> is a way to share my whakapapa and relationships to land, people and environment. I have formally identified my mountain, river, canoe, land, marae, sub-tribes, iwi, grandparents, and parents I belong to within the Te Ao Māori<sup>10</sup> worldview.

This master's thesis offers insight, into my journey of identity and self-discovery. It examines how colonization has affected family, education, religion, and loss of language through imposed governing systems. As a result, I navigate the duality of identity of the colonized self and Māori self within the same physical, mental, and spiritual space.

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<sup>9</sup> A pēpeha is a traditional Māori introduction that expresses an individual's identity, connections and place within the world.

<sup>10</sup> Te Ao Māori is term that encapsulates everything within Māori culture.

As described in my abstract, the colonized woman has experienced the impacts of colonization, while the Māori woman has embraced mātauranga Māori, reawakening to reclaim her Mana Wahine identity. This critical examination involves a continuous self-observation through the practice of weaving and whatu, traditional and contemporary artforms used by Māori kairaranga. These creative practices have become a healing mechanism, allowing my identities to coexist and evolve across past, and present timeframe experiences.

I have documented a personal story in the form of a 'Pūrākau,'<sup>11</sup> known as a traditional Māori narrative. This Pūrākau serves as a form of resistance and to decolonize, colonized impositions from lived experiences in my duality. In this academic paper, I am a researcher, inquirer, creative artist, student and teacher of kairaranga, grandmother, mother, daughter, and mokopuna as part of the collective in Te Ao Māori worldviews.

As this study follows a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), it consists of two main components: the creative practice of raranga whatu for a harakeke kākahu<sup>12</sup> and a written analysis. The written section includes a theoretical discussion, and personal interpretation of the kākahu creation, offering an awareness into its meaning. These interpretations I interweave, throughout this theoretical document, using creative writing as poems and journal reflections, to articulate an investigation of identity, revival, and healing. Recollections of past conversations with family and friends, further illustrate objectiveness to this inner dialogue.

Engaging in a Kaupapa Māori framework, this research follows a set of principles established by respected Māori scholars. These principles provide guidelines for conducting Indigenous research, ensuring the protection, advancement, and recognition of Māori aspirations, values, and cultural autonomy. Mana Wahine theory is a potent thread of Indigenous knowledge, interwoven into this composition initiated by Leonie Pihama, professor, activist and filmmaker of Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Māhanga, and Ngā

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<sup>11</sup> Pūrākau are traditional Māori narratives, stories, or accounts that convey important cultural knowledge, values, and teachings.

<sup>12</sup> Kākahu is the Māori term for cloak or clothes. In this practice-led research it is my creative artform to represent the tangible process of identity as the colonized self and Māori self.

Māhanga a Tairi iwi. Pihama's (2001) doctoral thesis, "Tihei Mauri Ora:<sup>13</sup>Honouring our voices: Mana Wāhine as a kaupapa Māori theoretical framework," she examines the principles and practices of Mana Wāhine, recognizing the importance of restoring Māori women's voices and identities. Pihama is a strong activist for Indigenous and Māori rights, especially in education, social justice, and health.

Theory and practice in this creative art masters, is my arrangement that seeks to honor our Wāhine ancestors, kairaranga, and Wāhine Māori as a collective. This theoretical document ensures the legacy of knowledge continues to be preserved and advanced. Pihama (2001) notes:

*There are many times and spaces that Māori women move through in our lives, wahine is one of those. There are others. There are varying terms that relate to times in our lives and relationships. From birth we begin a journey through those many spaces (p. 263).*

### **Aims of Research**

A practice-led study in creative arts that explore the duality of identity. It inquires and examines the impact of colonization within personal and social structures. This research is applied by a Kaupapa Māori framework that investigates cultural disconnection, and erosion of Māori identity. As part of the academic process, I seek to enrich mātauranga Māori, through the lens of Mana Wahine reclamation, supported by the practice of raranga whatu, a traditional artform of kairaranga. I invite you to engage with this research with an open mind, embracing its intended purpose and meaning.

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<sup>13</sup> Is the first breath of life, of first sneeze. I refer to this Māori term as the initiation or birth of my thesis and beginning of my raranga whatu journey.

## Research Questions

The focus areas for my thesis are:

1. Can Mana Wahine identity be affirmed through the practice of raranga whatu?
2. Can the practice of te pā harakeke affirm Māori identity?
3. Can healing from personal trauma of cultural disconnection be expressed through creative practice in raranga whatu?

## CHAPTER 1: WHATU THREADS



Figure 2. Kairaranga whatu threads of knowing. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### *-Time-*

*Time is running out to prove my worth, who determines that notion of worth. Worth in mine and yours. Your eyes, my eyes, their eyes. Eyes universally seen and perceived. Perceived silent voices with depiction download. Download interpretation, transcribe herstory. Herstory imprints existence, voyage on. On forward connecting to bygone. Bygone ancestors never dissipate. Dissipate be reborn in vitality. Vitality a discovered generation. Generations proceed a legacy, our distinctive mokopuna. Mokopuna will be heard.*

## Chapter Outlines

### **Chapter Two:** Weaving the Threads of Te Whakamatara Methodology

This chapter outlines my methodology that forms the foundation of my research, expanding on the principles of the whatuora (H. Smith, 2019, 2023). It draws from Māori theoretical foundations: Whatuora Methodology, Kaupapa Māori Philosophies, Mana Wahine Theory, Te Pā Harakeke Principles, and Pūrākau, each utilizing a qualitative approach to ensure cultural relevance and depth. Additionally, the methodology integrates perspectives, which is both reflective and personal, acknowledging my cultural belief systems and the pervasive impacts of colonial oppressive structures. Central to this approach is the aim to dismantle negative stigmas associated with colonization, while supporting the positive reinforcement of Mana Wāhine aspirations.

### **Chapter Three:** Weaving the Threads of Identity.

The Literature resources critically engage with theoretical written works, from both Māori and non-Māori scholars, academics, artists, kairaranga, activists, and Indigenous theorists focusing on how individuals and communities position themselves, within distinct cultural and social contexts.

Hereafter, this chapter delves into the role of the creative arts in both Māori and non-Māori frameworks. It explores the differences between these structures, shedding light on how they influence cultural expression, identity, and knowledge transmission. Furthermore, reflecting on how these artistic practices have shaped the progression of this practiced-led research study, contributing to the methodological and conceptual structure.

### **Chapter Four:** Weaving the Threads of Herstory.

Herstory explores my personal narrative as a Māori woman charting the impacts, of colonial oppression across family, education, religion, and loss of language. As a Māori herstory, it reflects upon cultural disconnection and resilience towards identity erasure. Offering insight into how colonization has shaped my dualities, and the

ongoing process of reclaiming cultural autonomy. The narrative emphasizes the strength and agency required to confront these challenges, contributing to the broader contexts, of colonial settlements in contemporary Māori life.

### **Chapter Five: Weaving the Threads of Kākahu.**

Kākahu tūpuna<sup>14</sup> provides an in-depth exploration of the historical and cultural significance of kākahu, tracing its origins from pre-colonial Māori ancestors to its contemporary relevance within Māori society today. It examines the representation of kākahu within this thesis as a powerful symbol of cultural resilience.

### **Chapter Six: The Creation Threads of Te Māhangaora.**

This chapter demonstrates the creation of Te Māhangaora,<sup>15</sup> and details the methods involved in creating the kākahu, outlining each stage of the process from preparation to completion. It begins with the harvesting of harakeke, ensuring the importance of following tikanga<sup>16</sup> to honor the plant and its whakapapa.<sup>17</sup> The process then moves to the dyeing of harakeke, where contemporary techniques are utilized to achieve desired colors and textures. Weaving techniques whatu and whiri the core of the creation process, including the intricate practices of feather binding and tāniko weaving, which add both symbolic and aesthetic meaning to the kākahu.

### **Chapter Seven: Te Māhangaora Embraced by Atua Wāhine.**

Te Māhangaora honors our Atua Wāhine and their creation stories, whose contributions to Māori cosmology have endured despite patriarchal oppression. Through the lens of a contemporary Māori kairaranga artist, I demonstrate how each color chosen for the

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<sup>14</sup> Ancestors for Māori people.

<sup>15</sup> Te Māhangaora translates to the healing of my two halves of identity. It is the name of my physical creative artform the harakeke kākahu.

<sup>16</sup> Tikanga is rooted in traditional Māori customs, it is not static. It is a living, evolving body of knowledge that is applied in different contexts by different iwi and communities. Tikanga remains relevant and meaningful to Māori people in the present day while preserving its essential cultural and spiritual teachings.

<sup>17</sup> Whakapapa It is much more than a family tree—it is a framework that links individuals to their ancestors, the natural world, and the spiritual realm, forming the basis of identity, belonging, and understanding within Te Ao Māori.

kākahu holds intentional meaning towards our goddesses, affirming cultural identity and preserving ancestral knowledge (Yates-Smith, 1980, 1989, 2022).

**Chapter Eight:** Weaving the Threads of Whanaungatanga.

Whanaungatanga<sup>18</sup> is a presentation of my thesis in a master's exposition and art exhibition. These platforms have provided opportunities to assert my Mana Wahine identity. The facilitation of these two dissertations, centered around the reclamation of cultural acceptance within both Māori and non-Māori societal contexts. Engagement affirmed culture identity through collective participation within public arenas.

**Creative writing:** will be in a different italic font and positioned in the centered of the page.

**Journal Reflections:** will be positioned to the right-side margin of the page.

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<sup>18</sup> Whanaungatanga is a fundamental concept in Māori culture that refers to kinship, relationship, and the sense of belonging within a community or collective.

## CHAPTER 2: WEAVING THE THREADS OF TE WHAKAMATARA METHODOLOGY



Figure 3. Undoing and reweaving the threads of knowledge. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### *-Who Are You-*

*Define the self, as whole, fixed in time and place. Cry is to remain fluid, to embrace multiplicity, am I today, Wahine or Woman, Māori or colonized. A being of force propelled by time's unfolding. To deconstruct and reconstruct, to unravel and reweave, perpetual process, resilience and becoming. Embedded roots my whenua, standing firm yet adaptable, navigating life's courses, legacy and footsteps, ever-evolving fabric of identity.*

## **Te Whakamatara Methodology**

I have developed a framework named “Te Whakamatara<sup>19</sup> Methodology,” as a response to reclaim Mana Wahine identity. At its core is the creation of kākahu, a storied cloak, used as a creative medium. The creative kākahu addresses the effects of colonization on my duality and challenges Western constructs of identity (H. Smith, 2019). Te Whakamatara, which translates to “the undoing,” draws from: Whatuora Methodology, Kaupapa Māori Principles, Mana Wahine Theory, Te Pā Harakeke, and Pūrākau.

As this structure guides research through a Mana Wahine and Kaupapa Māori lens, it acknowledges Indigenous and Māori ways of knowing and being. Building on Smith’s (2019) Whatuora Methodology, I have expanded its theorizing to interweave Te Whakamatara. This approach prioritizes cultural restoration and affirms Māori identity. Storytelling is also a part of the creative practice; it is central to this process offering a way to confront and transform the impacts of oppression. This methodology Te Whakamatara reflects the inherent nature of raranga whatu, where the act of weaving involves continuous cycles of unravelling and reworking the creative practice. However, this undoing transcends the physical process, and it also serves as a powerful metaphor, for personal and conceptual thinking. This happens through the unravelling of the self, new insights emerge, reshaping both identity and perspective. This transformation operates on multiple levels, to recognize the duality of self within this study.

The deconstruction of my thinking process has led to journal reflections and creative writing, echoing H. Smith, (2019, p. 10) words on “thinking, thinking, and thinking.” This iterative process of contemplation and reassessment mirrors the evolution of my work. The journal reflection below illustrates this inner dialogue, capturing my ongoing journey in this research and self-discovery.

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<sup>19</sup> Te Whakamatara translates to the undoing, which is a process I used to theoretically decolonize, personal negative stigmas of cultural disconnection.

Similar to weaving, I held myself to countless expectations, constantly striving to create in ways I imagined other weavers would expect of me. But this approach stifled me; it kept me from the freedom of simply being myself—a Māori woman without formal training in traditional weaving. As a result, I have had to undo my kākahu three times, each time searching for a configuration that feels right for both weaver and kākahu, balancing my dualities as the colonized self and Māori self. This struggle often brings my work to a standstill for days or even weeks, as I wrestle to find harmony between the layers of thought, balance, and belonging. The cycle of thinking, thinking, and rethinking, starting again has become as much a part of the process as the weaving itself.

### **Whatuora Methodology**

Hinekura Smith an artist, researcher, storyteller, teacher, and expert in raranga whatu practices. She is a descendant of Ngā Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, and Te Ati Awa. Smith's (2019) thesis, "Whatuora: Whatu Kākahu and Living as Māori Women," examines the traditional practice of whatu as a decolonizing methodology.

Smith's research focuses on Māori women who weave kākahu, exploring how this practice helps them reclaim and transform traditional Māori ways of living. The Whatuora methodology combines Mana Wahine theory, Māori creative practices, and Indigenous knowledge systems. It explores the transformative power of deliberate actions in "living as Māori" (p. 4) for individuals and their whānau. Her thesis confirms the embodied knowledge in Māori weaving practices, is their ability to restore cultural identity and well-being disrupted by colonization. Smith asserts:

*... the creative and embodied practice of whatu – a finger twining technique unique to Māori and used to create traditional cloaks, they shared deeply moving stories of growing up and “being Māori” women. As they became mothers and grandmothers their stories recounted experiences of reclaiming language and identity through the resistance to, and recovery from, continuing colonizing forces (p. 4).*

Building on the traditional practice of raranga whatu, that Smith features, I am inspired to reclaim my artistic practice. This academic paper enables me to theorize my methodology, te whakamatara, as a system that aligns with and adds to the whenu strands of kaupapa Māori principles.

Through this process I have practiced critical reflection, comparable to weaving, by unravelling and reconstructing my understanding of scholarly works. This involves a method of analyzing texts, integrating them with my changing viewpoints and new insights. Each reading contributes to a cycle of mental growth, refining and expanding my perceived process of conceptual transformation.

Te Whakamatara embodies these conceptual transformations in the ongoing process of undoing, redoing, unravelling and reweaving. Another example of transformation can be found in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) book "A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia," explores the metaphor of the bee and the flower. This illustrates a process of co-evolution and mutual becoming. The bee and the flower don't just exchange resources; they transform through their relationship. The bee, through pollination, becomes essential to the flower's cycle, while the flower supports the bee's survival. This mutual interdependence shows a relationship without hierarchy, based on interconnectedness and becoming.

Similarly, Te Whakamatara reflects my identity as both a colonized self and Māori self. These identities coexist within the same mental, physical, and spiritual space, each supporting and transforming the other. This continuous process of transformation resembles what Deleuze and Guattari describe as, with the "becoming-bee" and "becoming-flower"—change happens not in isolation, but through interactions, creating something greater than the sum of its parts (p. 10-13). This idea of mutual transformation is at the core of my methodology, my dualities create something new, greater than one identity in isolation. They are shaped by both cultural and personal perspectives, in the act of reclaiming Mana Wahine aspirations, towards self-determination of cultural revitalization (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001).

The method of unlearning colonial impositions and reconnecting with mātauranga Māori, becomes an act of resistance and renewal. By affirming the inner strength of

Wāhine Māori, we continue to assert our narratives as the true stories of our identity. The approach of Te Whakamatara is repetitive, but each cycle serves a unique purpose, involving moments of reflection and inward thinking. Each phase of undoing addresses the impacts of cultural domination that shapes, how I view myself and my worthiness as a Māori woman. As I continue to analyze and detached from the negative stigmas imposed by societal expectations, my sense of worth is empowered (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001).

Stuart Hall's perspectives on cultural identity, as discussed in his published (1990) theory, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," presents "essentialist and constructivist identities," offer two contrasting ways to understand cultural identity. Essentialist identity views identity as fixed, inherent, and rooted in shared traits such as ethnicity, culture, or history, emphasizing unity and continuity. This perspective can be empowering for creating solidarity. In contrast, Constructivist identity sees identity as fluid, dynamic, and socially constructed, shaped by history, culture, and power. It acknowledges diversity, hybridity, and the ongoing process of becoming, allowing for adaptation and resistance to dominant narratives. Hall critiques essentialism for its rigidity and exclusion while advocating for the flexibility of constructivism, which better reflects the complexity of identity in contemporary, multicultural contexts.

My dualities reflect a blend of both 'essentialist' and 'constructivist' perspectives. My duality as a colonized self and Māori self remains fixed by our shared traits, and fluid, while constantly transforming through shared experiences as part of a 'becoming' process as Hall defines.

### **Kaupapa Māori Principles**

Kathie Irwin of Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Porou played a key role in Kaupapa Māori framework. Advocating for Māori-centered approaches, in education and research during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Irwin's (1992) groundwork in "Towards Theories of Māori Feminism" (p. 1-9), challenged the dominance of Western methodologies by promoting Māori values, perspectives, and ways of knowing. Believing in education as a tool for cultural revitalization. Irwin inserts Mana Wāhine discourse is:

*In our work with Māori women we need to recognize that they, like any other community of women, are not a homogenous group. A number of other factors influence Māori women's development: tribal affiliation, social class, sexual preference, knowledge of traditional Māori tikanga, knowledge of the Māori language, place in the family, the level of formal schooling and educational attainments to name but a few (p. 2).*

In this practice-led investigation through kaupapa Māori engagement, I have provided a podium to weave together narratives of identity, resilience, and cultural affirmation. Through this process, I have been able to communicate through the praxis of raranga whatu, a traditional Māori artform, that holds a collective understanding towards Te Ao Māori worldviews. This approach not only supports the artistic and cultural expression of my journey, but also ensures that the stories embedded within the kākahu, are accessible and perceived by all Wāhine Māori.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith a professor of Indigenous education, from Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, has been influential in adding to the developed kaupapa Māori research. In her (1999) book “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,” Smith critiques Western research for marginalizing Indigenous peoples and offers alternative approaches. These are based on Indigenous knowledge systems, challenging colonial research methods, and promoting respect for Indigenous worldviews. Her work focuses on research that is by Indigenous, with Indigenous, for Indigenous communities, and aids in supporting their autonomy and cultural renewal.

Professor Graham Smith, of Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Apa, and Ngāti Kahungunu iwi, has also contributed to the development of Kaupapa Māori theory. His (1997) position “The Development of Kaupapa Māori Theory and Praxis” challenges Western dominance in education, and social policy. Smith focuses on promoting Māori tino rangatiratanga as self-determination and cultural values to empower communities. Building on these principles within te whakamatara, allows me to engage in critical self-analysis, drawing from personal cultural experiences.

## Mana Wahine Theory

*-Māori Girl-*

*Mana Wahine embrace the little girl, Mana Wahine erase the dark. No more hiding young kōtiro, take my hand, I will protect you. Reclaim your Mana, reclaim your place, your voice your nativeness. Let your Mana encapsulate you in this space.*

Mana Wahine is another strand of kaupapa Māori theory, that focuses on empowering Māori women. It also draws on Māori aspirations, knowledge, and perspectives to address the impacts of colonization, patriarchy, and racism (Pihama, 2001; Pere, 1982; Mikaere, 2003). As mentioned in the introduction, Pihama (2001) played a key role in developing Mana Wahine Theory. There have been many discussions around Māori women's identities and their resistance to colonial and patriarchal oppression. Pihama argues that Mana Wahine, is not only about understanding the past but also about empowering future generations. This approach addresses important issues such as social justice, health, and education, while amplifying the voices of Māori women.

Building on this foundation, Naomi Simmonds, of Raukawa, Ngāti Huri, and Ngāti Wehiwehi iwi, expanded on mana wahine theory. Simmonds (2009) theory in “Mana Wahine Geographies: Spiritual, Spatial and Embodied Understandings of Papatūānuku,” she explored the connections between gender, spirituality, and land, which are central to the Māori worldview. Simmonds positions Mana Wahine as a decolonizing approach that challenges Western ways of thinking, and centres on the experiences of Māori women.

Jessica Hutchings from Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Huirapa iwi, and Gujarati descent, is another wahine Māori voice, contributing to the discourse on Mana Wahine. Hutchings's (2003) “Indigenous Women and Genetic Modification: Mana Wahine and the Politics of Biotechnology,” she integrates this theory into critical discussions on genetic modification (GM), and environmental ethics in Aotearoa. Hutchings explores how Mana Wahine theory intersects with contemporary issues, like biotechnology and environmental sustainability. She argues that Mana Wahine offers Indigenous women,

a way to critically examine and resist forms of neo-colonization. In prioritizing Indigenous voices in science and policy we pave the way for systemic change.

### **Te Pā Harakeke**

Over the past decade, there has been a growing movement to recognize the role of whānau in Māori well-being. Māori childrearing within the context of Whānau Ora, focuses on practices based on mātauranga Māori. These initiatives aim to support organizations in creating positive outcomes and improving the well-being of Māori families. Supportive parenting methods, developed within culturally appropriate guidelines, help shape family experiences that align with Māori aspirations (Pihama et al., 2015).

Māori academics such as Leonie Pihama, Jenny Lee, Rihi Te Nana, Donna Campbell, Hinemoanaiti Greensill, and Tammy Tauroa have been instrumental in developing te pā harakeke principles. Their research strategies in projects for work in “Tiakina Te Pā Harakeke,”<sup>20</sup> promotes Māori childrearing practices within the broader context of family well-being. This analysis addresses the vital role of whānau, in supporting holistic well-being and resilience as an application (Pihama et al., 2015).

Di Grennell from Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri and Ngāi Tahu, is known for her work in whānau well-being and violence prevention. Grennell’s (2006) academic position presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Australasian Conference on Child Abuse, has advocated for incorporating tikanga-based approaches into community action against violence in the home. Her work focuses on strengthening whānau, challenging Western paradigms, and promoting Māori approaches in preventing domestic violence (Rokx, Woodham and Joe, 1999; Pihama, 2003). Grennell’s leadership in this field has gained international recognition, earning her the Annual Human Rights Prize from the Leitner Center in New York. Grennell notes:

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<sup>20</sup> Tiakina Te Pā Harakeke translates to "Protect the Flax Bush" and holds profound significance for Māori, symbolizing the nurturing, safeguarding, and continuation of whānau (family) and cultural identity.

*Drawing on the wisdom of our tūpuna and traditions, is not to return us to a mythic past or golden age. It is to remember our people have always adapted to new circumstances and experimented with new technology. Rather it is to understand and be guided by the symbols, values and principles that can enhance our capacity to live together peacefully as whānau and communities. Our capacity for resilience as an Indigenous people is fed and nourished by our language, traditional practices and oral traditions (p. 1).*

In response, it recognizes that our ancestors were adaptable, innovative, and responsive to change. Their values, symbols, and principles continue to guide us today, helping us build stronger whānau and communities. Our endurance as Indigenous people come from our language, cultural practices, oral traditions, nurturing our collective well-being, and strength in our ability to face challenges.

### **Pūrākau**

#### ***-See Māori Me-***

*Our destiny synthesizes, nurtured and nurturing. Pūrākau speaks our ancestral place, surround me in your grace, in my rightful place. Breathe in, “tīhei mauriora,” breathe out, bloodlines soaked in whenua, new generation frontline staunch. Wrinkles align worn brown skin of mine, tells my herstory thus far, innate kupu silenced from mouth. Unfamiliar vowel sounds escape my lips, Native tongue, make a Sound.*

Pūrākau is a form of Māori narrative, but for me, it is also a personal reflection on my lived experiences. A herstory is another form of storytelling from a Wahine Māori perspective (Hutchings, 2022), this will be explained further in chapter three. Both narratives explore how colonization has impacted both the colonized self and Māori self. These dualities have experienced the same discourses in life from family, education, religion, and the loss of language—yet from opposing perspectives (Cliffe-Tautari, 2020; Lee, 2009).

While navigating these milestones has been a journey of courage, sadness, confrontation, and at times a standstill. Seeing the world through one set of eyes, but

perceiving from two distinct identities, has been contemplative. This process often leads to cycles of “thinking about and interacting with the world” as H. Smith, (2019, p. 3) describes this thinking process.

Pūrākau has been advanced through the research of Jenny Bol Jun Lee, a professor in Māori research, from the Waikato Tainui iwi. Lee’s (2009) theory “Decolonizing Māori narratives: pūrākau as a method,” concentrates on using pūrākau as a narrative tool in Indigenous research, providing a culturally grounded methodology. Lee features its value in sharing Māori knowledge, decolonizing research, and capturing the experiences of Māori teachers. Lee views pūrākau as a vital method to preserve culture, drive social change, and strengthen Māori identity. She also shows its value in education (2005) as a way to connect traditional knowledge with modern learning and positions:

*Pūrākau, a traditional form of Māori narrative, contains philosophical thought, epistemological constructs, cultural codes, and worldviews that are fundamental to our identity as Māori, and a collection of traditional oral narratives that should not only be protected, but also understood as a pedagogical-based anthology of literature that are still relevant today (p. 1).*

In response to Lee's perspectives above, Pūrākau has influenced my creative approach, which intertwines Māori oral narratives with analytical self-reflection. Lee’s view of Pūrākau as a pedagogical anthology, presents their transformative potential in contemporary education. Kairaranga also integrate learning narratives into creative teaching through the practice of raranga whatu. This honors their enduring relevance and ensure the celebration and preservation of Māori ways of knowing.

### CHAPTER 3: WEAVING THE THREADS OF IDENTITY



Figure 4. Whatu Threads of Identity. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

#### ***-Your Truth, My Truth, Our Truth-***

*Traditional whispers, contemporary hues. Their story, my story, truths untold, woven together from fibers of old, yet intertwined. Fibres of memory, weaved by times. From ancient hands to mine anew.*

*Weaving wisdom kairaranga. Te Māhangaora kahu wings. Ancestral taonga, a sacred cloak.*

*Physical, mental, spiritual same space, duality balanced an embrace.*

## Raranga Whatu

Associate Professor Donna Campbell, a prominent academic, weaver, textile artist, and senior lecturer in Māori and Indigenous Studies at Waikato University. She descends from Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Ruanui iwi. Campbell's creative practices explore cultural empowerment through Māori weaving arts, integrating knowledge with contemporary methodologies. Campbell has exhibited both nationally and internationally, with pieces held in collections such as the British Museum and Te Papa Tongarewa. Campbell's (2019) thesis: "Ngā kura a Hineteiwaiwa: The Embodiment of Mana Wahine in Māori Fibre Arts," describes the practice of raranga whatu as "identity work" explaining:

*The stories we tell through our connection with the materials of weaving, the language of weaving as intrinsic to the relationships we have with our tupuna, our world and our bodies affirm cultural identity (p. 73).*

The creation of Te Māhangaora the kākahu represents my identity work, through the practice of raranga whatu as a critical engagement in reclaiming Mana Wahine identity. Through reflective undoing and redoing creative practice, I navigate the dualities of the colonized self and Māori self as a transformative journey. Therefore, integrating traditional and contemporary knowledge systems as tools for cultural preservation, reflecting the interplay between ancestral wisdom and modernity.

Another form of identity work proceeds from Roseanna Henare-Solomona, a descendant from Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Hine. Henare-Solomona is an expert in complexity theory that explores the intricacies of cultural phenomena, and how Māori identity and culture transform when Māori migrate to Australia. Henare-Solomona's (2012) doctoral thesis: "Whakaaro Rua: Two Ways of Knowing," focuses on how migration affects Māori cultural practices, and reshapes identity. It underlines how living in a different country

influences their connection to Māori traditions, and their integration with a new environment. Henare-Solomona notes:

*Storylines help to illustrate how whānau have managed to exist as Māori in another country without their tribal system close by to support the traditional and cultural way of life (p. xiv).*

Within my duality there are two ways of knowing, coexisting within the same physical, mental, and spiritual positions, mutually influencing and relying on each other. Learning to manoeuvre these dualities, is conflicting at times, leaving me questioning which identity to embrace. Is prioritizing one over the other a betrayal of self? How do I honor both identities, without losing who I am in the process? Can I retain the positive aspects of my colonized self, while reclaiming Māori self-spaces? For me, 'Whakaaro Rua' is not about physically living in two different places, but about inhabiting one body and navigating the balance between 'two ways of knowing.'

The practice of raranga whatu has provided a creative foundation where my identities can coexist. It is my healing mechanism, bridging the gaps between identities into a unified whole. Campbell's (2019) concept, 'raranga whatu are identity work,' alongside Henare-Solomona's (2012) theory of 'two ways of knowing' and drawing on H. Smith, (2019, p. 9) ideology of weaving "new fabric from old threads," I have created Te Māhangaora from old whatu threads of knowledge, into a new woven fabric of identity, bridging two ways of knowing.

### **Harakeke Metaphor and Taonga**

The harakeke plant holds a metaphorical value in Māori culture, due to its representation of family, community, and interconnectedness. In Te Pā Harakeke philosophies, Joan Metge's (1995) research explains this metaphor as referring to:

*Māori use the flax bush (te pā harakeke) as a favourite metaphor for the family group they call the whānau. They identify the rito in each fan as a tamaiti, emerging from and protected by its matua on either side. [This also symbolises that two whakapapa or genealogical lines of descent arise from the two parents]. Like fans in the flax bush, parent-child families in the whānau share common roots and derives strength and stability as part of a larger collective. Like rito,<sup>21</sup> “children are the hope of continuity...” they represent life’s yearning for itself— the future. Like the flax bush the familial systems of whānau, hapū and iwi enter cycles of birth, death and regeneration. In this sense new life is made possible by the old (p. 15).*

This metaphor underscores the collective nature of Māori society, adaptability and the importance of nurturing relationships across generations. It is the connection to whakapapa and sustaining cultural practices.

The late Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, a respected master weaver, had a major impact in revitalizing traditional weaving practices, during the Māori Renaissance of the 1980s. Puketapu-Hetet’s (1989) book “Māori Weaving” helped preserve the art form but also supported the revival of Māori culture.

The Māori Renaissance was a cultural, political, and artistic revival of Māori identity that began in the late 20th century (Grace, 1986; Kennedy, 2011; L. Smith, 1999). It emerged as a response to colonization, land dispossession, and cultural suppression. This movement revitalized Te Reo Māori,<sup>22</sup> increased Māori political activism, and affirmed Māori sovereignty through the Treaty of Waitangi. The revival of traditional arts, such as raranga and whatu, played an important role in preserving these practices.

Puketapu-Hetet’s (2016) edition of “Māori Weaving” notes:

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<sup>21</sup> Rito represents the child or tamariki. The rito is protected by the surrounding awahi rito (the inner leaves), which symbolize the parents. Just as the rito is nurtured and sheltered by the awahi rito, children are cared for and supported by their parents in a loving and protective environment.

Te Māhangaora is my metaphoric child I have nurtured and protected throughout this academic study.

<sup>22</sup> Te Reo Māori is more than just a language; it is a living embodiment of Māori culture and an essential part of Aotearoa New Zealand’s national identity.

*When the ancestors of Māori arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, they found the clothing they had worn in the Pacific was inadequate for the cooler climate, and they quickly discovered the useful properties of harakeke. Weaving became endowed with many of the spiritual values of Māori people and came to represent unity and togetherness: a weaving together of people and communities (p. 6).*

Puketapu-Hetet's words have prompted me to reflect on my connection to kairaranga ancestors, and how spiritual bonds merge through creative practice as I work the harakeke fibres. These connections are fluid in exchange between physical and spiritual realms. Preserving raranga whatu practices as a taonga for me is essential for future generations, symbolizing the cycle of birth, life, and death, where the 'old makes way for the new' (H. Smith, 2019).

The concept of "Herstory" as previously mentioned in chapter two has emerged as a critique, by white feminists challenging traditional historical narratives. Often focused on male perspectives and ignored women's experiences. Herstory emerged in the 1960-1970s during the second-wave feminist movement. It sought to reframe history by centering women's contributions, experiences, and viewpoints. The term is a play on the word 'history,' replacing 'his' with 'her' to focus on women's narratives (Lerner, 1986).

Herstory confronts patriarchal structures compounding the importance of preserving the documents, and achievements fought for by women. This approach has been used in various fields, such as literature, sociology, and cultural studies. Scholars and activists have adopted herstory to amplify marginalized voices and promote gender equity in historical discussions.

Jessica Hutchings, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Huirapa, Gujarati descent is a researcher, and author, her work is grounded in kaupapa Māori research within the subject areas of environmental and Indigenous Studies. Hutchings's research (2022), "Claiming our Ethical space: A Wahine framework for discussing genetic modification." This work disputes the dominance of Western scientific perspectives on genetic modification. Hutchings has adopted the herstory into the harakeke metaphor, as a dynamic and

vibrant plant, valued by Māori women for its diverse and creative uses. The versatility of the harakeke plant mirrors the rich tapestry of herstories, realities, and narratives that shape the lives of Māori women. As Hutching (2022) confirms:

*There is a long herstory associated with harakeke that includes whakapapa, preparation, manufacturing and the initiation of Māori girls to the Whare Pora (House of Weaving). This herstory is familiar to the herstories of Māori women that are woven through whakapapa and emerge from the land (p.29).*

From herstory, to my story is a constant self-reflection within this thesis. The practice of raranga whatu, brings attention to the relational connections, between the weaver and her materials, ancestors, Pūrākau, and identity that colonial structures often overlook or undermine (Campbell, 2019; Yates-Smith, 1998; H. Smith, 2019). As a result, my herstory aims to reframe Māoriness within a context of strength and continuity to underscore cultural acceptance and spiritual awareness (Lee, 2009; Mikaere, 2003; Pere, 1991; Pihama, 2001).

Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Porou iwi descendant Ani Mikaere is a barrister, solicitor, and teacher of Māori law. Mikaere's (2003) book "The Balance Destroyed: The Consequences for Māori Women of the Colonization of Tikanga Māori," is a critical analysis of the intersections, between colonization, gender, and culture. Mikaere has written extensively on the impact of colonization on Māori legal practices, biculturalism, and Māori self-determination in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi settlements. Mikaere (2003) advocates:

*It is also absolutely vital that the full range of Māori women's experiences be validated. Colonization has impacted on individual women in so many ways. The life experiences of a woman who has grown up away from the marae, with neither language nor strong whānau connections are just as much a part of what it now means to be Māori as those of the woman who has grown up in a rural, marae-centred Māori community, is fluent in the language and secure in her iwi identity... (p. 141-142).*

As a Māori woman, I also grew up distant from my culture, marae, whenua, Māori language and extended whānau. This study reflects those distances, and as the duality of self, reconnecting with cultural aspects that were once lost to me. Reclaiming Mana Wahine Māori identity is about restoring aspirations of what it means to be reawakened from the colonized self. Since the inception of this master's thesis, I have come to understand, both personally and collectively, the central role of whānau within Te Ao Māori systems. These paradigms have illuminated elements that, if present, might have significantly altered my lived experiences as a child, a young girl, and a woman.

In 2019, I weaved my first harakeke flower during a raranga wānanga, this action unknowingly planted the seed for this academic paper. That moment unlocked a wealth of physical and spiritual knowledge propelling my Pūrākau. Below is my first journal reflection on this first weaving forum.

#### **Journal Reflection 4. 2. 2019**

Today marked my first day in a weaving class, and it was pure joy. I felt as though I had returned home, to a place that was both familiar and safe, surrounded by whānau. The wairua of my tūpuna nannies cloaked me, offering comfort and guidance. As I listened to instructions from our teacher a deep eagerness to learn everything filled me—like a child gazing at a jar of lollies, longing to have them all. We began by creating a ‘putiputi,’ a simple flower, and the experience was truly enriching. It was remarkable to see how a single strand of whenu could be transformed into a beautiful, blooming treasure through the art of raranga. As I reflected on the day, words like excitement, connection, beauty, peace, healing, confidence, growth, humility, becoming and transforming came to mind. Raranga feels like being in a circle of protection that never ends. Each whenu leads to another, one supporting the other, together transforming something new from the wisdom of something old.



*Figure 5. Raranga Wānanga Putiputi. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2019).*

In Māori culture, introductions begin with two essential questions: ‘Ko wai koe?’ – “Who are you?” and ‘no hea koe?’ – “Where are you from?” (Smith, 2019, p. 5). These greetings are designed to uncover your identity, family connections, and ancestral lands. However, for the colonized self, the answers have been reduced to stating an English name and current residence. From these two examples of introductions, it reflects two ways of knowing (Henare-Solomona, 2012) as I explore the duality of identity.

Throughout my herstory it requires a constant ongoing self-discovery into ‘thinking, thinking, and rethinking’ (H. Smith, 2019). This reflection prompts the questions: Why create Te Māhangaora? Why pursue research through a creative practice-led lens? Why narrate my lived experiences impacted by colonization? These questions stemmed from the struggle to articulate my personal trauma of cultural disconnection (Cavino, 2016; Gemmell, 2013; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; Pihama et al., 2014). What I have learned from this creative practice is that a story can be expressed through various mediums, such as music, art, weaving, performance art, theatre, dance, digital media, audio formats, exhibitions, and more.

One variation of storytelling was conveyed by Merata Mita of Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāi Te Rangi descent. A pioneering Māori filmmaker, activist, and scholar whose work focused on Indigenous sovereignty, cultural preservation, and decolonization. She is widely recognized for her contributions to kaupapa Māori, and for using film as a medium to challenge dominant narratives about Māori people.

Mita's (2000) statement in her article reflects:

*We must not overlook the fact, that each of us is born with story, and each of us has responsibility to pass those stories on. To fortify our children and grandchildren and help them cope with an increasingly material and technological world, we have to tell them the stories which re-enforce their identity, build their self-worth and self-esteem, and empower them with knowledge (p. 8).*

Through accepting the responsibility to pass on our stories, we preserve cultural knowledge while equipping future generations to transverse a complex and ever-changing society. Stories are not merely narratives they are vessels of identity, carrying the essence of who we are, and where we come from. In sharing these stories, we strengthen the foundations of self-worth and self-esteem, and a sense of belonging for our children and grandchildren. As Mikaere (2011) notes:

*In order to guarantee our ongoing presence as Māori, we need to preserve those things that make us unique. In other words, while our physical survival may no longer be under threat, it is our cultural survival that must now be fought for... (p. 299).*

While my existence adds to the continuation of the Māori gene pool, my cultural survival lies in the autonomy of revitalizing the practice of raranga for our future mokopuna.

The practice of raranga whatu are more than just art forms, they are treasures known as taonga. As defined by Māori Marsden a tohunga, and author on Māori philosophy,

writer, belonging to tribes Te Aupouri, Ngāi Takoto, Ahipara, Ngāti Wharara and of Ngāpuhi. Marsden's (2003) collections of writings in "The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori," acknowledges taonga are treasures, passed down from our ancestors and inserts:

*...taonga refer to the cultural tradition, lore, history: corpus of knowledge...with which the descendants can identify, and which provide them with their identity, self-esteem and dignity (p. 38).*

This perspective underscores the integral role of taonga in preserving and transmitting Māori heritage, ensuring that cultural values and ancestral wisdom continue to enrich the lives of future generations. Working with harakeke as taonga for me has provided a journey of identity, while maintaining a physical and spiritual experience of feminine dignity (Campbell, 2019; Pere, 1992; Puketapu-Hetet, 1989).

Adding to the taonga as a treasure are the words from Ngāhuia Te Awekotuku, an academic specialising in Māori cultural issues. A descendant of Te Arawa, Tūhoe, Ngāpuhi and Waikato iwi, Ngahuia's (1990) proposal describes:

*The taonga inspire and confront; they relax and soothe; they provoke and energize; they empower and sustain. They convey memories from the past and make promises for the future, and they show us where we are going to. They represent hope, fortitude and resilience: the survival of the spirit (p. 139).*

For kairaranga, the process of weaving is a sacred practice that also requires karakia, which honors the spiritual importance of the weaving sites. This ensures the integrity of knowledge, that is fluidly exchanged as kairaranga, from past to future generations. Our spiritual ancestors were cognizant of karakia, before, during and after the weaving. This ensured that the spiritual balance is maintained in both the creation of the work and the

preservation of cultural knowledge (Campbell, 2019; Puke-Hetet, 1989; H. Smith, 2019; Te Kanawa, 2022; Turi-Tiakitai, 2015).

As I previously mentioned my initiation into raranga did not follow the traditional pathways, through whakapapa, or through teachings from my nannies, aunties, or mother. Rather, it began in 2019 at Waikato University, where I participated in my first raranga wānanga<sup>23</sup> under the guidance of kaiako<sup>24</sup> whaea Donna Campbell. The introduction to raranga whatu came later, through watching YouTube videos online.

There was limited information available online, so I embarked on a journey of trial and error, undoing, reweaving and a persistence in raranga whatu practice. In self-reflection, what H. Smith (2019) describes as ‘thinking, thinking, and rethinking,’ became the repetitive process of te whakamatara. Although geographical distances and time constraints, prevented me from seeking direct guidance from other kairaranga, however, this journey, while physically solitary, spiritually I was never alone. I am reminded by the words of H. Smith (2023):

*...astute theoreticians walk both physically and spiritually amongst our own people – if we only have the eyes to see and the hearts to hear (p. 7).*

### **Opposing Threads in Creative Practice**

Within a European system, creative arts exegesis research typically involves both an “exhibition or performance” followed by a “submission for examination” (Glade-Wright, 2017, p. 90). This serves as a powerful expression of original practice. However, in Māori creative spheres, it encompasses more than artistic achievement, taking on both tangible and intangible forms, that visually, emotionally, and spiritually embody the concepts of cultural research (Pere, 1991; Te Awekotuku, 1990). Glade-Wright (2017) responds to this tangible and intangible forms as noted that in:

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<sup>23</sup> Wānanga is a forum of learning for Māori.

<sup>24</sup> Kaiako refers to a teacher.

*...creative arts it is not possible to verify the creativity of an artifact through replication as works of art are original entities that are created through an act of imagination. Imagination is not required when a work of art is replicated. Therefore, an artifact cannot be made by a second person as a test for the validity of the imaginative treatment of the ideas (p. 94).*

Glade-Wrights concept that an artifact cannot be replicated by another person, and still hold the same significance as the original maker, is in direct contrast to Māori worldviews. Māori taonga can be replicated multiple times, while still maintaining their authenticity and originality. Māori taonga<sup>25</sup> from generations past, retain their mana in contemporary times through their ongoing connection to whakapapa, mātauranga, and cultural continuity. These taonga embody the spirit, intentions, and values of their creators, serving as vessels of ancestral presence and wisdom. The mana of taonga endures because they are not merely historical artifacts; they are living entities within Māori worldviews, connected to the people and practices that engage with them (Campbell, 2019; Ellis, 2016; Hakiwai, 2014; Pere, 1982; Te Awekotuku, 1990).

Rangimārie Te Turuki Arikirangi Rose Pere a respected elder, spiritual healer, Māori language advocate, academic and conservationist, is a descendant from Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Ruapani, and Ngāti Kahungunu tribes. Pere's (1982) research in "Ako: Concepts and Learning in the Māori Tradition," contends that taonga holds its significance even when it is created many times, because of the mana it holds through the creative practices inherited by our ancestors by noting:

*Knowledge of ancestors is valued in the present, and through creative practice we can maintain and pass on these treasures" because they are "highly prized practices and beliefs of our forebears, our ancestors (p. 69).*

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<sup>25</sup> Taonga is a treasure that holds significant value, whether material, cultural, or spiritual. The concept of taonga extends far beyond physical objects, encompassing anything that is deeply cherished, revered, or holds meaning within the Māori worldview.

In Māori and Indigenous contexts, creative works are not seen as artefacts but are regarded as treasured possessions, imbued with life and spirit. Te Awekotuku's (1990, p. 93-97) research in "Art and the spirit" inquires that a taonga possesses a "birth and a beating heart," as it comes into being. It is a living entity, carrying the Wairua<sup>26</sup> of its creator and the ancestral knowledge interwoven within it. Far from being static, a taonga endures beyond its creation, embodying a legacy that can be passed down through generations, either within kairaranga lineages or through the whānau who receive it. This perspective underscores the sacred, intergenerational role of creative practices in sustaining cultural identity (Tamarapa, 2019; Te Kanawa, 1992; Turi-Tiakitai, 2015).

Barbara Bolt is an, and academic specializing in practice-led research in the creative arts. Bolt's (2010) theory, "the magic is in the handling" explores how artistic practice promotes knowledge and challenges traditional norms. Drawing from her experience painting Australian landscapes in the Northern Territory, Bolt describes how the intense sunlight fragmented the shapes of the landscape, making it difficult to represent its complexity. This challenge led her to move away from traditional techniques toward a hands-on, material-based approach, shifting her perception and creative process. Writing became essential for articulating the insights gained through this shift, framing art as a performative act that bridges creation and theoretical inquiry (Barrett & Bolt, 2007, 2010). Similarly, initial perceived 'failures' within this creative practice, later revealed innovative pathways for presenting my work, as noted in my journal reflection below.

#### **Journal Reflection 11. 2. 24**

As I progressed through the sixth row of the whatu, I noticed that two whatu had become twisted incorrectly. Now, I am faced with an indecision, should I undo the entire row to rectify the two whatu wefts, or should I accept the mistake and leave it as is? This quandary prompts me to reflect on the tikanga surrounding raranga, which advises correcting such errors.

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<sup>26</sup> Wairua refers to the spiritual essence or soul of a person, place, or object. It is an intrinsic part of the Māori worldview and plays a central role in understanding identity, well-being, and connections to the physical and metaphysical realms.

However, as a contemporary wāhine māori artist, I have always embraced the notion that mistakes can contribute to the overall aesthetics of the artform. I interpret this mistake as a subtle nudge from wairua, guiding the harakeke in hands toward this incorrect action, as it is attuned to my unconscious desires for creativity. This moment presents an opportunity for me to choose between two paths: embracing the mistake as an integral part of my creativity or adhering to kairaranga tīkanga by correcting it.

The beginning of this thesis had specific compositions intended as the cultural foundation. However, my research has taken a complete 180-degree turn, revealing layers of understanding that were hidden until now. This is ‘the magic in my making’ and the heart of my practice-led learning, allowing time for the work to evolve, uncover what was previously unseen, and letting Wairua walk with me as a Māori kairaranga artist.

Bolt’s recognition of the unpredictable nature of creative practice, aligns closely with the experiences documented in this paper. The creative and writing processes has undergone multiple cycles of transition, interruption, renewal, and momentum-building. These complexities were sometimes chaotic but necessary to maneuver through to the other side. Periods of reflection, realignment through karakia, and external support were incorporated as needed to guide the progression. My journal reflection below describes trusting the process even in the midst of chaos.

#### **Journal Reflection 9. 2. 24**

Today, I found myself reworking some of my weaving. My focus on achieving technical precision, particularly with colour sequences, led to frustration as I tried to bring order to my thoughts of chaos. Realizing that this meticulous approach felt off, I sensed an inner urge to select colours more randomly. I then remembered my ancestors, whose presence has always guided my creative endeavours. A quick karakia of gratitude reopened the channels of connections, allowing me to experiment without a preconceived pattern of chosen colours, this form of process soothed both the conscious and unconscious hinengaro of the wāhine Māori artist. Though I have faced challenges along the way, I am reminded that these obstacles have a purposeful place in the journey.

Creative arts are an ever-evolving landscape, and practice-led research is gaining recognition under various names such as studio research, artist-informed research, and arts-based research (Glade-Wright, 2017). For Māori, this approach is not new, it's a process that Indigenous peoples have practiced long before colonization. Our learning methods are reciprocal, where knowledge is freely exchanged between kairaranga to keep cultural techniques alive in both 'old and new' (H. Smith, 2019; Campbell, 2019) innovative ways, ensuring future artists can learn and grow.

One of those new innovative artists is Tāwhanga Nopera (2017), affiliated with Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Te Rarawa, and Tainui iwi. In his thesis, titled “Huka Can Haka: Taonga Performing Tino Rangatiratanga,”<sup>27</sup> explores the role of Māori art forms in asserting Indigenous identity and sovereignty. Nopera challenges and articulates complex themes in Māori identity, takatāpui<sup>28</sup> culture and Indigenous trauma. His created art forums are through “digital image, digital video, writing and performance,” he weaves these threads of knowledge pertaining to his research (p. 15). Nopera (2017) sustains that there is:

*...an important aspect of raranga that is connective; although kairaranga often mahi alone, we gather knowledge and draw shared experiences into our creations – sustained focus brings thoughts of relationships into our conscious and unconscious minds (p.43).*

Another unique artist is Deborah Heke, from the iwi Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Te Arawa, and Ngāti Kahungunu. Her thesis, (2023) “Te Kupenga: A woven methodology for collecting, interpreting, and stor(y)ing Māori women’s knowledges.” She explores ‘Te Kupenga,’ a type of open-weave net, traditionally used for fishing or gathering food. This woven structure integrates three key approaches: Whakapapa, Mana Wahine theory, and physical activity. Heke contends:

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<sup>27</sup> Tino Rangatiratanga represents the right and responsibility of Māori to govern themselves, their lands, resources, and people according to their own tikanga (customs) and mātauranga (knowledge).

<sup>28</sup> Takatāpui is a traditional Māori term that historically referred to a close, intimate companion of the same sex.

*The conceptualisation of this methodology evolved from intersecting lenses to intersecting threads. These threads weave together philosophies and practices that take what is needed or useful from each and filters out what is not. Inherent in the structure of these intersecting threads of the Kupenga is the ability to be dynamic, adaptable, and discerning (p. 149).*

Her threads, woven and filtered to determine what is needed, reflects my process of weaving whatu threads of knowledge. Through the repetitive introspection, I have been able to unravel and reweave what is needed or not, refining how I articulate my positionality within this research, guided by my Te Whakamatara methodology.

### **Te Mōhiotangaora**

“Within the knowing healing begins,” translates to “Te Mōhiotangaora” in the Māori language. This is my Māori conceptualization that embodies intrinsic parts of my identity as a kairaranga. Te Mōhiotangaora is made up of three components: Mana, Mauri and Wairua, all are present within the practice of raranga whatu. While each carries an intangible importance, their true power comes when they emerge together promoting wellness.

This approach is likened to Pere's (1991) “Te Wheke” model, by using the sea octopus as a metaphor for the individual, or whānau wellness. Each tentacle represents a different dimension of well-being, and when all eight tentacles function in harmony, the whole being thrives, reflecting a state of optimal health.

In a comparable way, Mason Durie affiliated to Rangitāne, Ngāti Kauwhata, and Ngāti Raukawa tribes is a renowned professor in Māori studies, whose extensive research in psychiatry has made an impact on Māori health. Durie's (1998) composition is recognized globally, for the development of “Te Whare Tapa Wha model,”<sup>29</sup> which offers

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<sup>29</sup> Te Whare Tapa Wha is a holistic health model in Te Ao Māori. The four walls of the house represent and equilibrium of wellbeing. One wall is for the physical body wellbeing. One wall is for spiritual wellbeing of the spiritual. One wall is family and social wellbeing. One wall is for the mental and emotional wellbeing.

a holistic approach to health grounded in Māori cultural perspectives. Durie likens well-being to a house, where the four walls represent different elements of wellbeing: the taha tinana (the physical body), taha wairua (the spirituality), taha whānau (the family), and taha hinengaro (the mentality or intellect). Just as Pere's "octopus tentacles" must function in balance, Durie's "house walls" must also remain in equilibrium to ensure overall well-being. These two forms of wellness confirm Te Mōhiotangaora authenticity, of emerging components in enabling my health and wellbeing.

### **Mana**

Mana exists in both tangible and intangible forms. It spans internal and external realms, connecting earthly and celestial planes while embracing material and spiritual dimensions (Pere, 1991). Mana shapes our relationships with ourselves, our whānau, and our communities, influencing how we live and interact with the world. It embodies both simplicity and complexity, resisting any single definition (Henare, 1988).

Pihama (2022) continues to ensure that:

*Mana is integral to all aspects of our cultural world as Māori, including the ways we engage with tikanga across a broad range of contexts, practices, protocols, rituals, and relationships. Our protocols and practices are interconnected, offering guidance on what is 'tika,' what is correct (p. 192).*

Mana is central to everything we do as Māori, guiding our connections with tikanga and rituals to relationships and daily practices. Our protocols offer clarity on what is tika (right and true) and we are empowered to live with purpose, honoring our traditions and upholding the values that define us. It grows through collective support, uplifting us as we carry out social, cultural, and political obligations (Marsden & Royal 2003).

I view Mana as a dynamic force, woven into the fabric of Te Māhangaora. Representing personal growth while recognizing who I am as a Māori woman. Mana is not static for me; it is a living, breathing, and an expression of empowerment (Pihama, 2001; Te

Awekotuku, 1990). When I reflect on Mana, I see images of Māori women nurturing children, preparing meals for their whānau, attending universities, singing waiata, laughing while weaving, and sharing love with their mokopuna.

When Mana is paired with Wahine, it celebrates the powerful roles of Wāhine Māori in Te Ao Māori worldviews. While the word Wāhine translates to ‘women,’ it holds much deeper meaning. It encompasses many phases, spaces, and roles that Māori women embody throughout their lives (Pihama, 2001). To be a Mana Wahine Māori is to carry the strength of your ancestors, the wisdom of the land, and the ability to navigate life with grace, resilience, and Mana (Mikaere, 2003).

### **Mauri**

In Te Ao Māori, mauri is the vital life force that sustains all living things, linking physical and spiritual realms. Mauri enables growth and continuity within the natural world, connecting all entities, from people, trees, water, land, and animals an interdependent kinship network through whakapapa. This interrelatedness reflects the Mana and spiritual authority inherited from the gods, where each being holds both familial and spiritual relationships (Pere, 2022; Royal, 2007a; Yates-Smith, 1998).

I argue in the practice of raranga whatu, I experience Mauri as an exchange of energies through ‘breath work,’ where my life force aligns with the Mauri of the kākahu. This reciprocal interaction breathes life into the kākahu and returns vitality to me, creating a flow of healing energies that are crucial to my creative Māori space (Campbell, 2019; H. Smith, 2019; Te Awekotuku, 1990; Te Awekotuku et al., 2021).

Riri Te Whara Ellis is a director of Māori and Pasifika Business Programmed, at the Wellington School of Business and Government, Victoria University of Wellington. From Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Porou iwi, her work focuses on Māori entrepreneurship, governance, and collaborative business opportunities. Ellis’s (2006), research study “Enhancing Māori Health and Well-Being.” A kaumatua<sup>30</sup> gives his perceptions about the element of Mauri in these paraphrased words:

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<sup>30</sup> A kaumatua is an elder within Māori communities, while holding respected and pivotal roles.

*There is an entire world that we often overlook. It is like there is an entire world within our world. Have we heard of 'mauri'? It is a term that has different meanings and interpretations depending on who may ask. Mauri is like an entity that can be alive and functioning without a person to reside in. Suppose we can somehow 'tap' into this mauri. In that case it can be a major source of knowledge. (p.269).*

The 'tapping' into Mauri<sup>31</sup> referenced by the kaumatua is one of many ways to engage with this vital energy source, with each individual experiencing it uniquely. Before starting my academic journey, I lacked an understanding of Mauri as my birthright. I never questioned my whakapapa, or feelings of isolation as Māori, accepting them as normal. As part of the learning process my duality of identity has tapped into this Mauri and accepted it as part of my Mana Wahine identity.

### **Wairua**

Wairua is a fundamental element of hauora, essential for maintaining balance across the physical, mental, and emotional dimensions of well-being. It is a sacred energy interwoven with whakapapa, connecting individuals to their ancestors and the natural world. Marsden (2003) describes Wairua as "the source of existence, being, and life" (p. 47). For me, as a kairaranga, this existence is illuminated through the traditional and contemporary techniques of raranga whatu, as my interrelationship with the textile is guided by the energies of Wairua.

Pere (1982) emphasizes that Wairua offers intuitive guidance in "every act and natural phenomena" (p. 12), reinforcing our sense of belonging. Through karakia, the nurturing of spiritual vitality supports both individual and collective wellness, while sustaining Indigenous knowledge systems (Mikaere, 2011; Simmonds, 2009; Te Awekotuku, 1990).

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<sup>31</sup> For Māori weavers, mauri is a deeply significant concept that represents the life force, vitality, or essence present in all living and non-living things. It is the spiritual energy that connects weavers to their materials, their ancestors, and the broader environment.

## Ceremony

### *-Sacred Feminine-*

*Feminine, intimate my Māoriness pervades this space, wahine, kawa, and tapu—a private sphere, reciprocal learning unfolds, energies connect across dimensions. Atmosphere still, suffused with light, while flashes of fire cleanse the room. In this heightened state, the unseen is perceived, the unheard is understood, with every sense attuned to the liminal space between here and there. Time loses relevance; sustenance flows abundantly, renews with blessings, this space my Māoriness, intimate and feminine, Wahine Māori.*

Ngahuaia Murphy of Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Ruapani ki Waikaremoana, Tūhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu, and Te Arawa descent. A researcher and educator whose work revitalizes Mana Wāhine and affirms Mana motuhake. Murphy's (2019) thesis, "Te Ahi Tawhito, Te Ahi Tipua, Te Ahi Nā Mahuika: Re-igniting Native Women's Ceremony," explores the transformative power of ceremony, in restoring sacred relationships for Māori and Indigenous women. Murphy validates intimate feminine spaces that challenge colonial structures through relational ceremonial practices.

For me, ceremonial spaces are intimate, feminine, subtle, potent, and solitary, are created the moment my hands connect with the textiles. Through this connection, I experience an exchange of images, words, and scents that rejuvenate my senses, affirming the presence of my kairaranga tūpuna.

In this feminine state of being, I incorporate a practice called 'breath-work,' as previously mentioned in Te Mōhiohio section, as part of my raranga whatu practice. This breath-work occurs in a space between non-being and being, a meditative place where time has no meaning, sometimes referred to as Te Kore Kore,<sup>32</sup> described as the realm of limitless potential (Marsden & Royal, 1992). This quiet, unimpeded state

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<sup>32</sup> Te Kore Kore It is seen as a place of reflection, potential growth, and transformation, where the essence of creation and creativity resides. As a weaver it is the starting point of the creative process. The untouched harakeke fibres embody this potential waiting to take form.

represents intuitive rightness, as each inhale and exhale of Wairua energies, flow naturally in my creative space of Māoriness.

Paula Gunn Allen, a Native American scholar, poet, and novelist of Laguna Pueblo, Sioux, and Lebanese descent, is celebrated for her contributions to Native American literature and feminist studies. Allen's (1992) book, "The Sacred Hoop" offers a contemporary perspective on American Indian feminism, highlight the vital role of Indigenous ceremonies. Allen argues that these ceremonies are more than rituals, they serve as spiritual connections, conduits for healing, and continuity in Indigenous life.

I agree with Allen's view of ceremony as a multifaceted system, recognizing its embedded components within the practice of whatu. Over the past 18 months, Te Māhangaora has embodied a reciprocal process of growth and metamorphosis, benefiting both entities the kākahu and Wahine Māori. This dynamic relationship reflects an ongoing journey of 'becoming,' as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Also, the healing process is evident through positive feedback from my counsellor Anita Moleta. She has helped me recognize the profound transformation I've undergone, becoming an entirely distinct woman from the one who first sought her guidance. Below is a journal reflection contemplating within creative spaces.

#### **Journal Reflection 20. 3. 24**

For the third time, and last time I found myself undoing the whatu twining returning to square one. Why did I feel compelled to do this? It dawned on me that too many eyes had entered my creative sanctuary, a space I had intended to keep sacred and personal. While I was comfortable with my supervisor witnessing my progress, the random intrusion of others felt uneasy and beyond my control. Sitting with my kākahu, I could not progress any further; I was at a standstill, grappling with reasons as to why? Days passed without the urge to engage with her, prompting me to reflect on the underlying cause. Finally, I came to understand that my tūpuna kairaranga, nudging me from that sacred space of knowing, letting me know to keep my private zone of creativity solo, with karakia for protection and to continue on.

## CHAPTER 4: WEAVING THE THREADS OF HERSTORY



Figure 6. Pūrākau Threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### ***-Māori Woman and Wahine Māori-***

*I perceive the chant upon the wind, an ethereal echo of wāhine wailing. Do you hear? Harken, for they are near, karanga invoke your presence. Time to expose, your authentic self—brown skin, brown hair, brown eyes—unapologetic in all your glory. Your identity, woven into DNA, firmly rooted in whakapapa, preordained by our Atua. No longer constrained by limitations; you soar freely on kahu wings. Can you not discern? Can you see? I am here—timeless, weightless, adorned in a feathered cloak, interwoven in transition, both woman and Wahine. Our becoming with open sight, welcoming truth be told an illuminate.*

### **Rehutai and Tangimoana (Twin Sisters)**

My work draws inspiration from the Māori pūrākau of twin sisters Rehutai and Tangimoana, born from the union of Papatūānuku and Ranginui their parents. According to the pūrākau, Rehutai and Tangimoana personify the sea waters, with Rehutai symbolizing its calm, serene nature and Tangimoana representing its turbulent, fierce aspect (Schrader, 2024). Despite their contrasting temperaments, the sisters share a deep maternal bond. However, their relationship is tested when a fierce argument erupts over a handsome warrior and Ruatoroa starts to cause a great disturbance across both land and sea. Concerned for the safety of the land and its people, their parents intervene by casting a spell that separates the sisters, binding them to opposite ends of the ocean. Though separated by vast distances within the same ocean, their connection endures, and their moods continue to influence the oceanic movements reminding us of their sisterhood.

This Māori Pūrākau, symbolized by the twin sisters, reflects the interplay of contrasting forces, mirroring my journey of navigating the duality between my colonized self and Māori self. They are separate yet part of a greater whole, connected through their shared maternal mothers, prompting continuous self-reflection within societal contexts (Pihama, 2001; Yates-Smith, 2022).

### **University Expedition**

My university journey began in 2019 with enrolment in the ‘Te Tohu Paetahi’<sup>33</sup> program, a full-immersion course focused on learning ‘Te Reo,’ the Māori language. However, I only completed the first semester, as I struggled to adjust to the classroom environment as a mature-age student. The challenges were further compounded by the complexities of inner insecurities for cultural acceptance, making my full integration difficult.

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<sup>33</sup> Te Tohu Paetahi is a BA Degree taught in the Māori language at a university.

This struggle to find cultural acceptance within an academic setting, echoes the research of Native American scholar Brian Brayboy. His (1999) theoretical composition in “Tribal Critical Race Theory,” focuses on the challenges Indigenous students, and faculty experience in colonial institutions. He discusses the concepts of “insider” and “outsider” positionality, noting how these labels are inconsistently applied. Brayboy often faced being perceived as an 'outsider' within his own community. This stemmed from a historical mistrust toward European scholars, whose past exploitation of Indigenous knowledge caused notable harm. As a result, Indigenous communities were cautious about sharing cultural narratives, fearing further misrepresentation. Brayboy’s aspirations were, to one day be seen as an ‘insider,’ fully accepted and trusted within his Native American community.

L. Smith (2012) also confirms this mistrust and asserts:

*Within many indigenous communities there is a deep conservatism and an unwillingness to upset the status quo, and in these environments any agents of change – whether educators, researchers or activists – are regarded as suspect (p. 217).*

Similarly, Henare-Solomona (2012, p. xiv), contributes to this discussion by articulating the difference between the “insider’s passionate perspective” and the “outsider’s dispassionate one.” Her exploration of this insider-outsider dynamic reveals the complexities faced by Māori. Particularly those migrating to Australia and seeking to affirm their identity, away from their homeland Aotearoa. Henare-Solomona identifies the importance of gathering and sharing Indigenous knowledge within the framework, of “kaupapa Māori research” (p. 21) to preserve its sanctity and protect Māori communities from exploitation by outside researchers. Henare-Solomona inserts that:

*History reminds us the Pakeha system in Aotearoa has been largely responsible for the disempowerment of our Māori people. By revisiting our storylines Māori can validate how destructive research has been for us. When we conduct studies of any kind that*

*involve Māori suspicion and even animosity towards the process is often a major factor to consider (p. 21).*

Internal conflicts of being an insider and outsider within various academic and social contexts, creates a sense of uncertainty as I navigate settings, where belonging seems conditional. Cultural acceptance was often met with challenges and at times unattainable from a personal perspective. Many times, I felt my authenticity as a Māori woman scrutinized into boxes labelled, this is the template to follow if you want to be an authentic Māori.

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Māori language was excluded from New Zealand's curriculum, and children were often punished for speaking it, this led to a dramatic reduction in its use over many generations. Within these colonial systems, Māori language and cultural knowledge were stigmatized as barriers, viewed as outdated pre-colonial concepts that the education system sought to replace. This marginalization contributed to the erosion of te reo Māori,<sup>34</sup> and with it the associated cultural practices (Cliffe-Tautari, 2020; Gemmell, 2013; Mead, 2003; L. Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990).

Consequently, the stories shared by my parents reflect the painful history of cultural suppression, as they were reprimanded and even physically punished for speaking their Māori language. As a result, they chose not to pass the language on to me and my siblings, with my father often remarking, "better that you learn the white ways" (Smith & Simon, 2001). This decision shaped by the emotional trauma of language erasure, deepened my sense of cultural disconnection, hindering my cultural acceptance.

The intergenerational impact of these experiences illustrates what L. Smith (1999) describes as the deliberate marginalization of Indigenous knowledge systems, under colonial regimes, brings attention to the long-term effects of such systemic oppression. Smith notes:

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<sup>34</sup> Te Reo Māori is much more than just a language for Māori people; it is a taonga deeply embedded in their identity, culture, and worldview. Growing up as a child and teenager I only knew it as the Māori language or native language.

*For many Indigenous peoples, colonization has meant being cut off from their own histories, cultures, and languages, leading to deep isolation and alienation from their own identities (p. 28).*

In the classroom I often felt like an ‘outsider’ among Māori students, with varying levels of te reo Māori proficiency. While some spoke fluently and others struggled, and my own sense of inadequacy felt overwhelming. Learning unfamiliar words, sounds, and vowel structures, in a language tied to my cultural identity proved daunting. Although I was physically seen as another Māori in the classroom, our shared aspirations to reclaim our native language did not bridge my learning gap. This mirrors Brayboy’s reflections on his own experiences, where he yearned to be recognized as part of the collective ‘us.’ This setback in reclaiming the language as a Māori woman, ultimately led to my early withdrawal from the Te Tohu Paetahi program. Operating in duality while fearing rejection, from a Māori community absent from my childhood impacted my cultural belonging (Gemmell, 2013; Mead, 2003).

Despite these initial challenges, I later pursued and successfully completed, a Bachelor of Social Sciences in 2023, majoring in Māori and Indigenous Studies and Psychology. This marked a pivotal step in embracing both my academic and cultural identity. Each Māori paper that I engaged with provided an opportunity to adopt new values; aspirations; belief systems, and rules grounded in tikanga<sup>35</sup> Māori (Jenkins & Pihama, 2022). As a colonized Māori woman, the integration of these elements into my identity felt unnatural. My colonial mindset often questioned the Māori epistemologies I encountered, as the internal struggle against colonial indoctrination persisted (Gemmell, 2013; Johnston & Pihama, 1994).

I initially struggled to engage with concepts beyond basic practices, such as the introductory rituals of welcome that marked each new course. These anxiety-inducing experiences I refer to stem from generations of systemic oppression that marginalized

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<sup>35</sup> Tikanga refers to customs, practices, and protocols that guide Māori ways of living. In this context, I was learning the cultural norms surrounding karakia (prayers) in educational settings. This included introducing myself according to Māori tradition by acknowledging my tribal affiliations, ancestral mountain, river etc.

Māori cultural practices. Many Māori students, including myself, have internalized these beliefs that the Māori ways of knowing are inferior—a lasting impact of colonization (Jackson, 1998; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; L. Smith, 1999).

Gianna Leoni of Ngāi Takoto and Ngāti Kuri descent, with Italian heritage, explores this in her (2009) research in “Ma te huruhuru te manu ka rere – the formation of Māori identity in Dunedin high schools” on government attitudes toward the Māori language, shedding light on the broader implications of these systemic issues by explaining:

*It is here our Maori children began lessons in thinking that the Maori way of life was ‘inferior’, and they soon learnt European ways of life and understanding the world (p. 34).*

Formal introductions through a pēpeha were intimidating, as I struggled with the pronunciation of Māori kupu.<sup>36</sup> Despite my outward appearance as a Māori woman, I often felt like an ‘outsider’ among my peers (Brayboy, 1999). In my efforts to blend in and go unnoticed, I would anxiously hope to avoid being called on or questioned by the teacher. While I can now look back on these moments with humor, they were anxiety-inducing at the time. An internal, childlike voice constantly asked, ‘Am I Māori enough?’ (Cliffe-Tautari, 2020; Leonie, 2009; Pihama, 2001).

#### **Journal Reflection 4. 4. 24**

Why do I have to be more māori? I struggle to be māori enough to be accepted by a staunch Māori community. Are there rules that I must abide by? Is the color of my skin not dark enough, or is it too light? Do my brown eyes look so kind that others think they can dictate my journey here at university?

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<sup>36</sup> Kupu is the Māori word for “word.”

Cultural disconnection and a yearning to reclaim my mana wahine identity, stem from historical events marked by dispossession, assimilation, and intergenerational grief (Brave Heart, 1999; Durie, 2009; Pihama et al., 2014). These experiences, suffered by our ancestors have left enduring scars that manifest into the present. These constructs continue to perpetuate negative stigmas within Indigenous communities, reinforcing feelings of alienation and loss (Binney, 1984; Jackson, 1998; Johnston & Pihama, 1994; Mead, 2003).

### **Colonized Māori Woman**

Mid-20th-century colonial policies, partially “pepper potting,” aimed to assimilate Māori into Pākehā society by moving them from traditional communal settings, into predominantly European neighborhoods (Walker, 1990, 2006). This policy encouraged nuclear family living, disrupting the Māori way of life centered on collective well-being and shared caregiving. This shift made it harder to maintain te reo Māori, tikanga, and other cultural practices and traditions. Living in predominantly Pākehā<sup>37</sup> communities often subjected Māori to social isolation; systemic racism, and discrimination particularly in education and employment (Jackson, 1998; L. Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990).

Growing up in a middle-class Māori family in Pukekohe, a town known for its history of racial tensions (Bartholomew, 2020), I experienced a sheltered childhood. Unlike the communal lifestyle of my ancestors, my upbringing lacked the presence of extended whānau to pass on the richness of Māori traditions. My nuclear family consisted of two brothers, two sisters, and both parents. My earliest childhood memories are largely devoid of mātauranga Māori and lack the sense of whanaungatanga, which is central to the Te Ao Māori worldview. (Mead, 2003; Mikaere, 1994).

Professor Ranginui Walker a respected Māori academic, author, and activist of Ngāti Ruatākena, Ngāti Patumoana, and Whakatōhea iwi, was a powerful advocate for Māori rights, cultural preservation, and social justice. Walker’s (1990) research book “Ka

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<sup>37</sup> Pākehā is a term used by Māori people to refer to New Zealanders of European descent, particularly those of British origin.

Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End” examines the effects of colonization on Māori communities and argued towards self-determination. Walker featured how the ‘pepper potting’ policy of the 1970s forced Māori families into European neighborhoods, breaking up Māori state housing communities, yet another government construct aimed at dispossession.

Government strategies affected my nuclear family as I grew up without the presence of extended whānau, no grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. My father seeking better employment opportunities, relocated our family from rural Kaikohe to the suburbs of South Auckland. This prioritized the economic well-being of our nuclear family of five children. However, with this relocation I was deprived of cultural practices inherent in mātauranga, tikanga, whanaungatanga, and other aspects of Te Ao Māori. The shift displaced communal to urbanization as a systematic discourse of assimilation oppressing the Māori people ( Irwin, 1992; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; L. Smith, 1992; Walker, 1990).

Christianity was another wave of assimilation, as its monotheistic beliefs often positioned humans as separate from and superior to nature, conflicting with Māori views of interconnectedness with their environment. Christianity also attempted to replace Māori spiritual practices, labelling them as pagan or inferior, which disrupted Māori culture and spiritual identity.

In this context, my understanding of Mana, Mauri, and Wairua elements, were displaced by these teachings of Christianity, particularly in a singular European God (Marsden & Royal, 2003; Mikaere, 2022). The aspirations of Te Ao Māori were overshadowed by the Christian doctrine that dominated my sense of being (Gemmell, 2013). Attending church every Sunday reinforced these teachings, which conflicted with the Māori worldview of gods and deities (Mikaere, 2003; Yates-Smith, 1998). Hearing the Māori language at church was a rare occasion, and its eventual suppression further exemplified the institutionalized oppression of Māori culture. Adhering to these external pressures, my sense of belonging and safety within the Christian church environment was absent. As a timid child, I was often wary of adults and clung closely to my mother, my protector. The lack of cultural resonance within the Christian environment left a

huge disconnect for Māori Wairua, that might have otherwise nurtured my sense of belonging. The creative writing below demonstrates this disconnection.

***-White Ghosts-***

*Christianity shackled my growth. A cold deception confined me in. Dark skin sinners go to hell. Indoctrinated truth beholds. No whakapapa here. Don't speak your native tongue. Dress like us, talk like us, sing like us. Little girl, do-not be shy, we will cleanse you. No whanaungatanga in this congregation, few dots of brown amongst the mass of white. Something is absent, cannot, they, see? Sightless needs, speechless I must be. Good little girl, hymn songs deafen my ears. Innocent, they corrupt, too trusting look around. Indecent assault, stuck in time warp, body froze in place. Little girl powerless, mental movies on repeat. Never forget internal scars. No memories of childhood treats.*

I experienced trauma for the first time at the age of eight years. This harm stemmed from religious doctrines, where patriarchy and colonization allowed the perpetrator to evade accountability. As a result, the emotional wounds remain a distant yet persistent memory, leaving psychological scars as a constant reminder. From that moment on, I lived in a state of survival, remaining silent became a coping mechanism many children adopt (Duran, Firehammer & Gonzalez, 2008). These intersecting systems of oppression, rooted in global institutions, continue to cause harm and marginalization, especially within Indigenous communities (Duran et al., 1998; Duran, 2006). My experiences are part of a larger tapestry of Pūrākau—herstories that highlight the resilience of Māori women. In sharing our stories, we challenge the systems that seek to silence us, building a collective strength that empowers and redefines our reclamation of Mana Wahine identity (Irwin, 1992; Johnston & Pihama, 1994; Pihama, 2001).

In Pukekohe, many Māori families lived in low-income working-class areas, however despite being Māori, I had a middle-class upbringing because of my father's barbershop business, set me apart from both Māori and non-Māori students. We enjoyed greater

opportunities than many low-income Māori families, but this placed me in a unique position: not poor enough to be fully adopted by the Māori student community, and not wealthy enough to be accepted by the white middle-class students. This led me to shift between ‘insider and outsider’ positionalities, depending on the social setting (Brayboy, 1999; Solomona-Henare, 2012).

The following creative writing reflects my experiences at Pukekohe High School, where I was exposed to a distinct set of unspoken norms. These norms discouraged questioning the differences between myself and other Māori students.

### ***-Am I Māori Enough-***

*Is my skin not dark enough? Is my language too pākeha-fied for you? Why do you stare at me so? Are my threads too flashy. We share the same primordial roots. Why am I conscious of indifference. Disdain in your eyes cuts me deep. Though we inhabit different spaces, boundary school fences keep us in. Despite the opposing ideologies, our friend's through different lenses. Two pākeha girls my nerdy friends, whanaungatanga surrounds you, playful laughter reciprocal. Many skins akin to yours, darker than mine. My half-cast skin separates our indifference, isolated, lost, cultural identity child in trauma mode. Attitudes seen as indifferent, ‘other’ assimilation’s grip tightens. Normality becomes indoctrination, at home, at school, at church. Foraging amongst roots to unearth myself. Underground passage solitary direction beacons. Who is she? Why is she here?*

### **Wahine Māori**

The day I started raranga wānanga at Waikato University in 2019, marked the beginning of reclaiming my mana wahine identity. With each passing week, as my understanding of raranga grew, I underwent a profound shift—physically, mentally, and spiritually. This journey opened doors to a renewed sense of self, revealing connections to my Māoriness that I had not fully understood or recognized. In this space, guided by Kaupapa Māori and the principles of Te Pā Harakeke (Pihama et al., 2015), I uncovered vital aspects of my identity that I hadn't realized were missing.

I eagerly absorbed the raranga knowledge shared in these classes, feeling an insatiable need to learn more. I quickly realized that working with harakeke and creating with it generated a powerful, healing energy that surrounded me (Campbell, 2019; H. Smith, 2019). Henceforth, old wounds of cultural disconnection were healing, and trauma as a Māori girl was gently soothed (Brave Heart, 1999; Pihama et al., 2014).

My experiences as a university student have been enriching, allowing me to explore my duality within a community of Indigenous women on similar academic journeys. As I reflect on my roles as a grandmother, mother, aunty, sister, teacher, learner, artist, creative writer, and kairaranga, I recognize that my understanding of identity is constantly evolving. Some days, I may be perceived simply as a Māori woman, judged by my appearance and constrained by societal norms (Pihama, 2022), on other days, I fully embody the essence of a Mana Wahine Māori, celebrating self-determination and the values that define me (Henare, 1988; Pere, 1991; Pihama, 2001).

## CHAPTER 5: WEAVING THE THREADS OF KĀKAHU



Figure 7. Kākahu Tūpuna Threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### ***-Tupuna kākahu-***

*A karakia whispered in tīkanga lore. Kākahu leaves once sheltered to protect, the end is near this physical sphere, return to whenua Papatūānuku mother. A space of continuity thrives strengthening roots, as old gives way to new. Kākahu from past to present, mana, mauri and wairua unchanged.*

*Traditions of old with contemporary anew, carry the souls of our kairaranga ancestors.*

## **Kākahu Whakapapa**

The origins of kākahu date back to our esteemed ancestors, long before British traders arrived in Aotearoa. These cloaks have always been symbols of traditional mana, showcasing a rich variety of types and purposes cherished by our people. Each kākahu held great distinctions, woven with care and intention, and valued for its many roles within Māori culture. The art of weaving has been passed down through generations, preserving its sacred essence. Today, kākahu continue to honor these traditions while incorporating modern creativity, representing resilience and cultural pride (Buck, 1911; Pendergrast, 1998; Tamarapa, 2019; Te Kanawa, 2022; Turi-Tiakitai, 2015).

Kahutoi Mere Te Kanawa is a distinguished textile artist, weaver, and academic. She is a senior lecturer at the University of Otago and a curator at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Affiliated with Ngāti Maniapoto, Tainui, and Ngāti Tūwharetoa, her (2022) dissertation, “Taonga Tuku Iho: Intergenerational Transfer of Raranga and Whatu,” explores the knowledge of raranga, whatu, and mātauranga Māori, continuing her family’s weaving legacy.

Te Kanawa highlights that both the weaver and the wearer of a kākahu are honored with mana, a status deeply connected to the garment through the practice of raranga whatu. The kairaranga's skilled hands bring the kākahu to life, creating cloaks that hold significant roles in both ceremonial and official functions.

Cultural advisor, teacher and master weaver John Turi-Tiakitai from Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne, and Ngāti Tūwharetoa iwi. Highly regarded for his expertise in traditional Māori weaving practices, including tāniko (intricate weaving patterns) used in cloaks. Turi-Tiakitai (2015) thesis “Tū te turuturu Hineteiwaiwa: maintaining cultural integrity in the teaching of Māori weaving,” illustrates the importance of preserving Māori knowledge systems, and artistic expressions.

Turi-Tiakitai actively engages in cultural initiatives to share traditional weaving skills, recognizing the immense mana of kākahu. These cloaks are not merely garments; they

are living connections to our ancestors. They also hold important roles in pōwhiri,<sup>38</sup> signing of treaty settlements, and tangihanga<sup>39</sup> to honor the tūpāpaku.<sup>40</sup> Some kākahu are preserved in the Te Papa Museum, emphasizing their sacredness and historical value. These kākahu are tangible garments dating back to the nineteenth century, often still contain traces of the oils, once used by Māori to moisturize their skin. This is confirmed by Te Kanawa and Turi-Tiakitai as they assert:

*Many were worn in the nineteenth century, and some garments shimmer on the inside surface from the residue of body oils, showing generations of wear (Tamarapa, 2019, p. 20).*

Knowledge from both prominent weavers, concede that each kākahu is a living vessel imbued with Mana, and are interconnected across generations of kairaranga. The materials used in these creations—fibers, feathers, animal skins and hair reflect the natural environment of the weaver, providing insight into the resources available during that period (Tamarapa, 2019).

When these garments are passed down through generations, they carry the stories of their previous owners and the rich history of the cloaks themselves. Within kairaranga circles, discussions often center on the construction, designs, materials used and are enriched by compelling photographic documentation. Such visual records inspire kairaranga to recreate and honor these woven taonga, ensuring their legacy continues (Tamarapa, 2019; Te Kanawa, 2022; Turi-Tiakitai, 2015).

Historically, distinct patterns and cultural symbols were used to represent different hāpu and iwi. Weavers named various types of harakeke based on their quality and intended use, with distinctions made in the leaves' length, width, thickness, and

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<sup>38</sup> Pōwhiri traditional Māori welcoming ceremony, deeply rooted in the customs and values of tikanga Māori.

<sup>39</sup> A tangihau is the traditional Māori mourning ceremony and funeral process, a cultural practice that honors the deceased and supports the bereaved.

<sup>40</sup> Deceased body.

flexibility. Te Kanawa and Turi-Tiakitai established that kākahu worn by Ariki<sup>41</sup> were woven from four primary types of materials: “Kahu kuri, Kaitaka tāniko, Kahu huruhuru and korowai” (Tamarapa, 2019, p. 24).

### **Kahu Kuri**

Polynesian dogskin, hide, and hair were highly prized materials for decorating the pauku or pukupuku, a protective war cloak crafted from tightly woven mats used in battle. These materials formed the kaupapa, the foundation of the prestigious kahu kurī,<sup>42</sup> or chiefly war cloak. Dogs held high cultural value, serving as hunters, companions, and even ceremonial food to honor guests or solidify political alliances. Conflicts and migrations sometimes arose from disputes over stolen dogs. Dogskin and hair were sparingly sewn onto cloaks in long, colorful strips for visual impact. Today, kahu kurī garments are rare due to the extinction of the Māori kurī.

### **Kaitaka Tāniko**

Kaitaka Tāniko are kākahu that have tāniko<sup>43</sup> patterns adorning the borders of the cloak, adding personal distinction to the weaver while leaving the body of the garment undecorated, to showcase the lustre of the muka.<sup>44</sup> These cloaks were considered sacred taonga, symbolizing protection and prestige.

Tāniko designs reflect abstract ideas and values from artists viewed as channels for divine creation. While some meanings behind the patterns have been lost over time, core symbolic interpretations remain. Weaving styles and designs vary by tribal origin, evolving through generations while preserving traditional patterns recognized throughout Aotearoa (Tamarapa, 2019; Te Awekotuku et al., 2021; Turi-Tiakitai, 2015).

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<sup>41</sup> Ariki is the name associated with chief, leader, person of importance, born of high ranking family, royal.

<sup>42</sup> Kuri is the Māori name for a dog.

<sup>43</sup> Tāniko is a traditional Māori weaving technique used to create intricate and decorative patterns in woven textiles, particularly in kākahu (cloaks) and other garments. It is a highly skilled form of weaving that showcases the artistry, cultural identity, and storytelling of the weaver.

<sup>44</sup> Muka are the finer fibres of harakeke.

## **Kahu Huruhuru (feather cloaks)**

### **Kahu kiwi**

In the mid-nineteenth century, the kahu kiwi, a feathered kiwi cloak, gained fame as a symbol of prestige. In the Māori worldview, birds hold a sacred connection to our Atua and embody the ability to transition between realms as messengers. They hold value within Māori traditions, intertwined with mythological narratives. The kiwi bird, being nocturnal and inherently shy, is referred to as 'te manu huna,' or the hidden bird, rarely spotted by humans. These traits are imbued into the kahu kiwi cloak, elevating its status to one of exclusivity. As New Zealand entered the twentieth century, the kiwi evolved into an iconic national symbol, further enhancing the mystical allure of the kahu kiwi cloak (Tamarapa, 2019; Te Awekotuku et al., 2021; Te Kanawa, 2022).

### **Kahu Kākā**

The kahu kākā, or kahu kura, commands an esteemed status. Adorned with red feathers from the sociable kākā<sup>45</sup> bird, these cloaks possess a chiefly essence and are renowned for their oratory skills. Red, a powerful and sacred color across the Pacific, imbues the kahu kura with symbolism of chieftainship, inspiring profound awe. Countless narratives recount the acts of chieftain ancestors who, by displaying their kahu kura feathers, energized their people to achieve remarkable feats (Tamarapa, 2019).

### **Korowai**

Korowai can be identifiable by their decorative attachments, and korowai are the extension of a pāke, a rough cape made of undressed leaves of kiekie,<sup>46</sup> in which the flat tags had the primary function of sheltering from the rain. Korowai is known as a cloak

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<sup>45</sup> Kākā bird is a large, native parrot found in Aotearoa New Zealand and holds significant cultural importance for Māori. It is known for its distinctive bright green plumage, red underparts, and striking black and orange markings.

<sup>46</sup> Kiekie is a native climbing plant of Aotearoa and has strong durable leaves ideal for weaving.

that has a decorative tassel known as hukahuka attached to the body and neck border. The hukahuka is made from rolled muka which is a fine harakeke fibre, and then dyed black. Hihimā is the same tassel but left undyed (Tamarapa, 2019; Te Awekotuku et al., 2021).

Western influences have reshaped mātauranga Māori since early settlers arrived, introducing trade, Christianity, and new societal structures that impacted whānau, hapū, and iwi (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; Walker, 2006). These changes also affected whatu kākahu, shifting attitudes toward clothing and altering Māori weaving traditions. Māori began experimenting with new materials to create different aesthetics, and finger-weft twining techniques used by ancestors were gradually replaced by faster, less labour-intensive methods. Contemporary materials that became popular were the wool and candlewick, often replacing traditional dyed fibres for both functional and decorative use (Tamarapa, 2019).

## CHAPTER 6: THE CREATION THREADS OF TE MĀHANGAORA



Figure 8. The Creation Threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

### ***-Becoming-***

*Your destination oscillates my kahu wings, messenger from the physical, ancestral realms. Your presence encircles me, hands create me, healing manifests me, Wairua forms me, a reciprocal link. One wing the colonized self, one wing the Māori self, two ways of knowing, existing in duality. Te Māhangaora needs her wings to fly. Who am I? I am both Māori woman and Wahine Māori, I am both kākahu and kahu, I have found my belonging.*

## Harakeke Harvesting



Figure 9. Harvesting, cut on an angle away from the center shoot (rito). Photograph by Witehira, T. (2019).



Figure 10. Harvested harakeke. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2019).

Before I begin harvesting harakeke, I perform a karakia, following the tīkanga as a kairaranga. This practice clears the space and seeks permission before taking anything from the ngahere<sup>47</sup> or environment as explained by Campbell (2019):

*The space of karakia clears the mind and the physical space surrounding the body to be clear and focused on the processes to follow. Performing ritual incantation provides space to be grateful for the taonga plant, to thank the whenua, and acknowledge Hineteiwaiwa as the guardian of raranga and whatu (p. 150).*

The harakeke used for the kākahu was gathered from areas near my home in Pukekohe, with roots originating from Tainui whenua and Ngāpuhi whenua. The tikanga of harvesting harakeke involves carefully cutting the outer leaves of the plant near its base, ensuring an angled cut away from the plant to encourage healthy regrowth, and prevent water retention which can lead to root rot. It is essential to leave a portion of the plant intact, supporting future growth cycles. The harvested leaves are then examined for any damaged or discoloured sections, which are removed, and trimmed to the desired length, preserving only the best parts for weaving (Campbell, 2019; Puketapu-Hetet, 2016).

I deliberately chose harakeke leaves in various conditions, ranging from unblemished to weathered leaves, to symbolize that something old can be transformed into something beautiful, while preserving its mana and inherent knowledge for future generations.

As acknowledge by Nopera (2017):

*...the transformation that takes place is more symbolic, where tūpuna rau, or older leaves used for weaving become like taonga, or special and valuable objects (p. 37).*

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<sup>47</sup> Forest, bushland of New Zealand.

These aged, weathered leaves became a source of inspiration, fueling new expressions of artistic creativity. They served as a powerful tribute to my tūpuna, whose enduring influence, continues to add importance to this practice of raranga whatu research.



*Figure 11. Bundles of unblemished to weathered harakeke leaves. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*

### **Shredding Harakeke**

Using a shredding tool, I carefully shredded the whenu<sup>48</sup> into finer fibers, leaving half of each whenu intact. This intentional process created two distinct textures, one half of the whenu smooth, and the other half shredded into finer fibres. The contrast between the shredded and unshredded parts, symbolized my duality of the colonized self and Māori self. Both apart of the whole, in honoring who I am.

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<sup>48</sup> Whenu are strands of harakeke, stripped into long lengths ready for preparation for intended purpose.



*Figure 12. Whenu marked with a line where the shredding starts. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*



*Figure 13. Pull whenu through the shredding tool. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*



*Figure 14. Finished shredded whenu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*

### **Harakeke Dyeing**

To color the harakeke fibers, I started by heating water in a large pot until it reached a boiling point. I added the commercial dye<sup>49</sup>, ensuring it was mixed thoroughly to create the desired shade of color. I then submerged the harakeke fibers into the dyed water, allowing them to absorb the color gradually. By controlling the amount of dye and the duration time the fibers stayed in the mixture, I was able to achieve the vibrancy needed to enhance my kākahu. Finally, I took the harakeke out of the dye bath and rinsed it in clean cold water to set the color and remove any excess dye. Then, I hung the harakeke in a well-ventilated area to air-dry. Each picture below will illustrate this process.

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<sup>49</sup> Teri Dyes is a commercial dye used for dyeing harakeke for various reasons: wide range of color variety, convenience and availability, durability, and innovation and experimentation.



Figure 15. Shredded whenu ready to dye. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).



Figure 16. Harakeke in pot of boiling water with commercial dye. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).



*Figure 17. Dyed whenu drying in ventilated area. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*



*Figure 18. Dyed bundles of harakeke ready to ranga whatu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*

## Whatu Threads

### Aho tapu

In Māori weaving, weft-twining is divided into two main types: single-pair and two-pair twining. These types are distinguished by the number of aho (weft threads) used in each row of whatu. Both methods can be woven with spaced rows or closely packed, creating a continuous structure. This flexibility in spacing allows for variations in texture and density, while weaving traditional Māori garments and textiles (H. Smith, 2023; Te Kanawa, 1992).

The sacred weft, or the first weft line in a woven garment, holds cultural and spiritual importance. It represents the start of the weaving journey and establishes a connection to atua, infusing the entire garment with sacred energy and protection. The term "tapu" is the spiritual importance of this aho, linking it to respect, ancestral connections, and the guiding principles of Māori weaving practices (Pendergrast, 1987; Puketapu-Hetet, 2016; Te Kanawa, 1992).



*Figure 19. Aho tapu, the first sacred row of whatu in my kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).*

## Aho

This refers to a basic form of weft-twining commonly found in early cloaks. In this technique, the aho (horizontal threads) are given a half-turn twist before wrapping around the whenu (vertical warp threads). The twist direction can be either an S-twist or Z-twist, with the S-twist being more common, especially when the right hand does the twisting as the work moves from left to right. The aho binds the whenu together, creating the fabric's structure and symbolizing connection in Māori cosmology and kinship (Puketapu-Hetet, 2016; H. Smith, 2019; Tamarapa, 2019).



Figure 20. Aho whatu threads diagram, In Tamarapa, (2019, p. 81). Whatu kākahu = Māori cloaks (Revised edition.) Te Papa Press.

## Aho rua

This method uses two pairs of aho (weft threads) at the same time, creating a stable fabric by firmly anchoring the whenu (warp threads). The upper pair of aho is twisted in a Z-direction, while the lower pair uses an S-twist. As weaving progresses, each pair is passed over and around the whenu, with one pair held in front and the other behind. This stabilizes the structure and prevents the weft from slipping. This technique allows for faster weaving and adds strength to the fabric. Aho rua symbolizes duality and resilience, qualities that ensure kākahu can endure through generations (H. Smith, 2019; Tamarapa, 2019).

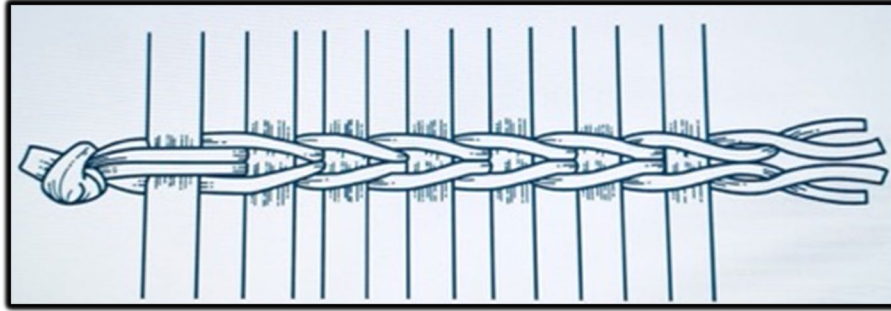


Figure 21. Aho rua whatu threads diagram. In Tamarapa, (2019, p. 81). Whatu kākahu = Māori cloaks (Revised Edition.) Te Papa Press.



Figure 22. Aho rua weft with two aho weft threads. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

## Binding Feathers

### *-Feathers of Time-*

*Pheasant and duck feathers lay beside mine being harakeke. Fading into the worn kākahu of never forgotten times. Who are you today? From what realm do you hail? What message do you bear in this present time? In this stillness, near yet far, I cannot see, I know you are nigh, tethered to past, present, and future, though memories fade, moments froze in time. Leave behind a trace, footsteps of mine, for those that follow may find.*

## Mullard Duck

Ducks were first introduced to New Zealand in 1867 as farm animals, but the attempt failed due to the cold climate. However, between 1930 and 1940, ducks were brought back during their egg incubation period, allowing them to acclimatize to New Zealand's colder conditions from an early stage (Seabrook-Davison, 2013).

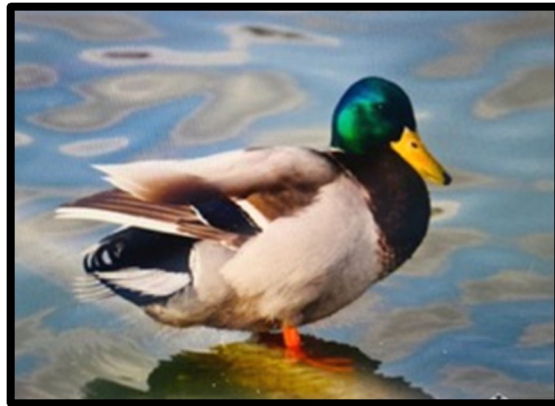


Figure 23. Mullard duck. Retrieved from: <https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/mallard>.

## Pheasant

The pheasant bird was introduced to New Zealand 1842 – 1877 to provide hunting sport for European colonists. They then established throughout the country in the North Island, with local populations topped up by ongoing releases by Fish & Game Councils and private breeders (Seabrook-Davison, 2013).



Figure 24. Pheasant bird. Retrieved from: <https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/common-pheasant>

To bind feathers using a soap-based adhesive, begin by softening the adhesive substance either by gently rubbing it between the fingers, or lightly dampening it with water until it reaches a tacky consistency. Once the adhesive is prepared, gather a small selection of feathers, aligning them evenly by the quills to achieve the desired thickness and texture. Apply a minimal amount of adhesive to the base of the quills, which will temporarily secure the feathers together, facilitating easier handling and arrangement. The photos below will demonstrate each step of the feather binding process. Note that traditional native feathers were not used in my kākahu, due to restrictions from Department of Conservation (DOC)<sup>50</sup> of the wildlife act 1953 and availability.



*Figure 25. Loose pheasant and duck feathers ready to bind together. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

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<sup>50</sup> Official site for the Department of Conservation <https://www.doc.govt.nz/>



Figure 26. Apply a little water to make sticky soap substance. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



Figure 27. Apply sticky soap substance to the quill feathers. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



Figure 28. Wrapping motion of sticky soap around the quill feathers to bind. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



Figure 29. Finished binded group of three feathers. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



Figure 30. Feathers in groups of three bound together. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

### **Whatu Feathers**

To attach feathers to a kākahu, the feathers are placed individually or in small bundles along the rows of Aho (horizontal weaving threads), ensuring they lie flat and slightly overlap for full coverage. Proper alignment with the natural flow of the garment is key to achieving a smooth, cohesive look (Tamarapa, 2019).

The feathers are typically secured using whatu techniques, where each feather is woven between the whenu and Aho or tied into the Aho threads. Ensure the feathers are tightly bound, to prevent loosening over time. Maintaining consistent tension throughout the binding process ensures the feathers remain uniformly secured, creating a flowing, layered texture on the cloak. The pictures below will illustrate the process of weaving feathers into kākahu.



*Figure 31. Place feathers in line with aho and whatu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*



*Figure 32. Turn binded feathers quill up into next whatu weave. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*



*Figure 33. Whatu one whenu between each feather placement. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*



*Figure 34. Two completed rows of whatu feathers in kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

The integration of harakeke and bird feathers in Te Māhangaora, further embodies the words of Te Awēkotuku who eloquently states (as cited in Ellis & Matchitt, 2023):

*...are not only about information; it may also be about joy, about sadness, about remembrance, about triumph and disaster, about survival, as the feathers and fibre of stories, pūrākau and storytelling entwine with the new texture and experience (p. 27).*

## Tāniko



*Figure 35. Tāniko rows in kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

Tāniko weaving is a traditional Māori finger-weaving technique used to create intricate geometric patterns, often seen on the borders of garments like kaitaka. Unlike other weaving methods, tāniko doesn't require a loom; instead, it is woven by hand, interlocking horizontal threads (aho) with vertical threads.

Tāniko designs are known for their symmetry and bold, repeating patterns. Traditionally, weavers used harakeke and muka, though modern weavers may incorporate a variety of fibers and colors to create more complex designs. Tāniko serves both decorative and symbolic purposes, with its patterns and colors reflecting aspects of Māori culture, genealogy, and tribal identity (Tamarapa, 2019).

The blue triangles in my tāniko weave represents the pursuit of knowledge from both the physical and spiritual realms. The green color represents the ngahere (forest), signifying rejuvenation, while the blue represents the awa (bodies of natural water), reflecting the importance of water in sustaining life and well-being.

## Iho and Aho Whiri

Iho whiri consists of the many whenu threads that form a three-plait structure, shaping the arch of Te Māhangaora's wings. This plait encapsulates the "umbilical cord," representing a connection to Papatūānuku, the earth mother (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2022; Smith, 2023). Another interpretation of the umbilical cord is provided by Jo-Ann Archibald, known as Q'um Q'um Xi'em, a member of the Sto: lo Nation in British Columbia, Canada. In her (2008) book "Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit." Archibald explores the role of storytelling in Indigenous cultures, a method of teaching and learning that nurtures holistic wellbeing. She contends a:

*...place of prayer... Perhaps this is because stories are the umbilical cords to our past, to the shared collective memory and to the sacred knowing that feed a deeply experienced relationship with life (p. 26).*

Te Māhangaora whiri is my connection to past ancestors and in the shared learning of mātauranga Māori. Campbell (2019), defines whiri as:

*Many strands can make up a whiri, each strand containing tikanga, mātauranga, ideas, designs, and insights, indigenous knowing as a mosaic of thinking (p. 47).*

Te Māhangaora integrates a 'mosaic of thinking' into its whenu, drawing on knowledge from ancestors, kairaranga, researchers, scholars, and artists across both traditional and contemporary art forms of practice. Each element underwent the process of te whakamatara, as the 'thinking, thinking and rethinking' (H. Smith, 2019) reflected personal introspection.



*Figure 36. Iho is the arch plait that becomes the kākahu wings in my kākahu. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*



*Figure 37. Iho Whiri is the three plait. It represents my connection to Papatūānuku. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

## Order in the Chaos of Making



*Figure 38. Thinking through the chaos. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

This reflective process often brings challenges and self-doubt, creating barriers to progress. However, these difficulties can also foster growth, acceptance of imperfections, and a deeper reliance on the evolving creative journey. In practice, this might involve unravelling completed work or starting anew. As Campbell (2019) observes, "thinking through the chaos" (p. 49) and embracing the "messiness in the sculptural ranga process" (p. 172) can reveal clarity, where disorder uncovers the magic in creation.



*Figure 39. Messiness in the ranga whatu process of Te Whakamatarā. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

## CHAPTER 7: TE MĀHANGAORA EMBRACED BY ATUA WĀHINE



Figure 40. Atua Wāhine feathers and fibres. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

### *-Atua Mothers-*

*Adorn my back with vibrancy, Each hue a splash of you. Purposeful each colour mutates. Shimming iridescent rainbow. Red Papatūānuku bleeds our whakapapa, Purple Hineahuone first mortal mother, tangible and intangible relations. Green Hinetītama daughter to the union our creation stories, renewal wild and free. Blues Hinenuitepō underworld goddess, Rehutai fierce currents of the sea, Tangimoana timid ocean waves. Turquoise Hineteiwaiwa matakite, muse, seer from Te Whare Pora' Do you see us? Flying high?*

Te Māhangaora epitomizes the interconnectedness of herstories (Simmonds, 2009; Hutchings, 2022), knowledge systems from ancestors, kairaranga, scholars, family and communities. She is the state of being in the ‘transformation of becoming’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), through the constant process of Te Whakamatara. Within the practice of raranga whatu she emanates the components of Mana, Mauri and Wairua as a state of optimal wellbeing. As a ceremony (Murphy, 2019) she is feminine, in the creative zone, as the exchange of ‘breath work’ between the weaver and material, enveloping each other as the taonga fabricates its presence.

Gonzales (2012), discusses this spiritual transmission, explaining that:

*...sometimes knowledge disappears because it is abused, and sometimes it recedes so as to endure and return at the right time (p. 187).*

I agree with Gonzales, that our ancestor’s knowledge lies dormant, patiently waiting for the right moments to emerge. For me it is summoned through sacred ceremonies, vivid dreams, and in the practice of raranga whatu. These spiritual awakenings guide my hands as a kairaranga, weaving stories, memories, and teachings into every strand. This sacred process embodies a living relationship connected to whakapapa, where our forebear’s knowledge is preserved and protected, and woven into the fabric of my identity (Campbell, 2019; Gonzales, 2012; Irwin, 1992; Pere, 1991; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; L. Smith, 1999).

Te Māhangaora has embraced the colonized self and Māori self, as part of her reclamation towards Mana Wahine identity. This resurgence has led to another doorway opening in acknowledging our Atua Wahine, of our creation stories. At some points in time have been lost due to colonial invasion, and the European movement of eradicating our Māori culture. Therefore, I introduce esteemed Mana Wahine Aroha Yates-Smith a New Zealand performer, composer of waiata and academic, who affiliates to Te Arawa, Tainui, Takitimu, Horouta and Mataatua. Yates-Smith’s (2022) article in the Mana Wahine Reader: Collection of writings, into forgotten Māori female deities in “Te Ukaipo - Te Taiao: The Mother, the nurturer-Nature” she notes:

*...the Mother, the Nurturer - Nature', links us to our Earth Mother, Papatuanuku, and all our grandmothers extending back through the mists of time to Te Kore and Te Po, a time of pure potential, the very essence of which was to produce humankind and all forms of life (p. 76).*

She refers to wāhine goddesses also as ancestral mothers, including Papatūānuku, Hineahuone, Hinetiāma, Hinenuitēpō, and Hineteiwaiwa. They have long served as archetypes for Māori women, embodying nurturing roles that have been passed down through generations. These Wāhine Atua exemplify the traditional values and responsibilities of caregiving, and sustaining life (Pihama et al., 2015) roles that continue to influence and shape the lives of contemporary Māori women. Adding to this knowledge is Yates-Smith (1998) thesis, “Hine! e Hine! Rediscovering the Feminine in Māori Spirituality,” is a pivotal work that dives into the suppressed role of feminine spirituality in Māori cosmology. It reveals how female deities have been overshadowed and overlooked due to the patriarchal influence of colonialism. Unfortunately, this has altered traditional understandings and shifted focus toward male-centric narratives. Their stories are critical to empowering Māori women and supporting a sense of cultural and spiritual continuity. Yates-Smith argues, the reclamation of Wāhine Atua, offers Māori women pathways to reconnect with their ancestral heritage and spirituality, thus affirming Mana Wahine identity.

In this thesis, I draw on the work of Yates-Smith to support my reclamation of Mana Wahine identity, affirming the feminine Wāhine Atua through the practice of raranga whatu in creating Te Māhangaora. My kākahu serves as an act of resistance against colonial and patriarchal oppression (Campbell, 2019; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; H. Smith, 2019). In honoring our Wāhine Atua, I have integrated specific colored whenu feathers into Te Māhangaora, to pay tribute to these ancestral goddesses and their enduring influence across past, present, and future generations.

## Papatūānuku



Figure 41. Papatūānuku - Whero. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### Papatūānuku (Goddess Mother Earth) Red

Papatūānuku, the earth mother, stands at the heart of Māori spirituality. “She is the life force, the mother of us all. She is the earth, the land, feeding humankind. It is to her that people return upon death” (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. 244). Her nurturing presence sustains both the physical and spiritual realms of life (Campbell, 2019; Tamarapa, 2019). Although patriarchal reinterpretations have diminished her role over time, she retains her mana through traditional Māori practices. Yates-Smith (2022) reminds us:

*...Papatuanuku, the ultimate source of creativity, along with her female descendants, reflected the nurturing quality of the feminine and the complementary aspects of the creator/transformer figure as embodied in the whare tangata/whare aitua concept, connecting women with life and death (p. 76).*

Papatūānuku our earth mother, is a guiding presence I honor daily through karakia. As a kairaranga, I uphold the ancestral knowledge and guardianship of the harakeke plant, recognizing its symbolic role as both mother and child within Te Pā Harakeke.

## Hineahuone



Figure 42. Hineahuone - Waiporoporo. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### **Hineahuone (Goddess our Mortal Mother) Purple**

Hineahuone origins as a feminine figure stem from the sacred soil of “Kurawaka,” considered the birthplace of humanity (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. 246). Kurawaka holds central importance in understanding the spiritual and genealogical role of women in Māori cosmology. This creation pūrākau highlights the deep connection between wāhine and Hineahuone, embodying both the physical and spiritual essence of life. It affirms the Māori belief in the intrinsic bond between women and the earth. Through the practice of raranga whatu, her legacy continues, reminding us of our sacred connection to the whenua and our responsibility to honor her contributions to humanity.

## Hinetītama



Figure 43. Hinetītama - Kāriki. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### **Hinetītama (Goddess Dawn Maiden) forest green**

Hinetītama often linked to the themes of dawn and new beginnings, embodies the concept of transition. She is the daughter of Tāne, the god of forests, and Hineahuone, the first mortal woman. Upon discovering that Tāne, was the father of her children, Hinetītama was overcome with shame, prompting a profound transformation. She left the physical world and descended into the realm of death, becoming Hinenuitepō (Marsden, 2003). As Campbell (2019) notes, “Hinetītama journey to becoming Hinenuitepō,” symbolizing a transformative process that bridges the living with the ancestral realm (p. 167). This thesis reflects my own transformative journey, acknowledging the past, present, and future aspirations within Māori concepts of spirituality and the feminine divine.

## Hinenuitepō



Figure 44. Hinenuitepō – Purū. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### Hinenuitepō (Goddess of the Night) Blue

Hinenuitepō originally Hinetītama, becomes the goddess of death and is tasked with guiding spirits into the afterlife. This metamorphosis signifies her pivotal role in embodying both life and death, showcasing the importance of female deities in the natural cycles of existence. Colonization marginalized such Wāhine Atua, focusing instead on the male atua in most recorded histories. Yates-Smith (1998) aims to reinstate these feminine entities as central to Māori spirituality. She argues that Hinenuitepō role underscores the balance and interdependence between the masculine and feminine in traditional Māori thought.

In sharing my herstory, I use this thesis as a form of resistance against these patriarchal narratives that have long marginalized my dualities. Figures like Hinenuitepō inspire my reclamation of the empowerment that Māori women have always possessed.

## Hineteiwaiwa



Figure 45. *Hineteiwaiwa - Kārikiōrangī*. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2023).

### **Hineteiwaiwa (Goddess House of Weaving) Turquoise**

Hineteiwaiwa is viewed as a guardian of women, particularly in the roles of fertility, creativity, and family. Hineteiwaiwa symbolizes the reproductive and creative capacities of wāhine Māori. Representations of resilience, spiritual leadership, within the domestic and communal spheres. This deity is linked to the arts of weaving from the “Te Whare Pora”<sup>51</sup> (Campbell, 2019, p. 21) in traditional skills that are central to cultural continuity and an expression of Māori womanhood. (Campbell, 2019; Te Awekotuku, 1990; Te Awekotuku et al., 2021; Yates-Smith, 1980, 1998). Hineteiwaiwa has guided my raranga whatu practice, influencing the creation of Te Māhangaora and empowering me as a Mana Wahine Māori.

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<sup>51</sup> Te Whare Pora is a physical and sacred space where weavers are immersed in not only the technical skills of weaving but also the tikanga, karakia, and spiritual practices associated with weaving. Also, a zone of self-reflection and thinking.

## Kahu Wings of Self



Figure 46. Colonized Self. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



Figure 47. Māori Self. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

## Te Māhangaora



Figure 48. Te Māhangaora, Colonized Self and Māori Self, merge together in full flight. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

## CHAPTER 8: WEAVING THE THREADS OF WHANAUNGATANGA

### Master Thesis Exposition



Figure 49. TUKUNA KIA RERE 3MK. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

### *-Not Enough-*

*Colonial brainwashing, never judge your potential for colourless prize. First, second, third, no place, no place for you to radiate, caged in white box, more perceived in consciousness. Conjoined purpose for colonial loss. Do not measure your worth, in their sight. Your rarity is infinite, tūpuna eternal by your side. Standing solo cemented your path, resilience is your forte. Knocked down, rock bottom, pull yourself up, greater purpose obscured, present time. Point in time has a rotation, I glimpse rare contemporarily, consequential step I tried to bypass.*

Each year, the Te Ahupaepae o te Ihorangi Māori o Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Māori and Indigenous Studies Department at Waikato University, hosts the TUKUNA KIA RERE 3MK: 3-Minute Kōrero Thesis Exposition. This event invites Master and PhD students to present their research in a concise, public format.

The time constraint of summarizing a thesis into three minutes seemed intimidating at first, but I saw it as an opportunity to openly share my research in a public arena. It also featured the importance of contributing to the collective voices of mana wāhine, who continue to advance knowledge in their fields. Each Wāhine voice adds valuable threads to the broader fabric of understanding. As Campbell (2019) explains:

*This study adds to a growing number of Māori women's' voices contributing to the ways Māori research is carried out. The issues explored in this study are centred on wahine Māori colonized realities and how the creative practices of raranga and whatu can disrupt these spaces (p.45).*

When I didn't place in the exposition, feelings of inadequacy resurfaced, echoing my early experiences in primary school. As a young Māori girl, I often stayed quiet, fearful of being questioned by teachers, and painfully aware of the lack of recognition or encouragement. This silence over time became internalized, and I began to believe that I was 'dumb.' These experiences reflect the boarder impacts of systemic undervaluation and marginalization of Māori in educational systems, reinforcing the psychological effects of colonialism (Cavino, 2016; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; L. Smith, 2012). Letting go of negative thought patterns aligns with Te Whakamatara, a method of self-reflection in undoing mental perspectives that no longer empower Mana Wahine.

## Art Exhibition



Figure 50. Ngā Ara Auaha Exhibition 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – 21<sup>st</sup> February 2025. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).

### *-I See You-*

*Eyes upon you, tracing atua's grace, timeless, woven in Māoriness, a transformation, a becoming, colonized yet unbroken. Wahine Māori speaks, kairaranga your voice woven, emerging through ritual, a ceremony of origins. Intimate, feminine, wāhine deities take form, shaping a sacred space, a cloak enfolds, feathered embrace. Kahu ascend to tūpuna realms, their messages descend, winged and wise, healing waters cascade over, fires of Papatūānuku stir below. Mother Earth's pulse clings to Kahu's flight, mana stands steady, a bridge forged, Māori woman to Wahine Māori, navigating the realms in between, a journey through ancestral echoes.*

Te Māhangaora was on display in the ‘Creative Practice Student Showcase exhibition’ on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October – 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2025 held at the Waikato University and curated by Dr. Rodrigo Hill. Te Kura Toi of Arts in association with Media and Creative Technologies, English, Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao – Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, and Design.

Ngā Ara Auaha simply translated means ‘creative pathways’ and comprises a collective exhibition featuring works, by undergraduate and postgraduate students who are producing creative practice research outputs. The works showcased diverse creative pathways, practices, and approaches across various artistic mediums as part of creative practice research. The exhibition highlighted innovative methods in ngā toi Māori, fine arts, photography, film, and design.

### **Curation and Presentation**

Te Māhangaora was displayed on a mannequin, allowing viewers to appreciate it from all angles and experience its full visual impact. To improve the presentation, I draped black fabric over the mannequin to create a silhouette, suggesting the presence of a wearer and bringing the cloak to life.

### **Audience Engagement**

Amongst fellow artists, family and friends were expert Māori scholars recognized for their expertise in raranga, whatu, textile fibres, and waiata composition. This diverse group provided a rich context for experiencing the full spectrum of creative practice research.

### **Cultural Sensitivity**

I performed a personal karakia in accordance with tikanga Māori (Campbell, 2019; Mead, 2003; Pihama, 2001). This karakia invoked ancestral protection over the kākahu and environment while on display. Te Māhangaora encouraged viewers to explore her meaning and engaged in dialogue. Audience feedback from the exhibition opening, was overwhelmingly positive towards Te Māhangaora. Attendees expressed keen interest in its purpose, meaning, the details of its creation process, and the timeline involved. Te Māhangaora is a tangible form to my herstory in addressing the impacts of colonization.

## Anonymous Audience Feedback

I provided writing cards in a kete laid at the feet of Te Māhangaora, for those of the audience who wanted to write their perceptions. I ask two questions - What do you see? How does it make you feel? Here are their objective comments in response.

*“Magnificent Piece!! Reminds me (the color) of a beautiful Tui bird. The colors reflecting with the light J”*

*“Beautiful, it drew me immediately and I felt goosebumps. My heart is warm. I have curiosity about the colors, your process and meaning. Thankyou! For sharing yourself.”*

*“I see a princess with sacred scarf in a calm spiritual disposition. I feel amazing and holy sensation. I think the work is multi-expression of cultural beauty.”*

*“Ribs, a fish tail, a part in hair, an exploration of femininity without the male gaze.”*

*“Protected and intricate and stunning. I see the power of femininity, beauty, courage, and spirituality. I see nature and life!*

*“It makes me feel like I’m in the presence of a Queen’s gown but also with a Pasifika and Māori background, just beautiful artwork”*

The public personal responses about Te Māhangaora were life-changing for me as a Māori artist, in affirming my mana wahine identity. Each comment offered a unique perspective, contributing to the interconnectedness of inviting others into my world, even if just for a brief moment. Te Māhangaora created a dynamic experience, sparking personal emotions and insights that resonate with each viewer individually. Below was the written narrative accompanying Te Māhangaora’s exhibit space, offers the audience a window into my journey of introspection within the context of an academic creative arts exhibition.

## *Te Māhangaora*

*Te Māhangaora represents my metaphoric journey through Waikato University, a vital part of my reclamation of Mana Wahine identity. Born from the healing wairua, through the practice of raranga whatu. Te Māhangaora holds the limitless potential from Te Kore Kore.’ She is a kākahu woven, in resistance to the impact of colonial systems. Her kahu wings in full flight across both the physical and spiritual realms, carrying reciprocal messages from our tūpuna, within my creative Māori spaces. Te Māhangaora embodies the Mana of ancestral Wāhine Atua, honoring the divine feminine from whom our creation stories flow. Te Māhangaora is the duality of existence as one wing reflects the colonized self, while the other embodies the reawakened Māori self. Both are maternally bound to Papatūānuku, our earth mother, creator of all. One cannot fly alone, only together the wings unite, finding a balance and strength in each other, a transformation of becoming.*



Figure 51. Back view of Te Māhangaora. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



Figure 52. Side view of Te Māhangaora. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).



*Figure 53. Te Māhangaora Mana Wahine. Photograph by Witehira, T. (2024).*

## **Weaving All Whatu Threads of Knowing**

This creative practice thesis has explored the complex relationship between the colonized self and Māori self, examining how these dual identities coexist within the same physical, mental, and spiritual spaces. Grounded in the in Kaupapa Māori theoretical approaches, this research draws from the knowledge of kairaranga, whose cultural practices are sustained through whakapapa and ancestral knowledge (Durie, 1998; Mikaere, 2003; Pere, 1982; Yates-Smith, 1998).

In reawakening and reclaiming of Mana Wahine identity (Pihama, 2001), I have integrated personal narratives (Lee, 2009), artistic expression, and Indigenous knowledge, reaffirming my sense of belonging and cultural acceptance. Guided by the values embodied in Te Pā Harakeke, symbolizing the bonds of whānau and community (Pihama et al., 2015), this creative journey has been both restorative and transformational. Creating Te Māhangaora became a decolonizing process, confronting and dismantling colonial impositions (Jackson, 1998; Mikaere, 2003; Walker, 1990) therefore, allowing my duality to co-exist within the woven fibres of my kākahu.

This research extends beyond personal experience by contributing to broader discussions on Indigenous methodologies. It illustrates how through the practice of raranga whatu (Campbell, 2019; H. Smith, 2023), it preserves cultural memory, supports cultural reclamation, and aids in healing historical trauma. Through these practices, Indigenous knowledge systems remain dynamic, relevant, and vital in contemporary contexts.

While centered on personal reclamation, this study underscores the power of cultural arts to cultivate resilience within Māori communities. Future research could expand on these findings, by exploring how collaborative creative practices strengthen cultural sustainability, and wider community engagement.

By weaving together threads of past and present, this work embodies an ongoing narrative of cultural resurgence. It stands as a living testament to ancestral knowledge, asserting that our identities, stories, and traditions endure through acts of creative practice, connections, and the sharing of mātauranga Māori.

## Glossary of Māori Terms

Aho	Single weft finger twining weave
Aho rua	Double weft finger twining weave
Aho tapu	Sacred first line of weaving
Aotearoa	New Zealand
Ariki	Chief, high chieftain, leader
Atua	God
Atua Wahine	Māori female god
Awa	River
E Ngā Atua	More than one God
Hapū	Sub-tribe
Harakeke	Flax bush, plant
Hauora	Wellness, vitality, healthy, good spirits
Hineahuone	First mortal female
Hinengaro	Mind, thought, intellect
Hinenuitepō	Goddess of the afterlife
Hineteiwaiwa	Goddess of house of weaving
Hinetitama	Maiden of dawn
Iho	Nature, essence, inner core, heart
Ingoa	Name
Iwi	Māori Tribe
Kāhu	Hawk bird
Kahu Huruhuru	Cloak made of feathers
Kahu Kākā	Cloak made from kākā bird feathers
Kahu Kiwi	Cloak made with kiwi bird feathers
Kahu Kuri	Cloak decorated with dog hair
Kaiako	Teacher
Kairaranga	Weaving practitioners
Kaitaka	Muka cloak with tāniko edges
Kākahu	Cloak, clothes
Karakia	Prayer
Kāriki	Forest green
Kārikiōrangī	Turquoise color
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, Māori topic, customary
Kawa	To perform a ceremony
Kete	Flax woven bag, basket
Kikorangi	Blue color
Ko wai koe?	Who are you?
Korowai	Cloak decorated with black twisted tags
Kōtiro	Young girl
Kua tupu te pā harakeke	Growing flax plant
Kupenga	Net, fishing net style type of weave
Kurawaka	Sacred soil where first woman created
Mahi	Work
Mana	Strength, authoritative

Mana Wahine	Inner strength of a woman
Manaakitanga	Hospitality, kindness, generosity
Māori	Indigenous person of New Zealand
Māori Kupu	Māori words
Marae	Area in front of meeting house
Mātauranga	Māori knowledge, wisdom
Matua	Parents
Maunga	Mountain
Mauri	Lifeforce
Mokopuna	Grandchildren
Motuhake	Self-determination
Muka	Flax fibre
Ngahere	Forest, bush
Ngāpuhi	Northland Māori Tribe
No hea koe?	Where are you from?
Ora	Wellbeing
Pā	Fortified village
Pakeha	European people of New Zealand
Papatūānuku	Mother Earth
Pēpeha	Māori formal introduction from person
Pūrākau	Māori narrative, story
Purū	Blue
Pūti	Flower
Rangatiratanga	Chieftainship, Authority
Ranginui	Father Sky God
Raranga	Weave
Rito	Centre shoot of flax plant, child, baby
Taha Hinengaro	Mental, intellectual side
Taha Tinana	Physical side
Taha Wairua	Spiritual side
Taha Whānau	Family side
Tainui	Waikato Māori Tribe
Takatāpui	Close friend, intimate friend
Tamaiti	Children, child
Tāne	God of the forest
Tangihanga	Funeral, weeping, crying
Tāniko	Finger weave, embroider
Taonga	Treasured, culturally prized and valued
Tapu	Sacred
Te Ao Māori	Māori Worldview
Te Kore	Realm of potential being
Te Māhangaora	The healing of two halves
Te Mōhiotangaora	Within the knowing, healing takes place
Te Pā Harakeke	Flax plant Metaphor for family
Te Pō	Day and Night
Te Rēinga	Place of departed spirits
Te Reo Māori	Māori language

Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Treaty settlements
Te Tohu Paetahi	BA Degree taught in Māori at University
Te Whakamatara	The undoing, unravelling
Te Whare Pora	The house of weaving
Te Whare Tapa Wha	House of holistic healing, wellbeing
Te Wheke	The Octopus
Tena Koutou	Hello to more than three people
Tiakina Te Pā Harakeke	Wellbeing of children in Māori families
Tihei Mauri Ora	First breath of life, first sneeze
Tika	Correct, true, right, just, fair
Tikanga	Custom, correct procedure, method
Tino rangatiratanga	Self-determination, sovereignty
Tipuna	Ancestors, grandparents
Tohunga	Expert in their field of knowledge
Tui	Songbird, native to Aotearoa
Tūpāpaku	Deceased body
Tūpuna	Ancestors, grandparents
Tūrangawaewae	Place where one has the right to stand
Wahine	Woman
Wāhine	Women
Wai	Water
Waiporoporo	Purple color
Wairua	Spiritual
Waka	Canoe
Wānanga	Learning forum, meet to discuss
Whaea	Aunty, respected older female
Whakaaro	To think, plan, consider
Whakaaro Rua	Two ways of knowing
Whakapapa	Māori genealogy
Whānau	Family
Whānau ora	Family Wellbeing
Whanaungatanga	Relationships, kinship, sense of family
Whare tangata	Womb, house of life
Whatu	Finger weft weave
Whatuora	Healing from weaving whatu
Whenu	Strand of flax, lengthwise thread woven
Whenua	Earth, land in Aotearoa
Whero	Red color
Whiri	Twist Plait

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