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PLAN

NOTES DE L'AUTEUR

This article was first published in its French version as "Sans la pousse de harakeke, où chantera le korimako ? Kaitiakitanga (sauvegarde, tutelle et protection) dans le monde māori," in *Recherches & éducations*, No. 30-31, *Nouveaux cosmos ?*, 2026, pp. 1-16, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/14l97.
In this article, originally written in New Zealand English, we have chosen not to italicize Māori names. Ideally, we would have preferred not to italicize any Māori words, but we had to work within the author's guidelines, based on American English. To learn more about decolonizing academic writing, see Alice Te Punga Somerville, *Always Italicise: How to Write While Colonised*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2022.

TEXTE

Introduction

1 Home of the Māori people – who are Tangata Whenua (Indigenous people of the land) – Aotearoa New Zealand is located in the

southernmost part of Te-Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean). Over time, its people have traveled from and maintained strong ties with other Pacific nations, including the Cook Islands, Society Islands, Tahiti, Austral Islands, Marquesas Islands, Tuamotu Archipelago, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue, Hawai'i and others. [1]

2 Within Māori ontology, the entities that make up the world – ancestors, humans, mountains, plants, birds, ancestral treasures, etc. – are associated with each other in a relational and genealogical sense. They all share the same origin and are part of a genealogical continuity that links them to the primordial ancestors who gave birth to the world: Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, and Ranginui, the Sky Father. [2]

3 In ceremonial contexts, this continuity is invoked by mentioning the names of key ancestors through an elaborate art of oratory channeling *taonga tuku iho* [3] (revered cultural practices, cultural treasures, Māori ancestral treasures, i.e. treasured ancestral belongings) as uplifter, aid, and support. [4]

4 The *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship), i.e. the care, protection and nurturing of *taonga tuku iho* such as *whatu* (weaving) or *raranga* (basketry), are therefore the subject of diligent care, knowledge, values, skills, and know-how that can be entrusted to specialists in *tikanga* (Māori custom) [5]. Among these specialists, *kaitiaki* (ancestral treasure guardians), *tohunga* (ritual experts), and museum professionals have a unique importance and responsibility to build *whanaungatanga* (relationships and kinship) between *taonga*, the land, and the people. [6]

5 It was these specialists who enabled the two authors of this article to establish their first exchanges in 2012. At the time, Awhina Tamarapa had been working at Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand, for more than a decade, as *kaitiaki* (caregiver, guardian) for *taonga* Māori (ancestral treasures, belongings), as well as concept developer and collection manager. Lisa Renard, then pursuing her PhD, hoped to do an internship under Awhina's guidance at Te Papa. Our connection was made possible through *kaitiaki* and artists who had previously worked with Lisa in Europe and trusted her to be the right person to learn from Awhina. From the very beginning, our bond was deeply rooted in *whanaungatanga* (relationship and

kinship). In 2013, we spent three months working on the Ngāti Toa Rangatira exhibition at Te Papa in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, building an enduring friendship. Ten years later, Awhina now holds a PhD of Philosophy in Museum Studies and Lisa a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Together, we have shared countless adventures (fig. 1), laughs, *kōrero* (discussion, stories) and a deep admiration for *whatu* (Māori finger weaving), *raranga* (Māori plaiting and basketry), and the people who practice these art forms.

Figure 1. Lisa and Awhina's hands above *harakeke*, Kapiti, December 2024

Awhina Tamarapa

6 This article considers the ancestral ties that bind the Māori, Tangata Whenua (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) to an emblematic plant, named *harakeke*[7] in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language). Through the presentation of key concepts from the Māori world, such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship and

protection) of *taonga* (Māori ancestral treasures) and *whanaungatanga* (Māori kinship ties and the art of relationships), we address the need for greater understanding, consideration and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, particularly within the museum world. Behind this lies not only our gratitude to the *harakeke* and its many *kaitiaki* (guardians) – humans, birds, insects, plants, *taonga*, winds, rivers, and rain – both here in New Zealand, Aotearoa and overseas – but also the importance of the ancestral connections between Tangata Whenua and *harakeke*. We also recognize the interconnected relationships that are fostered and sustained across generations, time, and places in alignment with the following Hūtia *waiata* (song), which is also a *whakataukī* (significant saying): [8]

> Hūtia te rito, Hūtia te rito o te harakeke
> Kei hea te kōmako e kō?
> Kī mai ki ahau, he aha te mea nui?
> He aha te mea nui o te ao?
> Māku e kī atu, He tangata! He tangata! He tangata, hī! [9]

Figure 2. *Korimako* Tiritiri Matangi island, November 2024

Lisa Renard

Whanaungatanga (kinship, relationship) and *taonga tuku iho*

7 For generations, Tangata Whenua have nurtured deep connections with the *whenua* (land) and the *taiao* (natural world).[10] Among the striking features of the *whenua* of Aotearoa are the beautiful, towering flax bushes, including the iconic *harakeke* (New Zealand flax) species unique to the land of the long white cloud. This uniqueness is reflected across Aotearoa's natural world, which is shaped by its native fauna and flora. In addition to its famous birds, such as the *kea*, kiwi, and *kererū*, many other species of animals and plants are endemic to Aotearoa.[11] This includes the *harakeke* (*Phormium tenax*, New Zealand Flax) (fig. 1) and the *korimako* (*Anthornis melanura*, Bellbird) (fig. 2), both of which are celebrated in the Hūtia *waiata* presented in the introduction. This song reflects not only the importance of *he tangata* (the people), but also underlines the fundamental connection between *he tangata* and other beings dwelling in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world).[12] Without the contribution of the *korimako*, *tūī*, and many other birds and insects, the pollen can hardly travel, and the *harakeke* cannot spread and grow (fig. 3). Without the skilled yet gentle hands of the weavers, the *pā harakeke* (the weaver's garden) cannot flourish. Ultimately, without the *harakeke* and the *manu* (the birds), the weavers would not be able to practice their arts.[13] All are mutually dependent on one another and are *whanaunga* (related and fostering relationships) to one another.

Figure 3. Jim and Cathy Schuster's *Pā Harakeke*, Rotoiti, December 2024

Lisa Renard

8 The trajectories of *harakeke*, *korimako*, and humans are not only intertwined in everyday life, but also historically, as this connection dates back to time immemorial. In the Māori worldview, all beings – *harakeke*, *korimako*, humans, and many others – are interconnected through *whakapapa* (art of genealogy) and are mutually dependent on one another in various ways. They are *whanaunga* to one another. In other words, they are related, intertwined, and interdependent. In the case of *harakeke*, *korimako*, and humans, they share multiple common ancestors: Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, and Ranginui, the Sky Father, and one of their sons Tane nui-a-rangi. He created the first woman, the birds, and the forest, among which the *korimako* and the *harakeke* emerged. The *pūrākau* (origin stories) tell that the *harakeke* species [14] came into the world of light through the union of Pākoti (also known as Pākoki) and Tane nui-a-rangi. [15] He also is at the origin of the creation of Hine-te-iwaiwa, the spiritual deity of weaving, childbirth and the cycles of the moon. [16]

9 Additionally, the emergence of the art of weaving in Te Ao Māori is closely linked to another *pūrākau*: the story of Niwareka and Mataora.[17] Niwareka was a spirit-being from Rarohenga (the underworld) who married a mortal named Mataora. After Mataora disrespected his wife, she fled back to her people in Rarohenga. Mataora chased her and was laughed at when he arrived in Rarohenga, as his *moko* (Māori tattooing) was painted on his face and body, rather than chiseled into the skin. Uetapu, Niwareka's father, a master carver and *tā moko* (Māori tattoo) practitioner, challenged Mataora to endure the process of having a *tā moko* chiseled into his skin. After meeting this challenge, Mataora was forgiven for his actions and was bestowed the knowledge of *tā moko* by his father-in-law. Niwareka and Mataora then returned to the upper world together. As a skilled weaver, Niwareka brought back the art of weaving and the first woven garments; Te Rangi-haupapa, a type of cloak called a *pāroha* (fastened at the throat) and a patterned, plaited belt named Te Ruruku o Te Rangi. "The patterns of both garments were the original designs to guide all students in the art of weaving."[18] Within Māori weaving co-exist a wide range of ancestral fiber technologies that include *whatu* (finger weft twining), *tāniko* (colored horizontal threads used in the *whatu* technique), *whiri* (braiding), *raranga* (plaiting), *whāriki* (mat weaving) *tukutuku* (lattice weaving), and *tuitui* (stitching).[19]

10 Passed down to the livings through many generations within *te whare pora* (the school of weaving), Māori weaving (fig. 4) is a *taonga tuku iho*: a revered cultural practice and treasured ancestral belonging. As such, when practiced, shared, and transmitted, it calls upon the *mana* (the influence, authority, prestige), the *tapu* (sanctity), the *wairua* (the ancestral presence, the spirit), the *mauri* (life principle), and many other ancestral qualities of multiple ancestors, connecting the weavers simultaneously to their ancestors, the *whenua* and the *taiao*.[20]

Figure 4. Māori weaving, Kawerau, October 2013

Lisa Renard

Kaitiakitanga and Responsibilities

11 Customarily, the disciplines of weaving have been deeply influenced by access to resources, time, skill, and purpose. As a consequence, a weaver always bears the responsibilities associated with *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship), which entails caring for and nurturing the land so that the *harakeke* and other essential weaving resources can flourish and remain accessible. It also involves mentoring apprentices to ensure *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) thrives and is passed down through generations. [21]

12 As apprentices – Lisa to Tina Wirihana, Awhina to Nanny Kath, and many others – we were primarily instructed the techniques related to *harakeke* and the associated practices for tending to a *pā harakeke* (weaver garden). Central to this *mātauranga* was the metaphor of the bush as a family, consisting of grandparents, parents, children, and

grandchildren. The outermost leaves represent the grandparents, who envelope and protect the parents, while the parents shield the youngest leaves – the children and grandchildren – located at the center of the fan known as *te rito* (central shoot or baby). These three central leaves must never be cut, as they are vital to the bush growth and regeneration. Yellowed and dried leaves, often referred to as "great-grandparents," are unsuitable for weaving, whereas the leaves referred to as the "parents" are ideal for this purpose. [22] Pruning, trimming, and caring for a *harakeke* bush requires few tools: a cutter or thick-bladed knife. Cuts must be precise, clean, and made at the base of the bush to ensure the plants can continue to develop and provide resources for weavers year after year. Because the leaves grow in a fan-like pattern, it is essential to keep the outermost fan well maintained to access the inner layers while clearing pathways between bushes to prevent injury. Improperly cut leaves, which remain too long, can pose significant risks, including injuries to legs, forearms, face, and eyes. [23]

13 One of the key contemporary concerns regarding Māori weaving is the accessibility and sustainable use of *harakeke*. For many decades, weavers and activists have fought – and continue to fight – to protect native species not only from invasive species but also from resource misuse, decline of traditional practices, the pollution of land and waterways, and loss of ancestral lands. [24]

14 Among the various significant initiatives undertaken over the years, the establishment of multiple community *pā harakeke* in Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) and Te Ika a Māui (North Island) has been particularly vital (fig. 5). The establishment of art schools and *wānanga* offering classes in Māori weaving has also been of considerable importance. [25] Furthermore, the Māori cultural rights claim against the Crown, called the WAI 262, [26] has played a crucial role in the protection of *taonga tuku iho*, including the art of Māori weaving, and other issued such as intellectual property and copyright laws. Issued by six different *iwi* tribal representatives, in 1991, this claim challenged the New Zealand Government to address the authority and rights of Māori over the control of *taonga* – cultural knowledge, heritage, and custodianship of the natural environment. This claim set a precedent in that it was the first to focus on contemporary laws and policies affecting Māori cultural rights. The

recommendations of the Waitangi Tribunal released in 2011, have still not been addressed by New Zealand governments. [27]

Figure 5. Orokonui Ecosanctuary near Dunedin, September 2023

Lisa Renard

Mana and Respect: The Importance of Cultural Care

15 To this day, one of the primary challenges faced by Māori weavers is the lack of recognition and understanding of *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) as *kaitiaki* (caregiver, guardian). This lack of acknowledgment undermines the depth of traditional knowledge systems and practices, often marginalizing the cultural, spiritual, and environmental understandings integral to weaving (fig. 6). These practices are upheld by the *mana* (authority) of *tohunga whatu raranga* (expert weavers), whose expertise is invaluable. [28]

Figure 6. *Harakeke* at Te Rerenga Wairua, August 2023

Lisa Renard

16 Yet, whether in Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas, the weavers often do not receive the respect and trust they deserve. Particularly within institutions such as museums where they are frequently called upon to provide culturally appropriate practices and *mātauranga* to care, restore, display, or research *taonga tuku iho* (revered cultural practices and treasured ancestral belongings). However, they are seldom acknowledged in the long term. Their names are often forgotten, their contributions go unrecognized, and, more often than not, they are inadequately compensated for their *mahi* (work). In the past, within museum contexts, both of us have witnessed expert weavers being both respected and admired for their skills, but we have also seen weavers being treated with disregard and subjected to external direction on their tasks, despite being the true experts.

17 On another level, when developing collaborative practices with Indigenous communities regarding plant-based material culture,

museums often lack cultural care. The teams underestimate the time required to build trust and develop a common language. Activities are typically planned according to rigid schedules, leaving little room for breaks, reflection, experimentation, joint discoveries, and most crucially, the reassessment of the initial project. Just as museums sometimes fail to allocate sufficient attention to the initiation of a project, and to properly welcoming their collaborators into the museum world, the final stages and conclusions of collaborative projects are regularly rushed. This often leads to outcomes that are misaligned with the *tikanga* (Māori custom) and fundamental protocols of Indigenous communities. [29]

18 The dismissal or misrepresentation of *mātauranga* and weavers not only threatens the preservation of Māori weaving but also disregards the role of Indigenous expertise in resource management, cultural sustainability and the care of *taonga tuku iho*. Besides, it undermines the strength of interconnected relationships between Tangata Whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) and their environment, which as we have seen in this article are fostered and sustained across generations, time, and places. We argue that to shift museums towards decolonizing practice, the *mana* of Indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and experts must be restored. Moreover, cultural restoration is a form of liberation not only in a museum context but also beyond, benefiting Māori communities, other Indigenous communities, and museum professionals alike. [30]

Conclusion. Where will the *korimako* sing, if not on the *harakeke*?

19 The *harakeke* (New Zealand flax) and the *korimako* (bellbird) are endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand and have been intertwined for generations. They both hold significant relationships with the entities that make up Te Ao Māori (the Māori world): rain, waterways, wind, other birds, insects, plants, humans, *taonga* (treasured ancestral belongings), and more.

20 Within this interconnected world, the *harakeke* and *korimako* are related to other plants, birds, as well as humans and *taonga*, not only through a genealogical continuity and shared common ancestors, but also by inhabiting the same environment and facing similar challenges. Their past, present, and future are therefore intertwined and interdependent. Humans, in particular, hold a responsibility toward the world around them and can act as *kaitiaki* (custodians, guardians) when called upon.

21 This is exemplified by Māori weavers, who act as *kaitiaki* (custodians) and for whom the *harakeke* and *korimako* are particularly significant. Māori weavers hold the *mauri* (life force) of weaving, which means they not only care and nurture the land to ensure *harakeke* and other essential weaving resources can thrive and remain accessible but also advocate for sustainable practices. They work to share and transmit the *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) associated with plants and birds, both within Aotearoa and internationally, in various contexts and especially in the museum world.

22 We hope this article has provided insight into Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) on two fundamental concepts demonstrated through the practice of Māori weaving; *kaitiakitanga* (custodianship) and *whanaungatanga* (kinship, relationships). The proverb “Hutia te rito o te harakeke” describes the interdependencies of the natural world. It also expresses the importance of family, and the obligation of humanity to nurture all life.

23 We demonstrate that it is possible to learn and understand intercultural respect through in-depth immersion and a willingness to be led by Indigenous principles, values, and practices. Museums, in particular, have an obligation to release control of cultural heritage that belongs to marginalized peoples in order to build new relationships based on trust and respect – so that all of us may sing.

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RÉSUMÉS

English

This article considers the ancestral ties that bind the Māori, Tangata Whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), to an emblematic plant, named *harakeke* in Te Reo Māori (the Māori language), also known as New Zealand Flax or *Phormium tenax*. Through the presentation of key concepts from the Māori world, such as *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship, custodianship, and protection) of *taonga* (Māori ancestral treasures) and *whanaungatanga* (Māori kinship ties and the art of relationships), we address the need for greater understanding, consideration and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, particularly within the museum world. Behind this lies not only our gratitude to the *harakeke* and its many *kaitiaki* (guardians) – humans, birds, insects, plants, *taonga*, winds, rivers, and rain – both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas – but also the importance of the ancestral connections between Tangata Whenua (the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) and *harakeke*. We also recognize the interconnected relationships that are fostered and sustained across generations, time, and places in alignment with the Hūtia *waiata* (song) at the heart of our article’s title. “Where will the Bellbird Sing? Kei hea te kōmako e kō?” is also an homage to the work of Dame Anne Salmond and refers to one of her

Discussion Paper dated June 2022. Titled "*Where Will the Bellbird Sing? Te Tiriti o Waitangi and 'Race'*," this work aligns with our collective engagement with Toitū Te Tiriti. It calls on the New Zealand government to honor Te Tiriti o Waitangi and ensure its endurance for future generations, in order to protect and nurture the many entities that make up Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), such as birds, plants, mountains, and rivers.

Français

Cet article s'intéresse aux liens ancestraux qui unissent les Māori, Tangata Whenua (peuple autochtone de Nouvelle-Zélande Aotearoa), à une plante emblématique, le *harakeke*, aussi connue sous le nom de lin de Nouvelle-Zélande ou *Phormium tenax*. À travers la présentation de concepts clés du monde māori, tels que la *kaitiakitanga* (sauvegarde, tutelle, et protection) des *taonga* (trésors ancestraux māori) et la *whanaungatanga* (l'art relationnel et les liens de parenté māori), nous interrogeons la nécessité d'une meilleure compréhension, associée à une réelle considération des systèmes de savoirs et de pratiques autochtones, en particulier dans le monde muséal. En toile de fond, s'exprime non seulement notre gratitude à l'égard du *harakeke* et de ses nombreux *kaitiaki* (gardien·nes) – humain·es, oiseaux, insectes, plantes, *taonga*, vents, rivières, et pluie – tant ici, en Nouvelle-Zélande Aotearoa, qu'à l'étranger, mais aussi l'importance des relations qui lient les différentes entités qui composent Te Ao Māori (le monde māori). Nourries et entretenues de génération en génération, dans le temps et dans l'espace, par de multiples *kaitiaki* (gardien·nes), ces relations sont, du point de vue māori, essentielles pour le bien-être de toutes et de tous, comme l'illustre le *waiata* (chant) intitulé « Hūtia » à l'origine du titre de notre article. « Où chantera le korimako ? Kei hea te kōmako e kō? » renvoie aussi aux travaux de Dame Anne Salmond et à l'une de ses conférences, intitulée : « Where Will the Bellbird Sing? Te Tiriti o Waitangi and 'Race' ». Cet hommage s'aligne avec notre engagement collectif pour la défense de Te Tiriti o Waitangi et enjoint le gouvernement néo-zélandais à honorer et à garantir sa pérennité pour les générations futures, afin de protéger et de faire prospérer les nombreuses entités qui composent Te Ao Māori, telles que les oiseaux, les plantes, les montagnes, et les rivières.

Español

Este artículo se interesa por los lazos ancestrales qui unen a los maoríes, Tangata Whenua (pueblo autóctono de Aotearoa Nueva Zelanda), a una planta emblemática, el *harakeke*, también conocida como lino de Nueva Zelanda o *Phormium tenax*. A través de la presentación de conceptos claves del mundo maorí, tales como la *kaitiakitanga* (salvaguardia, tutela y protección) de los *taonga* (tesoros ancestrales maoríes) y el *whanaungatanga* (el arte relacional y los lazos de parentela maorí), interrogamos la necesidad de una mejor comprensión, asociada a una consideración real de los sistemas de saber y de las prácticas autóctonas, en particular en el mundo museístico. En definitiva, expresamos no sólo

nuestra gratitud hacia el *harakeke* y sus numerosos *kaitiaki* (guardianes /-nas – humanos /-nas, pájaros, insectos, plantas, *taonga*, vientos, ríos y lluvia –tanto aquí, en Aotearoa-Nueva Zelanda, como en el extranjero, pero también la importancia de las relaciones que enlazan las diferentes entidades que componen Te Ao Māori (el mundo maorí). Nutridas y mantenidas generación tras generación, en el tiempo y el espacio, por múltiples *kaitiaki* (guardianes /-nas), estas relaciones son, desde el punto de vista maorí, esenciales para el bienestar de todas y todos, como lo ilustra el *waiata* (canto) titulado « Hūtia » que origina el título de nuestro artículo. «¿Dónde cantará el korimako, si no es en el brote de harakeke? Kei hea te kōmako e kō?» se interconecta también con las obras de Dame Anne Salmond y una de sus conferencias, titulada: «Where Will the Bellbird Sing? Te Tiriti o Waitangi and 'Race'». Este homenaje se integra a nuestro compromiso colectivo a favor de la defensa de Te Tiriti o Waitangi e insta al Gobierno neozelandés honorar y garantizar su perennidad para las generaciones futuras y hacer prosperar las numerosas entidades que componen Te Ao Māori, tales como los pájaros, las plantas, las montañas y los ríos.

INDEX

Mots-clés
Aotearoa Nouvelle-Zélande, expertise autochtone, environnement, tissage, musées

Keywords
Aotearoa New Zealand, Indigenous expertise, natural environment, weaving, museums

Palabras claves
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