

# Hello, My Other Self



By

Arhea Mawhinney

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*Ko Tauwhare te maunga*  
*Ko Wai-Patu-Kahu te awa*  
*Ko Mahuhu ki te Rangi te waka*  
*Ko Ngati Whatua te iwi matua*  
*Ko Te Tao U te iwi hapu*  
*Ko Reweti te marae*  
*Ko Whiti Te Ra te wharenui*

*Ko Arhea ahau*

*Tauwhare is my mountain*  
*Wai-Patu-Kahu is my river*  
*Mahuhu ki te Rangi is my canoe*  
*Ngati Whatua is my iwi*  
*Te Tao U is my sub tribe*  
*Reweti is my marae*  
*White Te Ra is my meeting house*

I am Arhea

## Abstract

Hello, My Other Self is a personal journey of discovery. As a *Māori* who is seeking cultural kinship, my first integral questions are “*ko wai au*”, who am I? and “*no hea au*”, where do I come from? As a *Māori* designer I look to my *whakapapa*, reminding me of where I come from, the stories of our people and what makes *te ao Māori* unique.

*Māori* design and *Māori* culture are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to consider these two concepts separately. The backbone of my exploration of woven process fuses customary *māoritanga* holding steadfast to the blessings of *Papatūānuku* from inception with contemporary form and practice. Creating narratives of *whakapapa*, through the intangible knowledge of ancestry that I embody in my being, connecting maker, materials and artifact.

Pursuing this praxis focuses on deepening an understanding of my culture through engaging the notion and dissecting the meaning of weaving as a design practice from material based exploration, to the woven process, to sustainability, where I, as *Māori*, am considered the medium. The eternal thread or *te aho tapu* is the genealogical line, the first and sacred line of weaving that guides me on this journey. *Te aho tapu* in *māoridom* is our connection to the past, acknowledging this is personally and culturally important as in our concept of time we cannot separate ourselves from our *tūpuna* or the generation in front of us.

This journey is a reflective exploration of material characteristics, creating cloth, a *korowai*, a blanket of culture, in *te ao Pākehā* culture, seeking ways I can culturally embrace and sustain culture in today’s world through *Māori* forms of design. Intrinsically engaging with *harakeke* and natural fibres that share similar foundational relationships such as flax, buffalo and sheep wool. The use of these materials enhances the cultural values, asserting sustainability of *Māori* epistemological notions of practice and meaning into my design.

I am weaving my story metaphorically, culturally and physically.

## Key words

*Whakapapa*

Cultural identity

Contemporary expression

*Māoritanga*

*Harakeke*

Weaving

*Korowai*

*To Papatūānuku*

To all my ancestral lines

To my parents Sarah and Dyson

To my siblings Tyran and Huia

To whom I dedicate this thesis

We are in this together

I am, because of you

To my supervisor Brenda Crabtree

To the Masters of Design twenty-eighteen

You were the support I needed in this process

It was all your encouragement that guided me on this journey

To all those who have lived with this thesis for the past two years

*Tēnā koutou*

## Note to reader

To truly understand the process, I immerse myself.

The culture of *Māori* people is highly oratory. Much of our storytelling revolves around composing, memorizing and performing all kinds of *kōrero* and *waiata*. It is a rich poetic record of the past which is handed down by oral history, over generations through *whakapapa*.

The writing structure of this thesis sustains and protects knowledge through reflecting many diverse voices of the academic, the poetic and the making as one. The voices are confident, angry, respectful, experimental, despairing and full of hope. The poetic reflections presented throughout the documentation are raw and truthful to each other illustrating the emotional, physical and technical processes.

To fully engage the viewer to emerge themselves into my narrative I have structured my thesis in a writing style that is divergent, repetitive and rhythmic. Storytelling and retelling our narratives engages a form of decolonization, mimicking the structure of the oral traditions of *Māori* people. Reinforcing our values, actions, *tikanga*, culture and identity. (Smith, 1999)

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All text in *Te Reo Māori* has been italicised to give emphasis between languages. A full list of the *Māori* terms used in this dissertation and their translations can be found in the vocabulary, on page 34.

Oral histories  
Importance  
To stand  
Grounded  
*Māori* world  
And told with  
*Māori* voices  
Interconnected  
Linked to a living thing  
To be heard  
Share knowledge  
A sense of knowing

*Tikanga*  
Responsibility  
To preserve  
Many stories  
A story  
My narrative  
A voice  
Finding  
My Other Self  
Emotional experience  
Reflect  
Personal  
Scholarly  
Divergent

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## A conversation

Hello, My Other Self is a personal journey of discovery. As a *Māori* who is seeking cultural kinship, my first integral questions are “*ko wai au*”, who am I? and “*no hea au*”, where do I come from? As a *Māori* designer I look to my *whakapapa*, reminding me of where I come from, the stories of our people and what makes *te ao Māori* unique.

I come from a land where there is an intricate, holistic and interconnected relationship with the natural world and its belongings. I come from a land that feeds and survives from one another. The diversity of life embellishes this world view through the interrelationship of all living things as dependent on each other, a worldview that acknowledges a natural order to the universe, a balance or equilibrium, and that if a part of this system shifts the entire system is put out of balance.

Growing up I was surrounded by mostly all things *Pākehā*, with no emphasis towards learning about my *Māori* culture. It wasn't until I embarked on this journey that the themes of *whakapapa*, the cultural imprint connecting me to my ancestors guided me to refine my thesis exploration. If you pull apart the meaning of *whakapapa*, it allows you to understand the emerging light through to the creation of the tangible world. The creation of two primeval parents *Ranginui* and *Papatūānuku*. The birth of their children the wind, the forest and plants, the sea, the rivers and the animals, through to the creation of humanity.

The themes of *whakapapa* have been traced throughout my dissertation as an acknowledgement to the people who came before me, but most importantly as a way to educate the future generation. As I begin to pursue and understand the legacy left to us by my *tūpuna*, I gain the cultural affirmation I am seeking. It is through the essence of *māoritanga* that I look to the spirits of our customs and values and apply them to the structure and concept of my design, process and narrative.

My *whakapapa* is my foundation sharing its knowledge. Both good and bad. Standing together unbroken from the beginning. It not only reminds me of where I came from, my lineage and my heritage but to look in the mirror and see

all the faces of ancestors, my *tūpuna* that have gone before me that are embodied in me. Hello, My Other Self is creating a relationship, gaining a sense of existence and honor, showing respect and value for my people.

*Whakapapa*

Genealogy

Kinship

*Whenua*

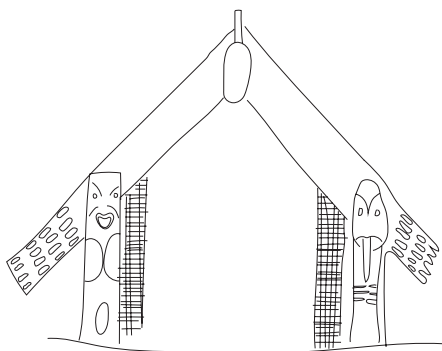
Skin

Container

*Aho*

*Māori* design and *Māori* culture are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to consider these two concepts separately, it is like a living organism that exists in the spirit of our people. (Mead, 2003) The backbone of my exploration of woven process fuses traditional *māoritanga*, holding steadfast to the blessings of *Papatūānuku*, within contemporary form and practice. Creating narratives of *whakapapa*, through the intangible knowledge of ancestry that is embodied in my being, connecting maker, materials and artifact.

Pursuing this praxis focuses on deepening an understanding of my culture through engaging the notion and dissecting the meaning of weaving as a design practice from material based exploration, to the woven process, to sustainability, where I, as *Māori*, am considered the medium.



## Creation story

Our story begins before there was a sky, sea, earth and gods.

A long time ago, there was only darkness, only *Te Kore*, the nothingness. From the nothingness, the primeval parents of the *Māori* came, *Papatūānuku*, the earth mother and *Ranginui*, the sky father. The two primeval parents, once inseparable, had many children. They birthed forward every living element, the wind, the forest and plants, the sea and the rivers each with supernatural powers often known as *atua*, *Māori* gods.

The children had a plan to flourish the growth of all the living things but it meant the parents would have to be separated. *Tāne Mahuta*, god of forests, a realm of the primeval parents, played an integral part in splitting his parents as he began to seek more space to grow, wedging his parents apart, thus creating the world of light. The separation led to *Ranginui*, the Sky father who formed the sky, as the tears he wept for his wife, *Papatūānuku* continued to fall. *Papatūānuku* bathed in the tears capturing them to form land, sustaining nourishment for all her children.

One of the many threads that make up the cloth of our people comes from *Tāne Mahuta*. From the creation of light and the separation of his parents, *Tāne Mahuta* fathered *Ngahere*, who provides us with forests, swamps and all the growth that clothed *Papatūānuku*. It was he, who gifted us with *harakeke*.

Our stories say that *Harakeke*, *Phormium Tenax* or the colonised term, Flax of *Aotearoa*, was the most essential commodity of our survival. To the early *Māori* it became the fundamental fibre used as a raw material for clothing, food, gathering, hunting, fishing, medicine and baskets for every need. (Smith, 1999) Breathe in its scent and you start to reflect upon elders. Thoughts are shared between the many relationships that have passed from hand to earth to hand across years and generations.

The  
fragrance  
of my *tūpuna*

is beginning to warm  
to my skin

The *whakapapa* of *harakeke* lies within the connections of the *Māori* world and specifically within the *Māori* creation narrative. Without *Tāne*, *Harakeke* would not exist.

*Tāne Mahuta*

The land  
World of light  
Interconnected  
A long time ago  
I was a seed  
Where do I grow  
A oneness In two  
Superbly  
Put together  
Next to  
The mountains  
Plants and soil Rivers  
Waters  
And animals  
Living systems  
Close to my essence  
A story where choices  
Move beyond self  
Knowing  
Observing  
Ecology  
Balance  
Harmony

Living

I am a seed

I became land

A way to be land

Become the forest

Adopt the swamp

Be *harakeke*



## The Fibre Of Being

*He kawenga ki te whenua, ki ngā uri o ngā ātua*

*Ko ahau te taiao, ko te taiao, ko ahau*

*Whakarongo, whakarongo, whakarongo ki te tangi o te manu e karanga nei; tui, tui, tui, tui*

The ethic of responsibility towards the natural environment

The ecosystem defines my quality of life

Listen to the cry of the birds calling for unity

The introductory lines of the *karakia* remind us that the natural world has a lot to teach mankind about the preservation of unity, interdependence, harmony and balance.

(Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013)

While the relationship *Māori* people share with the land has a spiritual aspect, it is also practical and balances the respect of our being. It is an ethic that can be seen through culture, contained through the *waiata* sung and stories told about the nature of the world and our place in it, about the webs of responsibilities we share and the ways that these things are bound together as a whole.

When I think about understanding the land and the materials that *Papatūānuku* provides *Māori*, the voices of Hirini Mead, David Suzuki and Fritjof Capra unfold. Ecologically speaking, there is a sense of responsibility for the land which is echoed through the bonds that exist between all things and what ultimately we, as individuals depend on as ecologist, Fritjof Capra (1996) reminds me in *The Web Of Life*;

Deep ecology does not separate humans - or anything else - from the natural environment. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views of humans as one particular strand to the web of life. (p. 7)

*Māori* tradition and knowledge is based on a holistic understanding and shares no word or translation for ecosystem. (Kaai, 2003) From a *Māori* perceptive, the integral knowing used to understand this relationship comes from linking our wellbeing to the environment, which supports customary beliefs and balances our culture. The conversation about genealogical continuity of *whakapapa*, *mātauranga* and *tikanga* is used together to understand the grounded bonds we have with nature and place *Māori* within the ecological context with all other flora and fauna. It is through my reflections that I have learned about the sharing of this knowledge which is told through the stories of *whakapapa*, the purakau of our *tūpuna*, the *waiata oriori* and *whakatauki*.

Respecting and valuing *māoritanga* and its concepts is essential towards understanding the perspective that we are a part of an inseparable community. As Maria Montessori writes, “the stars, Earth, stones, life of all kinds, form a whole in relation to each other and so close is this relationship that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun. No matter what we touch, an atom or a cell, we cannot explain it without the knowledge of the universe.” (As cited in Suzuki, McConnell, and Mason, 2007, p. 22). It is when we begin to harmonise with the environment, that our relationship becomes meaningful allowing us to be more ecologically aware. When I think about my *tūpuna* and how they established their *kawa* of conservation as a foundation, on which future generations could build, that I begin to understand its concept. When I view the environment within *māoridom*, it allows me to think sustainability, protecting *Papatūānuku*.

Changing our perspective to seek alternatives to our current practices may be difficult for others in our mainstream society to understand because those who are surrounded by the contemporary western world live in a culture where linear thinking and materialism shape our fundamental values. (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013) In an unfolding world influenced by the actions of the past and holding trust in the generation to come, I believe in such an interdependent universe we, human beings, hold an enormous responsibility. As when the past, present and future come together, each generation follows. It is in this way that I begin to understand the relationships my *tūpuna* shared with *Papatūānuku*, designing our ways of knowing which was truly ecologically sustainable and fulfilling. As botanist, Lyall Watson (1974) explains in *Supernature*;

...There is a continuous communication not only between living things and their environment, but among all things living in that environment. An intricate web of interaction connects all life into one vast, self maintaining system. Each part is related to every other part and we are all part of the whole, part of the supernature. (As cited in Suzuki, McConnell, and Mason, 2007, p. 49)

## Entangled Roots: Layering *Whakapapa*

Come to the *pā harakeke* and let me lay upon you the knowledges of our ancestors  
The tassel of the loose, flowing blades meets the voices of our people  
Hold my meaning and I shall stay  
Crouch down to the ground and trace out my ancestral stem  
Muddy green and glossy beneath, let the touch of your hands flow to the tips of your nose  
Close your eyes and let the scent of growth pass  
Breathe it in and you will start to remember what you didn't know you had forgotten  
Let this be the light to guide you in the direction you are going

Indigenous peoples have philosophies which connect humans to their environment and to each other which generates principles for living a life which is sustainable, respectful and possible. (Smith, 1999) As a *Māori* designer, I draw upon the principles and the values we, as *Māori*, use to sustain our culture as did my ancestors for their survival, while still holding a contemporary process in our culture today. As explored further in this section, I have used three principles *kawa*, *tikanga* and *kaupapa* as a guide privileging our beliefs, attitudes and practices throughout my practice over the past year as a contribution towards gaining a deeper understanding of my *Māori* culture.

To understand these principles we must understand our connection to them. As mentioned earlier in *The Fibre Of Being*, my ancestors looked to the natural world, to our environment, as our greatest teacher. They did this in the fundamental understanding that the environment that surrounds us had evolved over years and was spinning in perfection. It was with this relationship that my ancestors created unique knowledge systems based on the flows and rhythm of our natural environment, placing the spiritual wellbeing and collective ahead of individuals and materials. (Mead, 2003)

Layering the themes of *whakapapa*, I have defined three distinct principles my ancestors designed to preserve our ways of knowing and unify meaning in a contemporary context.

*Kawa*  
*Tikanga*  
And *Kaupapa*

The first is *Kawa*.

Without a clear vision  
You were lost from the beginning  
*Kawa*  
Formed connections  
Encapsulating our  
Hopes  
Dreams  
And desires  
A vision  
Aspire to achieve  
For the future

*Kawa* may be defined as the guiding philosophy. The collective aim, the communal goal. It is the principle where deep thinking takes place. A truth that will lead and guide the aspects of practice and unifies the light in the darkness or in the contemporary context, the wellbeing and prosperity of life.

The second is *Tikanga*.

Engage and you shall learn  
Hold me in your palms  
Accumulate the knowledge from generations  
Me your elders  
Of *Māori*  
Intellectual equity  
For I am a segment  
Identities of *mātatauranga*  
Underlying our principles and values  
*Ngā Pūtake o te Tikanga*

*Tikanga* can refer to a ‘rule’, ‘plan’ or ‘method’, and, more generally, to ‘custom’ and ‘habit’. For many people *tikanga Māori* means the *Māori* way, or done accordingly to *Māori* custom. (Mead, 2003) It means understanding the philosophy in practice. A practical face of *Māori* knowledge. Sharing behaviours that ensures an ethical approach. An attitude that comes with *mātauranga*, *Māori* knowledge. It is the voices grounding who you are... *Mana. Tapu. Whanaungatanga*. Our cultural renaissance carried through the minds of *tikanga*. They are embedded through the beliefs and values my ancestors pass to me.

See me in action

Do it

Feel it

Understand it

Accept it

And feel empowered through experience

And thirdly, *Kaupapa*.

*Kaupapa* is about the very survival of *Māori*. (Mane, 2009) It operates in unity. Through a multitude of universal kinship. It is the holistic makeup of *Māori*, as individuals, as a community. That all life has value. That all life has worth. That we are connected to all life. *Kaupapa* seeks positive outcomes for the collectives of *whanau*, *hapū* and *iwi*. (Smith, 1999). Integral to protocols, values and practice. It is drawn from *tikanga*. *Māori* aspirations that shape and drive us. Essentially *kaupapa* cannot exist without practice.

The *Māori* world view

Operate in unity

Spiritually or the power of the spirit

In the intangible bond which connects them all is *wairuatanga*

The spirituality my ancestors base the sacredness of life itself

As an awakening I am beginning to recognize where *kaupapa Māori* began. It is through *Māori* concepts, views and values that we are taught to be unified. In a contemporary context, I believe *kaupapa* identifies the spiritual connection that may be understood as a deeper feeling or understanding one has when integrating the mind and body together.

Enlighten me  
With teaching  
And wisdom  
That I draw upon  
To the ancestors  
Who stand here with me in spirit  
Speak the words of the past  
To the generation of the present  
Born of the same womb  
Tied in the bonds of humanity  
Tied to the heavens above us  
Tied to the earth beneath us  
Enlighten me to the bonds  
That can never be lost  
From this life to the next  
I am yours



## Methodologies

I am *whakapapa*  
I am listening with my hands. I am listening with my heart  
We are born of the earth  
When I am trying to understand *Māori* epistemology  
When I am trying to understand materials. When I am trying to understand weaving  
When I am thinking about customary. When I am thinking about contemporary  
When I am being respectful. When I am working with a material  
There are things I think about. Ideas that are present  
Nature of materials. The touch. The feel of each material. The feel between my fingers  
Thoughts as I am weaving. Our hands. Our voice. Our minds  
There are principles involved that I acknowledge  
A way to act ethically. How far can I push  
The technical side. The emotional side  
Honouring my ancestry. Reciprocate

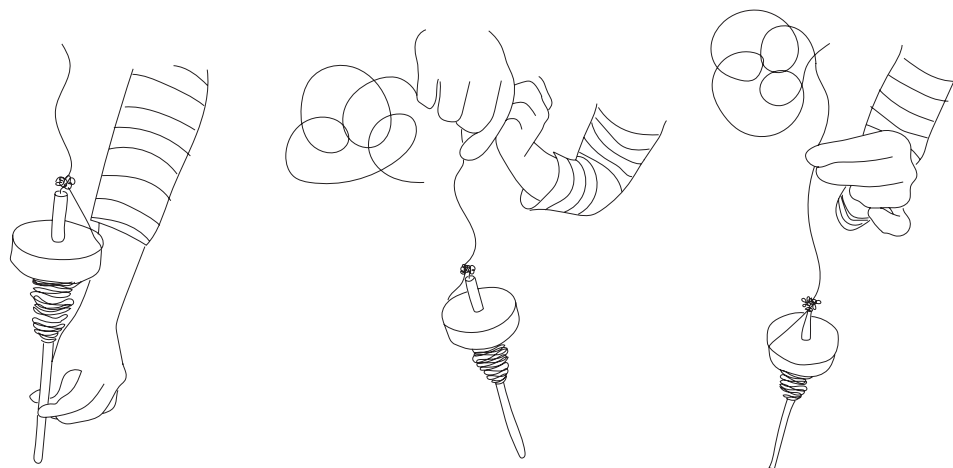
*Whakapapa* is the fibre of being, woven throughout the fabric of *Māori* society and inherently relates with both traditional and contemporary *Māori* society. The learning of new knowledge today is a similar process in that *Māori* ways of knowing and doing continually develop and are applied to our understanding of the world irrespective of time and place.

It is through *whakapapa* that the organisation of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all things legitimates a *Māori* world-view, which is at the heart of *Māori* knowledge, *Māori* ways of knowing and *Māori* ways of acquiring new knowledge. Accordingly, a research methodology framed by *whakapapa* not only authenticates *Māori* epistemology and its rightful place among research traditions, it also supports the notion

of *whakapapa* research methodology throughout the indigenous world; indigenous peoples researching among their indigenous communities worldwide. Indigenous identity is strengthened, as is the contribution of the notion of *whakapapa* to Indigenous research paradigms worldwide. (Graham, 2009)

An ethic I try to embrace. One that shares the sacred air, water, soils and plants. The inseparable links between the atua, land and humanity. I am wanting to embody this way of life. Multi-layered journey. Working with the unfamiliar. New to my practice. New to my culture. I think that sometimes we are so concerned with moving forward that we forget the success of the past. Mine is a story of *māoritanga*, harvesting, weaving, guidance, independence, a concept of respect. A fibre of being.

Over the past year, I have worked towards understanding my *Māori* culture. Through that understanding, I have come to acknowledge the relationship I share between the natural environment and myself. I travelled home to *Aotearoa* where I connected with *aku hoa*. Having conversations, learning the basics of customary knowledge, engaging in a *noho*, harvesting local *harakeke* and practicing the art of *raranga*. I am guided by the stories of my people. I am guided by *te ao Pākehā*. Immersing myself in my studio culture. I listen and observe. I reflect. Embodying the practice of using a floor loom. I wove a piece of cloth. Working with natural fibres washing, spinning and dyeing. Highlighted in the pages to come are the stories that illustrate my experiences towards gaining an understanding of this shared knowledge.



## Come Down To The *Pā Harakeke*

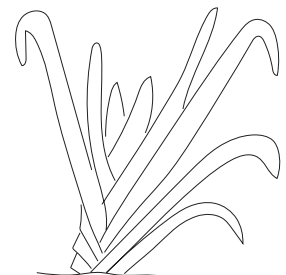
I walk down the path to the *pā harakeke*. I see bushes upon bushes of *harakeke*. I find myself surrounded by lofty flower stalks that stab the sky and leaves as broad as a *waka* paddle. Some have drooping, floppy leaves. Others growing as stiff and upright like spears. To the touch, there is a diversity of silky fineness to a texture that is waxy and coarse. Flower stalks reaching over four meters high, although others are only half the size. At first glance, I mostly see green on green but the closer I look the more I see the nuances of each. Leaves orange to deep purple, even black. Yellow, bronze and red keels running up the centre of each leaf. Blades showing off their blue tinge of driftwood smoke through to the spring green of *Pohutukawa*. Tips of the leaves tapering very gradually to the sharpest of dagger points. Others blunt, like a trowel. Leaves split back along the midrib. A leaf gapping, with only a few holding together. I can hear stories being told by the leaves through the sounds of the echoing wind. Whispering conversation between the *rito*, *awhi rito* and *tūpuna* blades. Where to begin? I seek guidance from my *aku hoa*, a *kaiako*.

All these *harakeke* are called a *pā harakeke*. When you come and look at one plant like this, it's like a *hapu*. A sub tribe, your *whanau*. There is lots of little plants within the plant. If you look here for example this is a fan, little families. Your immediate *whanau*. This is the centre shoot, the *rito*, and these two are *awhi rito*. They are on either side of the *rito*. They protect the shoot, they are the parents. The rest of the blades that fan on the outer side of the parents are the *tūpuna*, the grandparents. [ . . . ] So they are what we can harvest. If you cut the parents out the baby will die and it will compromise the quality of the *muka* and the health of whole plant. Reflecting back to earlier days our *whanau* was all about having full, strong family support and if you were to take the baby away from the parents it wouldn't be a family. [ . . . ] We always cut from the outside. When I cut, I like to take it back to these ones. From here, I cut it right down on a angle like that. Cutting the leaves as low as possible to ensure the wellbeing of the plant. When you take from one side you must always take from the otherside. (M. Lee, personal communication, June 27, 2017)

*Te harakeke*  
*Te korari*  
*Nga taonga whakarere iho*  
*O te rangi*  
*O te whenua*  
*O nga tupuna*  
*Tenei matou e inoi atu ana ki a koe e Tane Mahuta*  
*Nau enei rawa kua poipoia*  
*Homai he oranga mo matou*  
*Tihei mauri ora*

The *harakeke* plant  
The *harakeke* flower  
Treasures left down here  
Of the sky  
Of the land  
Of the ancestors  
We are praying to you *Tāne Mahuta*  
For these things that you have nurtured  
Give wellness for us  
Breathe of life

I say a *karakia*. Acknowledging and appreciating all that *harakeke* encompasses. I pay her my respect. I move towards the *harakeke*. Shifting our relationship as I step into her space. We are intimate. I feel anxious. A bit nervous. I move to understanding the intricacies of harvesting. The feeling of uncertainty. It is my first time. I think about it. *Tapu*. This is how we get to know things. I take my time. I touch her. I harvest my first blade. I harvest my second. Bundles of *harakeke* I cut. I am welcomed. We are apart of each other. I now understand her story.

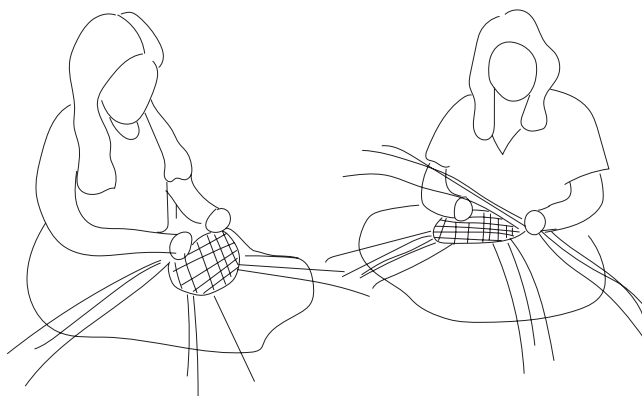


## Mountain To *Maunga*

Indigenous peoples have philosophies which connects humans to the environment and to each other and which generate principles for living a life which is sustainable, respectful and possible. [ . . . ] The spiritual and creative resources that indigenous peoples can draw on from each other provides alternatives for each other. Sharing is a good thing to do, it is a very human quality. To be able to share, to have something worth sharing gives dignity to the receiver. To create something new through that process of sharing is to recreate the old, to reconnect relationships and to recreate humanness. (Smith, 1999, p.105)

Three days of guidance. I arrive at the noho. I observe my surroundings. I follow. I get out my tools. I am preparing myself for *mahi*. I get out the *harakeke* that I devoted to harvesting that morning. I fold. I strip. I pull. I separate. I soften. I section. Repeat. My hands are in routine. I am honestly aware of the process I just completed.

The *kaiako* is encouraging. I begin to weave. The process is timely. I cannot rush. There are times I call out. I am learning through observing. I am learning through making. While I work with *harakeke* I learn to understand *harakeke*. An embodiment of *whakapapa*. I am told to treat it with great respect. It is living. It is breathing. Connection of *whanau*. We are bound together. It brings opportunity of conversation among all weavers. Around all things *harakeke*. Comforted through the talk of common threads. As I weave I envisaged my *tūpuna* working this way. Having the community to *tautoko* and *awhi* each other. There is laughter and comparison of work. A feeling of connection.



## The Naked *Harakeke*

A tarpaulin is placed on the floor to prepare us for *mahi*. We sit. I lay out the *harakeke* I have just harvested. Grouping the lot in three. *Muna*, the *kuia* picks a leaf from the first pile. Discarding away the material that is waste. The sides. The midrib. Splitting the leaf in two. She demonstrates how to get the *muka*.

“Alright, ok. So we are going to extract the *muka* from the *harakeke*.”

I am enlivened.

“So remember we have the dull side, when you did your *kete* you *hapene* on that side and then we have the shiny side.”

“Mmmhmm”... I acknowledge.

“What we’re going to do is make a cut about half way down the strip of *harakeke*, not too deep and not too light because if you do it too deeply you will hardly get any fibre, and if you do it too light it will give you quite a bit of green among your fibre. But just to make it easier for you while you are getting used to the technique we will just split that in half so it is a little bit smaller.”

I sit opposite. Observing, intrigued.

“Ok my knife is really blunt so it is good to scour with because you’re going to cut all the way through. I’m going to run it across like that and if you see here, it is cut through but not all the way exposing the *muka*.”

Moving her body towards her tool box, she pauses.

“There is a few tools we can use as you know... I have my horse mussel shell, the wild ones so they are really hard and my butter knife.”

She carries on explaining the different techniques used between each tool and then demonstrates.

“Now I have my knife I am going to put it underneath the shiny side, just sitting it on the cut I made.”

I say, “is it kind of like ribboning?”

“Yeah, that’s the same kind of concept... I am just going to pull it, then I’m going to do a loop and then pull it again.”

As her hand moves with the knife down to the length of the leaf it’s rich creamy *muka* becomes naked.

I couldn’t believe how effortless she made the action of processing look.

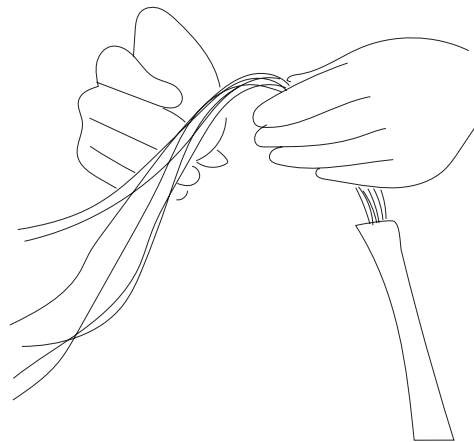
I think the expression on my face told it all...

“Is it my turn”, I ask.

She laughs.

“Yes”, she replies.

(M. Lee, personal communication, June 27, 2017)



## An Unpredictable Process

I have read about the customary process *Māori* used for dyeing their *muka* naturally. The hundred shades of red, stemmed from the *tanekaha* bark and rubbed in wood ash, the yellowy orange layer scraped from the *raurekau* bark, stripped from the sapwood and boiled in water. Loose *hīnau* bark broken from the mature trees, soaking in mud rich in iron turning it black. I want to learn. There are intricacies... I am here. The limitations of resource are back home. What am I'm going to use? Onion skins, cedar, moss. I heard avocado dyes red. The next morning I get up early, breath warmer than the air I walk through the park. Misty lakes and frosted tipped grass, warming as the sun rises, I feel as though I have woken the peace. In an open field a willow tree sits. Rays beaming through the leaves, a web glimmers. I pause shutting my eyes, inhaling the beauty of nature that surrounds me. I thank *Papatūānuku*. Walking through the trail I find myself listening to the autumn leaves crunching beneath my soles. The only footsteps I can hear are my own. I move past the trunks of Douglas Fir, picking the Indian Celery and Black-eyed Susans as I go. I stop at the grocery store on my way back from the park. I read that alum is a mordant used for plant based fibre. I walk to the spice aisle as a guess it would be there. Alum, alum, alum. What does that look like. I think to myself. I see a red can that labels alum. I buy one. It is time to go home. I fill the sink at a lukewarm temperature letting the fibre soak. I turn the stove on medium heat. I fill the pots with just enough water to cover the leaves and flower heads picked from my early morning excursion. An aromatic smell lingers in the air as they simmer. I sit. I wait. Fifteen, twenty minutes go by. I can see the colours subtracting away from itself. I am excited. Next step. I drain. I add 3/4, 1, 1 1/2 tablespoons of alum salt each into the different dye pots. An exploration. I place the fibre into each bath. The fibres from the moss and avocado turn out bleak. Hummm. I decide to leave them overnight. The Susan Petals have dyed a fluorescent yellow. The Indian Celery is more grey than black. Colours of surprise. An unpredictable process.

## The Wool's Words

I am standing in a paddock. There is a name being called. Stan... Stan.. Stan. Glancing to the left of the sun shelter a big brown eye peers from under the shade. The voice calls out a second time. Stan... I can now see two eyes. Four legs. A body. A bison. I can feel the energy of his weight shifting. He is coming. I stand there still. I put my hand out. I am slowly building up the courage to touch him. I look into his eyes and I can see there is a kindness to them. A story is being shared. The touch of his wool is comforting. I place my hand on the front of his face. Aware. I hold it there. Gently acknowledging our relationship. It is the middle of summer. We are visiting Dwayne Riley in Longview, Alberta. A friend of a friend. It is my first time meeting him. I spend the next few days at his ranch interacting with three extremely intelligent bison. Stan, Finnegan and Apache. We are comfortable. The lasts of their spring coats are shedding away. Rich dark and alive, I can see many shades of brown. Fibre organically dropping away from their bodies. I am drawn to know what he does with it all... I ask. Nothing. Endless amounts are stuffed into big orange bags and stored. With the inclination one day of function. We speak about my work. I am gifted with opportunity.

I am back home. Days go by. Weeks go by. I don't know what to do with it. A bag of bison fibre just sits. I face the unknown. Unsure of the process, I feel a discomfort from not knowing. As I open the bag a release of dirt and dust is immediate. A distinct knowledge, to clean. I seek guidance. All I need is a bucket with some lukewarm soapy water to start. Being careful of the temperature... Too hot the fibres can felt. Placing the wool in the water I leave it to soak for an hour. I rinse, I repeat. I continue to do this until the water becomes clear. On the last rinse I soak the fibre in Lanolin. I leave it overnight. I drain. I lay it out on the table. I tease. I pull. I leave it to dry. My actions become repetitive. Next step, spinning.

I am holding a hand full of raw wool in my hands. The softness of the wool is comforting. As I hold, I pull. I can feel the delicate curly fibre like cotton fluff. I can see the fine light brown, beige, white hairs. The coarse brown and stiff black hair. I put the wool through the drum carder. The length is short. It isn't holding together. This could become difficult for spinning. I try doing it manually. The difference is minor. Eager to start. I continue the process.

I have some wool in my hand and a drop spindle in the other. Lightly pulling at it, I twist. Twisting the fibre in the direction of my fingers. It is slowing down. I am creating yarn. I have a feeling of contentment. Spinning does not

come naturally to me. I notice the Lanolin from the wool is leaving a residue on my fingers as the wool moves through my grasp. The length becomes awkward to hold. I squeeze my legs together to stop the drop spindle, allowing me to control the movement of it. The rhythm has been paused. I stop the action completely. I am unravelling the yarn at the top so I can wrap it around below. I am watching my hands as they go in a circular motion. It is starting to pull away. It is separating itself. A feeling of disappointment. The fibre is too short. I thought this might happen. Wool is introduced to sheep. Wool invites sheep, sheep becomes wool, wool becomes sheep. As the materials meet I begin to think about the *Pākehā* and how they influenced *Māori* peoples. Experimenting using materials like wool, cotton and silk in their textiles. Adapting old techniques for new materials. I think about the many customary practices that have disappeared. My thoughts make me feel unbalanced. I pause. I take a deep breathe. In and out. I think about the customary and contemporary blurring together. Where I am. I continue to spin.



## A Repeating Story

I walk into the Softshop. I am meeting Jen the school shop technician. We have been in contact for a few weeks, communicating back and forth about my studio practice and where I see it going. She is going to teach me to weave using the floor loom. She has a stack of books on the table. We sit. She shows me some of her past work as we make a plan about my project. I want to weave a piece of cloth. Using natural undyed flax linen as the material. I hold out a tape measure to show her the cloth size I am thinking about. We calculate how much yarn I will need. She takes out a piece of scrap paper and pencil. She starts writing all these math equations. 40" X 60", add on 12" each side = 24".  $\frac{2}{40}$ ,  $\frac{8}{2}$ ,  $\frac{4}{2}$ . Cloth, width, length. 12 EPI, 480 threads. 108" length/thread. 51,840 inches, 4320 feet, 1,440 yards. 28,800 divided by 12 = 2,400 divide by 3 = 800 yards. Okay... So you will need 3 Wet Spun Tow – Natural, 4 for backup if you want. I sat there overwhelmed at what I just witnessed. I order the material online and wait.

It has arrived. I am measuring out the warp length. To set up I use five 'F' clamps spreading them on the tables in an awkward extended V shape to make the length of 108" long. I need to calculate how many bundles I need splitting the work into shared amounts that I can cope with.  $480 - 108 = 372$ , divided by 2 = 186.  $25 \times 25 = 50$ , repeat three times. Plus one equal 36. Okay! That adds up correctly, I'll make bundles. I put the thread roll on my finger and loop the flax around the first clamp. As I walk the thread walks with me. My finger becomes waxy placing the flax between my thumb and my index as a guide. Third bundle in my fingers begin to feel sore. The tension between the material and my hands begin to show. Only four more to go. I start to count down.

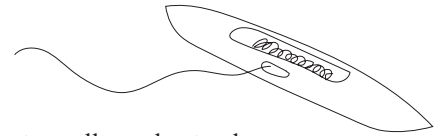
I am warping the loom. I measure out 20" from the middle. I place a piece of masking tape to mark the spot. I use a lease tool to tie together the linen. I thread the linen through the reed. I thread the linen through the heddles. I pull the warp through the shafts to the back. Attaching the warp we roll the length of the thread. I need help. It is a two person process. We must do it slowly. It needs to be an equal tension. Two weeks pass and I have finally finished warping the loom. It became slow. It became repetitive. It felt endless. I am ready to tie off. Untying and retying the knots, the flax has become indented in my fingertips. They are pierced. Only five more to go, I feel agitated. I stand up, I stretch. I sit. I consciously watch as my hands and fingers move. I become aware that the process has become imbued.

Rizzzz, rizzzz, rizzzz. Is the sound I can hear as the drill spins the pencil threading the linen onto the bobbin. My hand

vibrating repeatedly. It becomes apart of the alternative process. Bobbins are threaded. Boat shuttle ready. Pedals one and three are pushed down. I start from the left side. Tap, tap dart. I catch the shuttle at the right end. Tap, tap dart. I catch the shuttle back on the left side. I pause. I have just completed my first line of weaving. I treasure it, it is sacred. I embrace what I have done. Accepting it as the *te aho tapu*, the eternal thread that guides me on this journey. I reflect. It is not just a piece of cloth. I am weaving a cloth of knowledge. I am weaving a cloth enlightening me to my ancestors. It is informing an understanding of interconnected processes. I am aware that every row I add, I am adding to the skin of My Other Self. I continue to weave. Pedals two and four are pushed down. The boat shuttle moving from one end to the other. It is a repeating story. Four weeks in total I have finished. The foundation.



It is difficult for those of us a from western, urbanized society to really understand the concept of a mountain being sacred or to feel what that means. (Turner, 2008, p. 43)



From the traditional way of learning being passed down from generation to generation through our elders, to learning in the company of others in the *marae*, the question I have asked myself over the past year is how I can apply custom *Māori* knowledge systems to an academic degree framework. In a contemporary context, I have adopted the synergies of weaving, using a *te ao Pākehā* floor loom and the sistering material of flax, sheep and buffalo wool, as a way to encircle the threads of my cultural knowledge. The contemporary exploration of weaving and materials from techniques, style and design, has allowed me to treat my making process in the contemporary perspective of *Māori*.

Pathway to diversity. *Māori* now and *Māori* then. Reclamation. A developing process. Contemporary realities. Playing the roles of our future. A walk in *te ao Pākehā*.

Through my studio practice, I strive to consistently explore the blend between the *Māori* and the *te ao Pākehā* worlds. This requires a strong *kaupapa*, a base in which to place myself in the context of a *Māori* designer in a colonial society. My explorations within the weaving practice, using *harakeke* and the sistering materials, have allowed me to reinforce and build this *kaupapa*. The constant redress to *whakapapa* is integral to this reflection. The exposure to cultural practice that is inherent in the learning associated with *Māori* epistemology has made possible my connection to *te aho tapu*, which is explored in the following section, The Eternal Circle, and has been the guidance of weaving the skin of my *korowai*.

## The Eternal Circle

The eternal thread or *te aho tapu* is the genealogical line, the first and sacred line of weaving that *Māori* use as a metaphor. It places us in the present, connects us to the past and is our thread to the future. There is a phrase, '*i ngā rā o mua*' used when one is referring to the past. But the word '*mua*' also means in front of you. Acknowledging this is culturally relevant, as according to our concept of time, we cannot separate ourselves from our *tūpuna* or the generation in front of us. Like the eternal circle.

She sees herself  
As a repository  
Linking knowledge  
Of the past  
With that  
Of the future

In reflection, the thought of *te aho tapu* embodies the relationships and confirms the connections we, as *Māori*, have to the present, past and future. Customary and contemporary practice can be viewed in the same light, so that when applied to the creation of an artifact, this could also be considered as *tikanga* being translated across cultures. Throughout my woven process I have used the analogy of *te aho tapu* as a conscious concept, seeing it as a path that acknowledges the movement from customary to contemporary and back again.

Take the single line, such as the *te aho tapu* of the weaver, the genealogical line. Follow it to its logical conclusion. It doubles, triples, quadruples. Eventually there is a mosaic of interwoven lines, a fabric of history, an infinite number of references surface. That single line reflects the *mana* of the people and a history that can go beyond the present to another time long, long ago. (Ford, 2001, p. 12)

In my studio I am making a contemporary *korowai*. The word *korowai* for me is a embodiment of the old ones, our *tūpuna*. I think of a *korowai* as a blanket of our culture. These thoughts remind me of the *taonga* our *tūpuna* gifted us. As I am weaving my own *korowai*, I envisage the trace of my *whakapapa*, I am unified by the sense of grounding I have that is intrinsic to my body. The making of a *korowai* is an outcome of my past years exploration and compliments the narrative of My Other Self. It is through reflecting *te aho tapu* and conceptualizing its meaning, that I feel I can situate my studio within *tikanga Māori*. Throughout the creation of my *korowai* I would repeatedly reflect on the contemporary practice and in particular not using only traditional materials and forms of weaving, which lead me to question the role of appropriation of my work. What I have come to understand through this metaphor, that regardless of the materials used, if you as *Māori*, are aware of the spiritual connection in the creation then the design and culture of *tikanga* is accepted.

The making of a *korowai* is a lengthy process. This is something I have become familiar with. I am using the knowledge I have learnt through each of the past years stories to complete my *korowai*. I have the foundation of my *korowai* folded and placed across the table. There is three lines running horizontal on it. This represents *whakapapa*, my *tūpuna*, *awhi rito* and the *rito*. As it lays across the table, a silhouette of the workstations my *tūpuna* used for weaving their *korowai* becomes visible. I am sitting. I am looking down at all the thread dangling off the edge. Placing the tips of my fingers on the thread, I run my hand across them. I take a moment. I am about to introduce *whatu*, a weft-twining weaving technique adapted by *Māori* to complete my *korowai*. A technique designed for woven objects and garments. Grouped in sections I gently begin to untie the first knot. My choices become aware. A shift between contemporary and customary. I am using the yarn I hand spun. I take a piece of it and fold it in half, making two weft threads. Looped around the first warp I rest it over my left hand. My right hand holding the tension. I am using my fingers as the my tool. I half-twine twist clockwise. My weft threads are now interacting around each other in the shape of a 'S'. I am consciously aware of *te aho tapu*. I must not leave the first row uncompleted. Each row takes me two hours to complete. As I am twisting, I reflect upon the legacy of design my *tūpuna* left to us. My thoughts acknowledge weaving as a form of design. Its function through detail, materials and techniques becomes a tacit skill and knowledge. It fosters cultural continuity and is what tells the stories, connecting us back to the identity of being *Māori*.

I am weaving a *korowai*. It is embodying a *Māori* value system. It is weaving a cultural expression. As I weave, I am conscious of *te aho tapu*. This is essential to my practice. I retain my inner connection. To the land. Connected through *te aho tapu*. *Aho* means connection. *Aho* connects the *whenua*. *Whenua* sustains us after birth. *Whenua* is also the name for placenta, which feeds us before birth. The connection with all those elements. I live amongst. I learn from. Inextricably linked. I am in touch with the creator. You take a *korowai*. Your skin. My Skin. I put it on. I am perpetuating knowledge. *Korowai*.

## *Kupu Whakatepe*



*Tipu ai au i te kākano  
Ka rapu mātauranga ki a mau  
Hei manaaki, me te whakanui  
Rātou e manaakohia  
Ana te mātauranga*

From a seed I go  
To pursue knowledge  
To grasp knowledge  
To nurture and empower  
To who seek knowledge

Tell me the story of the bellbird. A story of where if the heart of the of *harakeke* was removed, where would the bellbird sing? A story that if I was asked what the most important thing in the world is, I would be compelled to tell the story, *he tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata*. Tell me a story, a story that will be my story as well as the story honoring the wisdom and voices of my *tūpuna* and the sounds of the generation to come, preserved by the present this is the voice of *Māori*, the story that brings together the blessing of *Papatūānuku*, the story that brings us land through the intricate, holistic and interconnected relationship with all living things. Tell me the story from the intangible knowledge of ancestry that is embodied in my being, where I, as *Māori*, am considered as the medium, a story that lives and breathes the diversity of life, there is the story of a *maunga* and *te awa* of a *waka* and *iwi*, it is a story of *whakapapa*, it is my story of My Other Self...



## Vocabulary

*Aho* Line of descent Genealogy

*Aotearoa* New Zealand

*Awa* River

*Awhi rito* Leaves that embrace the centre shoot of the *harakeke*

*Awhi* To embrace

*Hapū* Kinship Group Clan Tribe Subtribe To be pregnant

*Hapene* To process Soften

*Harakeke* New Zealand native flax *Phormium tenax*

*He tāngata* People

*Hīnau* *Elaeocarpus dentatus*

*Hoa* Friend

*Iwi* Extended Kinship Group Tribe Nation People Nationality

*Kaiako* Teacher instructor

*Karakia* Ritual chants Say grace Pray Recite a prayer Chant

*Kaupapa Māori* approach *Māori* topic *Māori* customary practice *Māori* principles *Māori* ideology

*Kawa* Guiding philosophy

*Korowai* Cloak

*Kōrero* To tell Say Speak Read Talk Address

*Ko wai au* Who am I

*Kupu Whakatepe* Concluding words

*Mahi* To work Perform

*Mana* Relates to power Dignity Respect

*Māori* Indigenous peoples of New Zealand

*Māoritanga* *Māori* culture *Māori* practices and beliefs

*Marae* Gathering place  
*Mātauranga* Knowledge Wisdom Understanding Skill  
*Maunga* Mountain  
*Muka* Prepared flax fibre  
*Ngahere* Bush Forest  
*Ngā mihi* Acknowledgments  
*Noho* Sit  
*No hea au* Where do I come from  
*Pā Harakeke* Flax bush Generations  
*Pākehā* English European  
*Papatūānuku* Earth Earth mother Wife of *Ranginui*  
*Pohutukawa* New Zealand native tree *Metrosideros excelsa*  
*Purakau* Oral history Myth Legend Story  
*Ranginui Atua* of the sky and husband of *Papatūānuku*  
*Raranga* Weaving  
*Raurekau* Large-leaved coprosma *Coprosma grandifolia*  
*Rito* Centre shoot Young centre leaf of the *harakeke* New *harakeke* shoot  
*Tanekaha* Celery pine *Phyllocladus trichomanoides*  
*Tāne Mahuta Atua* of the forests and birds and one of the children of *Ranginui* and *Papatūānuku*  
*Taonga* Treasure  
*Tapu* Be sacred Prohibited Restricted Set apart Forbidden Under *atua* protection  
*Tautoko* To support  
*Tēnā koutou* Speaking to three or more people Thank you  
*Te Ao Māori* Māori way of life  
*Māoridom* Māori way of life  
*Te aho tapu* The genealogical line The first and sacred line of weaving  
*Te Kore* Supreme being The nothingness  
*Tikanga* Protocol Custom Method Rule Practice

*Tūpuna* Ancestor Elder Grandparent

*Waiata* Song Chant To sing

*Waiata* Oriori Lullaby

*Wairuatanga* Spirituality

*Waka* Canoe

*Whakapapa* Genealogy Lineage Descent

*Whakatauki* Proverb

*Whānau* Extended family Family group

*Whanaungatanga* Relationship Kinship Sense of family connection

*Wharehui* Meeting house

*Whenua* Country Land Ground Placenta Afterbirth

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