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WHATUORA: THEORIZING "NEW" INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY FROM "OLD" INDIGENOUS WEAVING PRACTICE

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Abstract: Despite Indigenous peoples' deeply methodological and artistic ways of being in and making sense of our world, the notion of "methodology" has been captured by Western research paradigms and duly mystified. This article seeks to contribute to Indigenous scholarship that encourages researchers to look to our own artistic practices and ways of being in the world, theorizing our own methodologies for research from our knowledge systems to tell our stories and create "new" knowledge that will serve us in our current lived realities. I explain how I theorized a Māori [Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand] weaving practice as a decolonizing research methodology for my doctoral research (Smith, 2017) to explore the lived experiences of eight Māori mothers and grandmothers as they wove storied Māori cloaks. I introduce you to key theoreticians who contributed significantly

to my work so as to encourage other researchers to look for, and listen to, the wisdom contained within Indigenous knowledge and then consider the methodologies most capable of telling our stories from our own world-views.

Keywords: Indigenous methodology; Māori weaving practice; decolonizing research; women's art research practice

Preparing the Strands

Indigenous artistic weaving practices, and the storied art forms they produce, hold sophisticated systems of knowledge that guide how we move through and relate to the world, how we learn and are taught, how we experience life, and pass down knowledge. Historically, these weaving practices were practical and purposeful – to weave clothing and create shelter. More recently, Māori and Indigenous researchers have looked to theorize our artistic practices as research methodology to tell our stories and explain our lived experiences in our words, in our ways, and through our own Indigenous artistic lens.

One purpose of this article is to encourage emerging Indigenous arts researchers, like me, to look to our own ways of being, our knowledge systems, stories, language, and creative practices to theorize the arts research methodologies most capable of telling our stories from our complex and interwoven world-views. The way that I view research, and life in general, draws deeply from my engagement with my weaving practice. That is, I frame and theorize, analyze, construct, and critique using weaving metaphors, ideas, and language. This article is no different as I apply a cloak weaving logic to order and frame my argument.

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Before cloak weaving begins, it is important to know whose hands are at work and what brings them to the work. I begin, therefore, by locating myself as a Māori woman in relationship to the research, before providing some context of the project itself through the stories that led me to this work. The next step is to gather one's weaving materials, or in this case, the multiple and entangled theoretical strands that, once critically examined, are selected and methodically bound together to form and inform the fabric of the woven cloak. At this point, I introduce you to key theoreticians, language, and ideas that contribute to how I have theorized a methodology. In doing so, I challenge Western theoretical norms that forward "real and robust" theory as residing with mostly white, usually male, and often dead theoreticians.

At its broadest, methodology can be understood as a way of being in, thinking about and interacting with the world – the thinking behind the doing (Kovach, 2009). How we engage in art practice, how we plant a garden or mother our children have "methodology" to them, informed by our experiences and knowledge, values and beliefs, societal influences, and so on. In our artistic practice, as in research, we test theories and materials, we discuss

problems, we may seek out “expert” advice or consult literature. We make mistakes, reflect, review, adapt, and innovate in order to learn from our experience and make positive change for the future.

As each Māori woman who contributed to my research learnt, 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. Through the journey of weaving a cloak for their family, the women wove, with both their fingers and their words, storied garments that instantiate the aspirations they hold for their children and grandchildren to live holistically well lives that connect them “as Māori” to the land, their language, culture, values and beliefs. In short, the women created storied heirlooms to cloak their children in their aspirations for them to not just “be Māori” – a recognized right by virtue of having Māori ancestry, but importantly, to live culturally and holistically well lives “as Māori.”

Embedding Myself in the Research Fibres

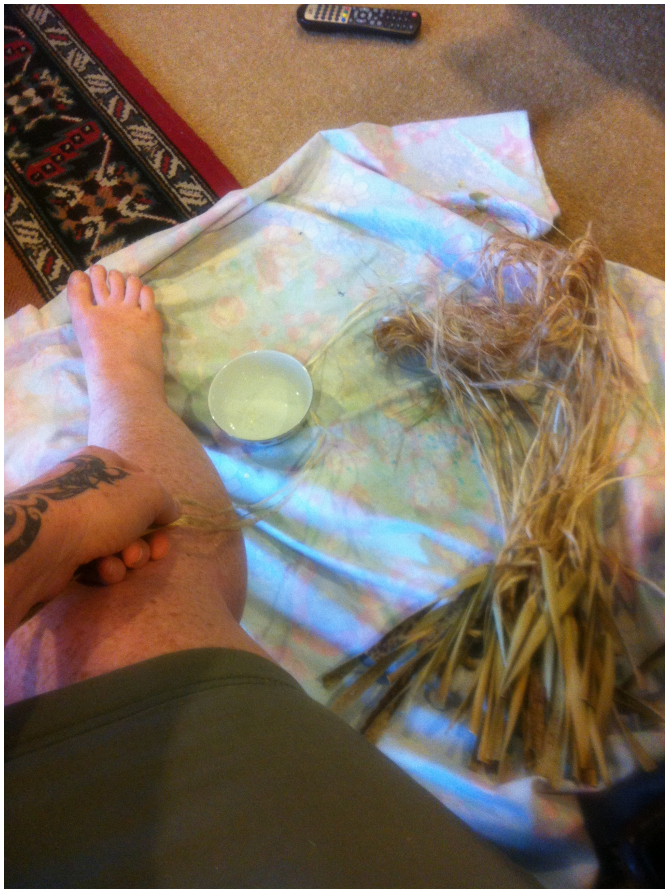

Figure 1. The prolific flax plants that grow throughout Aotearoa New Zealand are harvested and treated in a laborious process to extract their inner fibres named muka. The weaver rolls thin bundles of muka fibre down her leg to twine into corded strands, in doing so, embedding her DNA into the fibre. 2000 strands or more are required to create one cloak.

An important and expected element of researching “as Māori” is to locate oneself in relationship to people, place and purpose, understood here as embedding myself in the research. Often, the first question asked in a Māori language exchange is not: WHO are you? but more importantly: WHERE are you from? The response is usually articulated through the recitation of significant geographical landmarks, eponymous ancestors and tribal canoes that tell a story of relationship to the land and its people. In contrast to many Western scientific approaches that forward researchers as acultural and objective observers, Indigenous researchers intentionally locate themselves in relationship to the research and those involved. I begin with a story through which I identify as artist and researcher, storyteller, teacher, Māori woman, mother, and daughter to declare, as I disclose (Grierson, 2007), the woven stories which led me to this research and my theorization of whatu weaving as methodology.

Figure 2. “Born of the flax bush,” my daughters are intimately connected to the traditions and processes associated with my weaving practice.

I am the daughter of a Māori mother who sought to actively reclaim and restore Māori identity in her family – ways of being that had been systematically stripped away by colonizing processes. Her deliberate actions to reclaim language, identity and artistic practices served to disrupt our family's experience of cultural disconnection so that her children and now her grandchildren may experience a positive cultural identity as Māori. As a child, I enjoyed the creative act of making, whether it was sewing, cooking, or crafting. I recall a sense of fulfilment in making something "new" from something "old," the quiet reflective space that art making creates, and the joy of gifting what I had made to others. My mother actively sought out opportunities for me to learn Māori weaving, an art form I picked up very quickly. Weaving was the space where my creativity and desire to make could be located within Māori practices, language, and knowledge. Through weaving I felt connected to an old set of knowledge that enabled me to express a Māori identity in storied and creative ways.

Now as a mother of two young daughters, I continue to seek out or create for them, opportunities to learn about and express their identities through the arts. Both daughters have grown up surrounded by Māori fibre arts. As babies they would come with me to harvest materials from the land, crawling amongst piles of flax and other weaving materials. As they grew older, they would sit alongside me as I wove, and more recently, my youngest daughter has taken up weaving – I suspect as a way for her to spend time with me. In a sense, as I continue to learn and reclaim Māori artistic practices, knowledge, and language, I am embodying my aspirations for my daughters to continue a legacy handed down to them through matrilineal lines.

Cloaked in My Mother's Aspirations

Exploring issues of Māori women's identity is a legacy handed to me from my mother – a key theoretician in my research. She explains here her theory of cloaking me in her aspirations:

> *In a "western" sense, we are born "naked" – naked as the day you were born, I once heard someone say. But within a Māori way of thinking we are born cloaked in a kākahu* [cloak] *that speaks of the aspirations of our whānau* [family]*. On this kākahu are the feathers of our parents, our grandparents, our tūpuna* [ancestors]*. These feathers tell us who we are, where we are from, where we belong, all of which help us to be well and live well in this world. These storied feathers connect us to our past and project aspirations of our future. They have form. They have pattern. Each feather is carefully and consciously woven into the kākahu.*

Figures 3 & 4. My mother wearing the first full length cloak that I made and gifted to her.

Each cloak has been carefully crafted and is imbued with story. It speaks of those things – good and bad, that surround us, and form and inform who we are and how we "see" the world we live in.

The feathers on the kākahu can be understood as teachings and learning experiences, desires and whakapapa [genealogy]*. When we are young, those who raise us inform the pattern of our feathers, for a multitude of reasons, adding and removing feathers that they deem "important" or "useful" within the context of that time. As we mature, we assume the responsibility of weaving our own cloak, adding to it our own feathers, rejecting or accepting the feathers woven early on by those who have gone before.*

Within an education system that does not clearly understand Māori aspirations, our kākahu are vulnerable. Feathers may be forcibly removed as Māori children are told

that they do not need particular feathers – like those that tell us that reo [Māori language] *is part of a Māori identity. More covertly, some Māori children are told to leave their kākahu at the school gate – that being Māori will not benefit them here. Our storied kākahu may be invisible to others, the knowledge, whakapapa* [ancestry] *and aspirations that are carefully woven into its fabric are simply not seen. Some learn that to be Māori is not an advantage. If you had the eyes to read my kākahu, what would my kākahu tell you about me?*

I have cloaked you my daughter in a kākahu that is adorned with feathers that speak of reclaiming and restoring being Māori. You will choose which feathers from my experiences are useful in your own desire to (re)claim what being a Māori woman means to you. My desire is that I have woven into your kākahu feathers that keep you safe and well in your identity to give you the strength to always contribute, to give back in positive ways that enhance mana [pride, prestige and reputation] *– yours and those around you. When you wear this kākahu my daughter you are never alone.* (M. interview)[1]

Figure 5. Families share stories at weaving workshops.

It is the wisdom and theory contained within my mother's story of "cloaking" me in her aspirations, woven together with my own engagement with Māori artistic practice, Māori education, Māori identity politics and postgraduate research that provided the interwoven ideas for my research, arriving at this research question: *How do Māori women reclaim "living as Māori" through the creation of storied cloaks?*

Eight Māori mothers and grandmothers, including me and my mother, who had expressed a desire to weave an heirloom family cloak, attended six weekend workshops over the course of a year. Each full day workshop was recorded, transcribed and returned to the women to edit. The women were also asked to keep a reflective journal in which they wrote often moving and emotional stories that were provoked both during and in between our workshops. The reflective journals and transcribed workshops comprised the "data" for the study. The data was thematically analyzed, and a small selection is presented below.

Figure 6. Two friends talk and weave.

An Idea is Awoken

When I began this research project, there was not an established methodology that appeared to me as appropriate for a project that explored living as Māori women and weaving cloaks. I noted that some research projects explain methodology in a small section within a chapter where "established" and "accepted" methodological approaches are assumed then "applied" to the project. My methodology is a more diffuse, interwoven idea. Theorizing the artistic practice of whatu as methodology is concerned with creating methodology, and in turn methods, from within the embodied knowledge of whatu. When theorizing whatu as the methodology most appropriate for my research, I did not invent something "new." Instead, I wove together a number of different strands of thinking that already existed around Māori weaving practices, language, identity, and so on, in a "new" way – creating "new" fabric from "old" threads, if you will.

Figure 7. A mother weaves a cloak for her new-born son as he sleeps at her breast.

While holding firm to the belief that the methodology for my research would be found within its practice, it was a gift from another theoretician within my family – my then five-year-old daughter, who prompted me to theorize the practice of whatu beyond its practical application. I began to think about the interwoven meanings of the term whatu – something my daughter Kahukura as a bi-literate child did instinctively, and how these intertwining meanings could be bound together as methodology. This is Kahukura's story.

I sit deep in thought, working on a kākahu. Fingers moving rhythmically. Aho tangling and untangling. Whenu coming together. Building the kākahu whenu by whenu, one by one as the feathers are added. Some in pattern some not. Some selected, others discarded. I am in the zone. Thinking, thinking. Thinking about my research. Thinking about who this kākahu is for. Thinking about what to cook for dinner. Thinking that it is getting dark and the girls need to come in for a shower. Thinking. Kahukura is 5 years old. She often sits beside me and does her version of "whatu" – twisting and plaiting and twirling of whenu into curious knots. I think to myself, "I love it when she sits here with me," and I tell her so. She smiles and I can tell that she enjoys the time we sit together. I think, "I wish I had had someone to sit next to, to learn whatu. Yet, I do not "teach" Kahukura to whatu. She watches. She talks. She sings. The pedagogy at work here is not teaching. It is education. It is the deliberate act of whatu pedagogy – reclaiming knowledge and learning and passing this on to our children. My aspirations, handed down to her through the time we spend together, talking, telling stories, weaving. I am cloaking her in my aspirations that, in turn, she will continue these traditions with her daughters, my future mokopuna.

She comes in from outside. "Kei te aha koe Māmā? [what are you doing mum?] E whatu ana ahau bubba." [I am weaving.] "Oh," she says, hums to herself, plays with the whenu and then replies. "Whatu eh Mama like seeing with your eyes? I look up.

She smiles and walks away. I stare after her as a connection is made, blinding me like a bolt of lightning. Whatu means finger twining. Whatu also means eyes, to see or a way of seeing. In this moment Kahukura helped me to "see" that the physical practice of whatu is simultaneously a way of being and being seen in the world through the stories we weave into its fabric. I watch her go and thank the universe for the simple yet complex brain of a 5-year-old and wish I could think with her clarity more often. (H. journal)

Figure 8. A three-year-old Kahukura weaves her story into our family cloak.

Kahukura's (in)sight reminded me of the richness that exists within our own knowledge systems and that sometimes it takes a different "whatu" lens or set of eyes, with which to view that knowledge. As Māori scholar Taina Pohatu (2011) says, "an unwillingness to properly value the potential held within Māori bodies of knowledge, deposited by generations past into the "library of te reo" [language], will have the effect of limiting our visions, horizons, and so expectations" (p. 3). Kahukura's "vision" offered me a way to "re-

vision" the practice of whatu, beyond its practical sense, in "new" theoretical and methodological ways. Having been handed the theoretical threads by Kahukura, I began to think in other ways about theorizing art practice as research methodology and looked to Māori and Indigenous scholarship for the courage to advance my theory.

(Re)claiming the Courage to Theorize Art Practice as Methodology

Theorizing is not new to us. Indigenous methodologies that enable us to think about and understand our lived experiences have existed in various forms for thousands of years. As Māori scholar Leonie Pihama (2001) reminds us, theory and methodology did not arrive with the colonizer. Instead, we are surrounded by our own sets of theoretical knowledge that have supported great technological and creative advances, enabling Indigenous communities around the world to thrive.

Leah Abayao (2006), an academic who works in the fields of Indigenous peoples' education, environmental studies, and ethno-medicine, defines Indigenous methodology as:

> Acquired over generations by communities as they interact with the environment. It encompasses technology, social, economic, philosophical, learning, and governance systems, and is not just about woven baskets and handicrafts for tourists per se. It is about excavating the technologies such as looms, textiles, jewelry, and brass work manufacture, exploring indigenous technological knowledge and knowledge transmission systems, and recasting the potentialities they represent. (p. 180)

Margaret Kovach (2009), a Professor in Education of Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry explains Indigenous methodologies as ways of knowing that are both practical and capable of transmitting values and knowledge. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, Māori across a wide range of fields are working to awaken "new" theory from "old" knowledge by theorizing Mātauranga Māori or Māori knowledge in new and useful ways. As Charles Royal (2011) says the goal of theorization "is not the creation of yet new knowledge for its own sake but rather to develop a way of encountering the world that upholds life, deepens our relationships with the natural world and with each other" (p. 48).

Indigenous research methodologies drawn from artistic practices create space in the Western academy to view and conduct research through an Indigenous artistic lens. Kovach (2009) says that in her early academic career, there was a paucity of theoretical literature that centred Indigenous conceptual frameworks and tribal knowledge. She, along with others, encourages Indigenous researchers to look to our own systems of knowledge to develop methodologies, to investigate our own problems, and make visible the ways we see

the world. Often activated by decolonizing politics, Indigenous researchers continue to develop and use Indigenous approaches to speak back to Western research practices that marginalize Indigenous knowledge. In doing so, Indigenous methodologies re-centre, re-claim and re-present Indigenous knowledge as a valid and legitimate academic approach to research, and more importantly, as capable of contributing to positive transformations for Indigenous people.

When theorizing the artistic practice of whatu as the methodology most appropriate for my research, I did not invent something "new" as is often the imperative in research from a Western perspective. Instead I brought together existing strands of thinking around, language and identity in such a way as to create "new" fabric from "old" threads or "new" theory from "old" ideas – a research methodology I name Whatuora.

Whatu and Ora – Unpicking and Unpacking the Threads

Figure 9. What may look like a tangle of strands to one set of lenses is seen by another as an opportunity to re-weave in our present and for our future. When some see a tangle of threads others see potential transformations made possible by the hands of the reflective and conscientized weaver.

Aspirations to decolonize and reclaim often require an unpicking of experiences and the courage to re-weave new ideas in creative ways. Each of the Maori women participants simultaneously engaged in physically and emotionally demanding work as they prepared their fibres and feathers. As they worked, they spoke in deeply reflective ways about the necessary process of “unpicking” their own constructed identities in order to re-weave themselves in new and transforming ways to work towards a state of “ora” or wellness.

Whatuora methodology twines together two not commonly associated ideas – whatu and ora. While not intended to be a comprehensive examination of the complex language and ideas developed in the study (for further explanation see Smith, 2017), some explanation of whatu terminology is offered here to enable a reading of how art practice was theorized as research methodology.

Figure 10. Women’s fingers at work finger twining strands one by one to create storied cloaks.

Whatu is the term for traditional Māori finger twining, an ancient practice developed over centuries and used to create traditional clothing ranging from everyday rough rain capes through to ornately woven and highly prized feathered cloaks. As Kahukura reminded me, whatu is also the Māori word for eyes – the lenses through which we view the world. The concept of whatu as sight, vision and lens provides some interesting metaphorical language to think about how the women in my research "see" themselves, how they believe they are "seen" to be living as Māori women, and how they consciously and deliberately seek to "re-vision" living as Māori for themselves, their children and grandchildren.

At its simplest form, the practice of whatu requires the twining together of two sets of aho or horizontal weft threads around a set of whenu or vertical warp threads as seen in the diagram below. As one set of aho threads come to the fore, it is exchanged for another that is then foregrounded, both sets of aho interacting interdependently with the other.

Figure 11. Interdependent binding threads – whatu aho rua. Mother and daughter's hands whatu aho rua [weft threads].

Ora is a common word in the Māori language that means to be well, to survive, to be healthy, fit and vital (Williams, 1997). The ubiquitous greeting in Aotearoa New Zealand "kia ora," for example, literally means "be well." Of particular relevance to a Whatuora methodology is ora as a stative – to be safe, cured, recovered, and healed (Williams, 1997). Ora in this research is understood as a journey to wellness and recovery from the impacts of colonization by Maori women who are reclaiming, restor(y)ing and self-determining what it means to them to live as Māori women.

Ora can be expressed in diverse ways. Taina Pohatu (2011), suggests a person in a state of ora shows signs of being highly motivated, active and alert, content, committed, and

engaged. They may be more likely to participate and support cultural activities or indeed lead from the front. Applied to notions of living as Māori in this research, ora is understood as being culturally connected to place, people and identity, living a fulfilled life, confident to participate positively in te ao Māori and the wider world, and engaged and committed to ensuring the cultural continuity of living as Māori into the future through our tamariki and mokopuna.

When the complex notions of whatu as eyes, ways of seeing, ways to be seen, and the practice of finger twining are woven together with notions of ora as being well, cured, healed, and able to participate culturally, a new bound together idea, Whatuora, comes into being as a methodology through which Māori women's stories and experiences can be viewed.

Theorizing a Connection between Whatu Terminology and Māori Maternity

The artistic practice of whatu, and the whatu kākahu it creates, is richly embedded with maternal language, an important connection in research that explores Māori mothers' and grandmothers' lived experiences. Some whatu terminology expresses the physical connections between a mother and child, including aspects of childbirth. Other whatu terms refer to the complex and symbolic ideas embodied in whatu kākahu as a means for cultural production and continuity (Henare, 2005). For many hundreds of years, the practice of whatu, and the garments it produces, have played a key role in Māori women's lives. Traditions held within Māori cosmogony connect Māori women with the art of whatu and the cycles of the moon, women's bodies and childbirth, such as the cultural practice of using natural muka (weaving fibers) to tie off a newborn's umbilical cord. The very language of whatu resonates deeply with women's maternal bodies creating intimate connections between the two.

The term aho, the continuous binding weft strands described above, are defined as line, genealogy, and chord. Of relevance to the research is that aho also means umbilical cord, that which connects the baby to its mother (Williams, 1997). Aho are understood as vital connectors to the past and the future, or the tangible and substantive links between ancestors and their living descendants (Henare, 2005). Spiritually, aho connect us to our ancestors and are the means through which the weaver enables ancestral energy to "live on" in the present through her artistic practice and the cloaks she creates. This abstract idea moves aho from "metaphorical" connectors to tangible instantiations of ancestral efficacy –

those threads that bind and connect us to our past, and will continue, through our children and grandchildren, into the future.

The term for cloak – kākahu or kahu, is another element of whatu practice that is rich with maternal language. A kahu or kahukahu is the Māori name for the amniotic sac or foetal membrane that envelops the unborn child (Henare, 2005; MacAulay & Te Waru-Rewiri, 1996). Referring back to my mother's story, mothers can be understood to literally and metaphorically "cloak" our children in a protective (kā)kahu before they are born and this protective and nurturing kākahu continues to be woven and influenced by us after our children enter the world. Understood in this way, we as mothers cloak and protect our children physically and spiritually in multiple ways.

The term whenu or the vertical warp threads that make up the body of a kākahu, is an abbreviation of the word "whenua" meaning "placenta" and "land" – one sustains the child within the mother's womb while the other continues to nurture the child once she is born (Maihi, 2011). Present in other Indigenous cultures, for example, the Navajo (Lamphere, 2007) and Hawai'ian people (Green & Beckwith, 2009), paying special attention to the umbilical cord and placental afterbirth has long been a traditional practice for Māori (Mead, 2003; Jenkins & Mountain Harte, 2011). A new born baby's whenua [placenta] is returned to the whenua [land] as a means of connecting that child to Papatūānuku [Earth Mother]. The ritual act of burying whenua reinforces a Māori connection to the land as tāngata whenua – quite literally people of the land.

Māori mothers and grandmothers are understood in this research as key to creating positive transformative change for their wider family. As the women wove, they shared their experiences, wrote reflections on their past and forecast their aspirations for the future. They experienced moments of awakening as they identified how their own positive and negative experiences of growing up and being Māori now informed the experiences they want their children and grandchildren to have, or not. These conscientized Māori women aspire to see the world through well and healed eyes – Whatuora.

Weaving our Stories – Storying our Weaving

More than mere research participants, I view the women who contributed to my research as theoreticians whose storied lived experiences, critical perspectives and theoretical aspirations comprised the "data" of this project. Below are three of many themes that emerged from the research. Each of their stories can be understood as the multiple textured layers of feathers that adorn their cloaks. Each story has a past set of experiences

and circumstances that inform it. Like the feathers on a cloak that once adorned a bird, we cannot know all the places that that feather has been. Similarly, the small selection of feathers here are offered by the women and selected by me. When carefully and respectfully gathered and woven together, this collection of feathers/stories collectively form yet another narrative.

Becoming Mothers and Grandmothers

During the course of our weaving together, many of the women described an inescapable obligation to affirm and pass on to the next generation a Māori worldview that is positive and affirms a holistic wellbeing. This responsibility requires each generation to re-vision how and what will be passed on by exploring and tracing understandings held in bodies of knowledge, then making them relevant to our current lived realities. Not only are we as mothers and grandmothers responsible for nurturing the day-to-day physical and emotional wellbeing of our children, we are arguably the most important contributors to how they understand themselves living secure and positive lives as Māori.

Being mothers and grandmothers is inextricably intertwined with our efforts to live as Māori women. For some of us, becoming a mother or grandmother acts as a turning point, providing a conscious awakening that strengthens our resolve to reclaim and restore (Gangé, 2013; Pohatu, 2003). During our weaving and in the journals, the women made an explicit connection between their determination to live as Māori women and being mothers and grandmothers.

> *When I think back to my life 20 years ago and compare the things that I found important back then to my values and aspirations now, I am almost unrecognizable! Haa! And it all started when I gave birth to my children.* (A. interview)
> *Being home now as a 41-year-old, I also feel at times the outsider. It's a repetitive story that maybe in some way I should make peace with, especially now as I am a mother.* (T. journal)

> *When Maioha was born I remember looking down into this perfect little face and saying to her, "I will never let you feel lost and uncertain about who you are and where you come from."* (H. journal)

Becoming a mother was a profound moment in my own mother's life, forcing her to examine more closely the storied nature of her own identity cloak. When I, her first child was born, she experienced an almost inexplicable moment of awakening that this child would reclaim and restore aspects of living as Māori that she herself had not yet realized or to

which she had not yet aspired. It appears that from my birth, I was cloaked in my mother's aspirations for us both to live as Māori. Mum wrote this in her journal:

> Hinekura *was born weighing 9 lbs. 14 oz* (4.5 kgs.) *She was as perfect a child as could be when born. Beautiful skin, head covered in red hair and as the nurse commented, "as if she was 3 months old." I recall I was standing at the side of the bed and I lifted her up to me and said: "You are my secret weapon."*
>
> *What that might have meant at the time I have no idea. I now contend, in my maturity, that not only had she chosen me, but that a wairua* [spiritual being] *had sent me a message that she was going to be the reclamation, restoration and rejuvenation I felt our whānau* [family] *needed.* (M. journal)

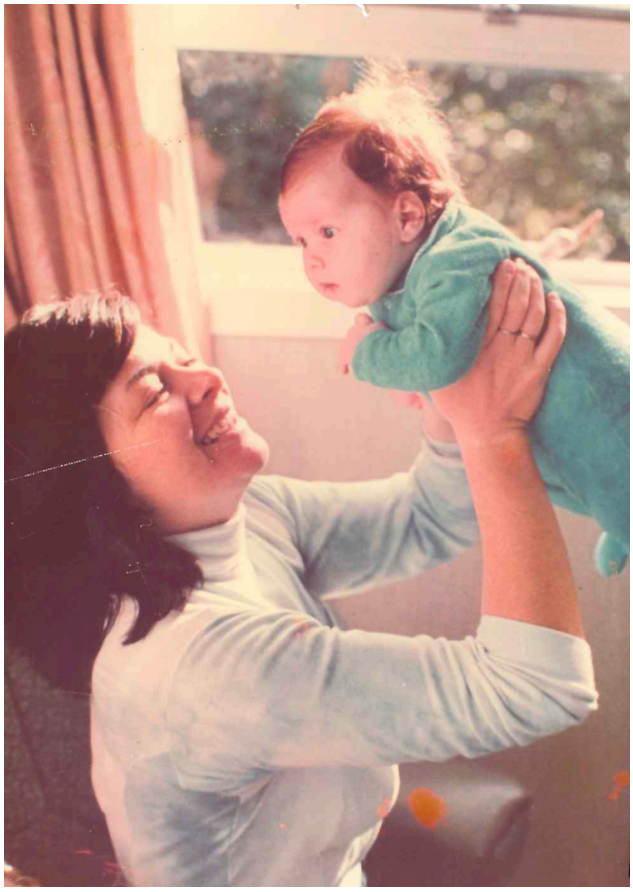

Figure 12. Mum and her "secret weapon" at 2 months old.

During the research process, three of the grandmothers spoke, at different times, and with great pride, about their grandchildren, alluding to a special connection different to that experienced with their children. One woman said:

> *I remember a koro* [male elder] *talking about that word mokopuna, talking about the reflection in the puna* [spring of water] *of the moko* [traditional facial tattoo] *looking back at you. When a grandparent looks at their mokopuna* [grandchild] *there is a reflection of themselves in there because they possess the DNA of that taonga* [treasure]*. As a grandparent you "see" them even more so because you saw it in their father or mother as your child and then you see it come out in that mokopuna.* (K. interview)

The emotive imagery created here shifts the idea of reflection as looking back into our past to see where we have come from, to reflection as looking forward into our future to see where our grandchildren will take us.

Another woman talks about the different space she finds herself in as a grandmother and the role that she played in shaping her mokopuna (grandchildren) through the deliberate choices she made in raising her children:

> *For me, in my time in life, as I have become a grandmother, things shift again. You realize how deliberate some of the things are that you are instilling in your kids that come out in your mokopuna, that you haven't even had a chance to directly influence.* (K. interview)

My mother talks about being a mother and then becoming a grandmother:

> *Giving birth was a truly wondrous experience – to give life. But to watch my granddaughter coming from the body of a child I had birthed was life changing. Being a mother is a very responsible and stressful time. It is the most important role that any woman can play. Being a grandmother is also a very responsible and busy time, but busy in different ways. It is a most important role. Being a grandmother allows me to reflect on my parenting so that I can embrace new ways of knowing, being, doing and relating, which may be more appropriate for this time – a kind of "re-parenting." I am learning new skills and I am sharing my experiences, I am being supportive and developing trust from the parent and the child. I have a new sense of value and contribution.* (M. interview)

Awakening a Critical Consciousness – Decolonizing our Vision

Being and becoming critically conscious, of actively living full and well lives as Māori women, has played out in multiple places and spaces for the women in this research. Their

stories range from active involvement in public protests in the Māori renaissance movement, to family-centered activities and individual acts of resistance and reclamation. Whether individual or collective, the actions undertaken by the women have had purpose, and have contributed in large and small ways to reclaiming and restoring how they understand themselves living as Māori women.

Coming from different ages and backgrounds the women shared a wide range of transforming and politicizing experiences. I am the daughter of an educationalist mother who confronted numerous challenges to reclaim and assert ways of living as Māori for herself and her children. As an adult I am grateful for the "activist feathers" that she wove into my cloak although I did not always appreciate her actions as a child. I wrote in my journal:

> *I can remember as a teenager being embarrassed by Mum protesting and being vocal and confrontational in whānau hui. Red-faced, I would beg her to please sit down and be quiet. One day she held my hand and, not in a patronizing way said, "my darling I am too old to wait any longer and things are not moving fast enough." I understand that now as a parent. Now it is me who embarrasses my girls!* (H. journal)

Mum attributes her oho or awakening to the idea of living as Māori, in part, to the feminist and Māori renaissance movements of the 1970s.

> *My real determination to be Māori was when I realized, as a woman, that I had rights. Who said that was my job? Who said I could only earn this much money? At the same time, I realized that I am Māori and I have rights there too! It was these movements that pushed me forward and my impetus to become stronger and more knowledgeable in my Māoritanga only grew stronger when my children were born. This coincided with my entering the education profession. It became clear to me at this time that my marriage to my English husband was impeding my children's ability to live as Māori and so after 20 years we parted.* (M. interview)

A Whatuora methodology helps us to see ourselves, our past experiences and possible future through decolonizing eyes. A Whatuora approach does not stop with simply "seeing" the damage caused by colonization, but insists that we actively reclaim and restore, unpick and re-weave, a culturally well and clear vision of our present realities and, importantly, create a vision for the future. Whatuora encourages us, as Māori women, to re-vision a future for our children and grandchildren as culturally intact and engaged, holistically well people.

Whatu as Teacher

The women spoke at length about what they learnt about themselves through being a part of Whatuora as an arts research project. Participating in the weaving workshops, it was agreed, was not only creating "me" time, but also creating wāhine time – time and space to be with other Māori women. I wrote this analogy in my journal:

> *Wāhine time. Self-care. Me time. I am reminded of the safety briefing on an aeroplane. In an emergency, the adults are advised to put on their oxygen masks first, before they assist their children. On the surface this appears a selfish act. Surely, I need to see to the needs of my children first, before my own? But how do I care for my children when I am not receiving enough oxygen myself? My responsibility to them is a responsibility to myself – to ensure that I breathe in deeply that oxygen that will nourish my body and mind. Through this nourishment I am able to then nourish and care for my children.* (H. journal)

One woman's story of "being" and "becoming" Māori highlighted the lesson of learning to accept ourselves as Māori women. Her moving, written and spoken words revealed some significant shifts in her sense of self. At the end of the research she wrote about a sense of contentment and wellbeing. She signalled an increased sense of confidence in who she is and her ability to make decisions for herself and her children to live as Māori.

> *I am finally realizing that being me is not that bad! I have always thought I was a bad person that lacked intelligence and good looks, haha! But coming to this experience and whatu-ing like a pro, I realize that I am okay and it's okay to be okay.* (L. journal)

This woman drew strength from the knowledge that she is not alone on this journey to live as a Māori woman. She realized that Māori women from diverse experiences and backgrounds confront similar uncertainties and challenges as she does, and that this is okay, because living as Māori women is shaped by us, for us and with our aspirations at its centre.

Whatuora Methodology as Teacher

Whatuora methodology as teacher produced a number of important lessons. I learnt that developing theory from the practice-based art of whatu is necessarily difficult. To explain and capture the embodied, tactile, and tangible relationship between the artistic practice of whatu and Māori women in a linear written research project is to attempt the impossible. The transformative nature of this research occurred in its fullest sense during our weaving time, when the women sat and talked, wove and shared stories, connected and related, presented

their completed cloaks and cried as they described the feeling of seeing it worn by their grandchild. Transforming moments were also experienced in our own private and quiet spaces when we wove by ourselves. I recognized the impossibility of trying to capture and write about an embodied artistic practice as methodology as I simultaneously understood the importance of engaging with this impossibility to push the boundaries of how research can be conducted.

I learnt that methodology does not belong solely to the academic realm. By re-complexifying how methodology has been constructed in an academic context, I saw an opportunity to theorize the art of whatu as an approach that emerged from within its own language and practice. I learnt that theory is everywhere if we only have the whatu / eyes to see it – and the ears to hear it. While Western theory can be a useful ally, and like critical and emancipatory theory, has contributed to Māori and Indigenous thinking, astute theoreticians walk both physically and spiritually amongst our own people. As Goodyear-Ka'ōpua reminds us that, "the theorists of my academic genealogy include the women of our family who formulated their ideas through love and daily struggle" (2007, p. 53). Two theoreticians in my own family, my mother and five-year-old daughter, contributed key theoretical ideas to this work enabling me to "see" more clearly a relationship between Māori women and whatu kākahu, and to then theorize an appropriate research approach from within this relationship. Their stories could have appeared as anecdotes or cute vignettes. Instead, I see their contributions as containing important theoretical knowledge and thus acknowledge them as contributors to developing Whatuora methodology. The most powerful learning however, emerges, of course, from the women themselves. Here I have shared a selection of their stories from the research.

Summary – Tying off the Strands

Re-complexifying accepted notions of methodology and awakening "new" knowledge from the "old" have been taken up in this article. Activated by decolonizing politics, "new" knowledge, useful to address Māori lived realities, is awakened from within the "old" knowledge, language and artistic practice of whatu. By theorising "new" methodologies from our artistic practices, Māori and Indigenous researchers are reclaiming and re-framing knowledge fragmented through colonization, then re-presenting this knowledge in new and useful ways to reclaim, reframe and rename our experiences. It is imperative that Indigenous arts researchers continue to decolonize our own research whatu [vision] in order to "see," not only our research topics through "well eyes" [Whatuora], but to also view how the approaches we employ tell our stories in positively transforming ways. Applied to this research, Whatuora enabled a way to talk with Māori women about how they work to decolonize their whatu [vision], finding strength and reassurance that their children and

grandchildren WILL live self-determined and positive lives as Māori, as they, their mothers and grandmothers, work in active and disruptive ways to reclaim and restore living as Māori for them and simultaneously for ourselves.

I finish as I started with my mother's voice. After years of sometimes-painful reclamation work to restore living as Māori for her children, her determination has not diminished as she transitions into her role as grandmother and kuia [elder woman]:

> *As the years of my autumn approach, my determination is to be the best Māori I can be. To role model this is now my absolute focus. I will continue to reclaim as I can; I will continue to restore as I can, and I will always support our cultural rejuvenation. In terms of my whānau, my daughter is the leader and restorer and her children are the rejuvenators. My son and his children, I do not envisage, will have the same level of reclamation, restoration or rejuvenation, but will do so at a different level and with a different sense of urgency. I have every intention to "lose no ground" nor go back over "the glass I have crawled over." In becoming the Māori woman that I claim to be today, I will continue to introduce new ways of knowing, being and doing, not only to my whānau, but to all with whom I have engagement. I will continue to challenge the structures that question my being as a Māori woman. I will continue to insist that I am tangata whenua, and as such, this is my mana whenua [land of my ancestors].* (M. interview)

Figure 13. *I am Māori, I am wāhine, I am me, I am me, I am me.*

Ko au he Māori, ko au he Wāhine, Ko au ko au ko au.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The capitalized letter refers to the participant. Either “journal” or “interview” indicates the context within which the statement was made.