

# CLOAKED IN LIFE AND DEATH

---

## Korowai, kaitiaki and tangihanga

*Vincent Malcolm-Buchanan*<sup>\*†</sup>

*Ngahuia Te Awekotuku*<sup>\*</sup>

*Linda Waimarie Nikora*<sup>\*</sup>

### Abstract

Indigenous New Zealand Māori have maintained many customs evident in our pre-contact histories and, ever-pragmatic, we allowed and continue to allow for the introduction and influence of contemporary ideologies and objects of significance. In te ao Māori, our world, such objects include taonga tuku iho, treasures from the past handed down to us. Our taonga are revered repositories that can reveal much about their owners, those owner's families, and the histories of our people, preceding and subsequent. Their tangible presence is often subtle, yet their social significance can be historically and culturally far-reaching, movingly evocative and even controversial. In the experience of these three authors, kakahu and korowai are just such exemplars. In so saying, as revered treasures of the Māori, they are guarded preciously and vigilantly by custodians or kaitiaki whose caretaking roles are perhaps all too often unsung. In this paper we seek to explore that juncture between our kaitiaki and their/our revered taonga tuku iho, in particular, unique and rare cloaks of the Māori. It is these taonga which Māori aspire to being, at some point, cloaked, in life and death.

### Keywords

Māori, kaitiaki, korowai, taonga tuku iho, tangihanga, tūpāpaku

\* School of Māori and Pacific Development, University of Waikato

† Corresponding author Email: vam12@waikato.ac.nz

This paper is drawn from ongoing doctoral research which considers tangible aspects of funerary practices involved in tangihanga, or Māori death rituals. Māori, and increasingly non-Māori, participate in and observe firsthand a multitude of inimitable culture-bound activities combined with distinct aspects of indigenous identity. A common practice is the deployment of korowai adorning our burial vessels. Korowai, the contemporary term for cloak in the Arawa tribal domain, is used in this study which investigates the practice of traditional hand-woven korowai used at tangihanga. It considers aspects of their origins, ownership, safekeeping; their multi-faceted utilisation and the consequences of doing so, or not, as well as their eventual disposal. Throughout, the critical involvement of kaitiaki (guardians) is evident. This paper will also speak briefly to a reflexive ethnographic account that acts as the foundation for this work, framed by ethnohistoric research of archival and artefactual material, as well as some fieldwork observations.

There is arguably no less powerful, affecting, or memorable ritual than that of funerary processes which proceed with the inevitability of death. This study is drawn from ongoing doctoral research which considers tangible aspects of funerary practices involved in tangihanga, or Māori death rituals. Māori, and increasingly non-Māori, participate in and observe firsthand a multitude of inimitable culture-bound activities combined with distinct aspects of indigenous identity. A common practice is the deployment of korowai adorning our burial vessels. Korowai, the contemporary term for cloak in the Arawa tribal domain, is used in this study which investigates the practice of traditional hand-woven korowai used at tangihanga. It considers aspects of their origins, ownership, safekeeping; their multi-faceted utilisation and the consequences of doing so, or not, as well as their eventual disposal. Throughout, the critical involvement of kaitiaki is reflected upon, exemplifying how living dimensions of taonga

unfold, and how relationships and responsibilities are maintained and perpetuated by uri whakatipu (descendants).

To a great extent, the acknowledged cultural treasures of today originated from pragmatic processes intended to obviate particularly harsh living conditions, and the Māori of old drew on a rubric of technical abilities that would increasingly allow for the development of aesthetic aspects. The earliest simple, functional, and protective dwelling over time became the ornate whare whakairo (carved house); basic bone fish hooks carried on a cord around the neck eventually became highly crafted, elaborate, and at times ostentatious taonga (treasures); sturdy practical woven rain capes evolved into uniquely flax-woven, tāniko (ornamented border), feather-adorned korowai.

The first Pakeha explorers noted the richness of the chiefs' costume and the regal manner of their bearing; their immaculately dressed hair fastened by combs of wood or bone; their glowing pendants and curious amulets of polished nephrite; their shimmering fibre cloaks and brightly textured dogskin wraps... (Te Awekotuku, 1991, p. 137)

Many of the technical and cultural practices have remained, but some things necessarily changed. From the outset, attempts by our eponymous ancestors to translocate aute or mulberry (for bark cloth) as a productive and feasible crop in Aotearoa came to fail, and consequently our weavers experimented with other local fibres. "So the enterprising weavers—mat-makers, garment-makers, sail-makers, basket-makers—set out in search of new resources. And they discovered harakeke..." (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 278). Harakeke or flax (*Phormium tenax*) was the most prolific and successful alternative. The entire blades and fine inner fibre became essential elements of traditional economy. Colour schemes were similarly dependent on the natural resources of this land, as opposed to the flora and fauna of previous lands; as well

as new, different birds' feathers that variously enhanced the mana (authority) of whoever received and donned the garments.

Traditional Māori dress was the product of an ongoing process of discovery, experimentation, and creativity. Far from being static, it evolved continuously from the practices associated with the Eastern Polynesian origins of the first settlers. Familiar techniques were applied and adapted to semi-familiar materials in Aotearoa. Functional and effective procedures were passed on through successive generations. (Wallace, 2007, p. 13)

Historically, the art of weaving korowai has primarily remained the traditional realm of women (with few contemporary exceptions), whose articles have often come to be imbued with mana unparalleled by any other hand-woven kākahu.

From the simple rourou food basket to the prestigious kahu kiwi, weaving is endowed with the very essence of the spiritual values of Māori people. The ancient Polynesian belief is that the artist is a vehicle through whom the gods create... (Puketapu-Hetet, 1999, p. 2)

Korowai are perceived as emerging from a female tradition involving stringent training, steeped in centuries of generationally transmitted matrilineal knowledge and rituals which verify, and perpetuate, the time-honoured wisdom of our foremothers. In the foreword to Hirini Moko Mead's ethnographic work *Traditional Māori Clothing: A Study of Technological and Functional Change*, E. S. Dodge wrote:

Woven clothing, in its various forms, elaborations, and decorative borders is among the most admired products of Māori technology... Dogskin cloaks and feathered capes highlight the fashions of other days. Their rise and fall in popularity, their craftsmanship, their significance... (1969, p. 12)

The technical aspect of all korowai initially arises with the crucial extraction of the raw materials, an act which in and of itself draws directly upon the female Papatūānuku (mother earth personified). Growing, selecting, and cutting, taking only the most suited and required blades of the kohunga (flax), and crucially returning any unused part to the base of the parent plant (Te Kanawa, 1992) to become a regenerative source of sustenance. Flax reacts to rain, frost, and wind, making summer and autumn the preferred gathering seasons, leaving winter and spring as the ideal times for weaving (Puketapu-Hetet, 1999). Stripping, sorting, sizing, and extracting the muka (fibre of the flax) then provides the weaver with the basic raw materials, to be coloured, worked, woven and accentuated accordingly. Such were the technical and environmentally conscious responsibilities of our weavers, whose conduct exemplified the Māori concept of kaitiakitanga; acting as guardians for both the perpetuation of mother earth's resources upon which they were drawing, as well as for the kākahu, korowai, and so forth which would come to be produced. Māori often drew on the abundant resources of Papatūānuku, and this is demonstrated in the lived experiences of my whānau (family).

In my whānau, according to several historical accounts verbally communicated down through the generations, my Tūhoe koroua (great great grandfather) Te Tuhi Pihopa, undertook to build our wharenuī (meeting house) Hinenuitepō (Figure 1), at Waikotikoti Marae. Beginning his work in the closing of the 19th century (according to whānau accounts), he would sadly not live to see the completed and hard-fought achievement of his industries, which came to fruition two long decades after he began his work, just a few years following his passing; work which was gratefully finished with the help of carvers from Te Arawa. This whare whakairo (carved house) still stands proudly in the embrace of Te Whaiti Nui a Toi. His eclectic building, carving, and rare weaving

skills (in that era more typically a female art) remain for all to read of, scattered throughout the writings of Elsdon Best, to whom he was a friend and informant. Neich relates that my koroua Te Tuhi was likely the carver which Ngata, in the early 1900s, had identified as one of only two surviving carvers outside the Te Arawa rohe (2001, p. 159). He was by all accounts an accomplished kite maker, weaver, builder and carver, whose rare artistic skills were etched into every part of our whare whakairo.

Similarly, my Arawa kuia (great grandmother) Te Pae Mihikore (Figure 2), was skilled in the indigenous arts of our people; in particular, the art of whatu (traditional weaving). Although in many aspects my iwi (people/tribe) had been considered poor, we had largely retained our language, lands, and numerous other precious taonga, including treasured korowai woven by my kuia Te Pae, as well as revered kākahu and korowai woven by other esteemed kuia. We have been privileged to possess, and continue to utilise, numerous such artefacts that harken back to a bygone era of tupuna (ancestors) long gone, but never far from our own lived memories and developing worldviews.

In Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) korowai

are trans-tribal taonga, meaning they often traverse from the tribe of the weaver, to the tribe of the recipients, forging inter-tribal bonds long-lived and remembered; albeit perhaps the taonga are acquired and treated differently from iwi to iwi, throughout the ages. As prestigious garments of aristocrats, they could symbolise personal semblance, tapu (sacred), mana, āhua (appearance). Referring again to *Traditional Māori Clothing: A Study of Technological and Functional Change*, Mead speaks of korowai that were known to have been thrown over captives or people under threat of death; lives that were subsequently spared because of the korowai acting as a semblance of its owner's mana. He goes on to articulate his rubric of instrumental and expressive functions, wherein they were used to both dress up corpses, or as wrappings for corpses prior to burial, as well as being used for payment to specialists, and to claim an article or set it apart (1969, pp. 176–179). Such was their prestige that some received personal names, such as Karamaene which was exchanged for the carved war canoe Te Toki a Tāpiri, as mentioned by Te Awekotuku (1993, p. 278).

From the threading of an idea in the mind of a weaver, to corporeal threads of actuality, ownership of korowai as a commodity often



**FIGURE 1** A black and white image of our whare whakairo Hinenuitepō at Te Whaiti Nui a Toi, carved and erected by my koroua Te Tuhi Pihopa, with assistance. This was taken at the time of the opening in 1930 and our then Chief Whatanui can be seen standing in front. Alexander Turnbull Library Albert Godber Collection (1875–1945).



**FIGURE 2** Our kuia Te Pae Mihikore Hohepa (1887–1952). In this image she can be seen to wear her own simple handmade wrap and a tiki made of pounamu—one of many. I have been informed by an aunt that as we see her in this portrait, so our kuia was interred.

differs from the custodianship and safekeeping roles of whānau and hapū (sub-tribe), many of whom have designated kaitiaki. These are often noteworthy generational guardians who retain and communicate their whakapapa (genealogy), oversee their utilisation, frequently with strict parameters, maintaining specific methods of storage and conveyance.

Unlike my great grandmother who was a reputed weaver as well as a revered kaitiaki, sadly neither of my grandmothers, nor my mother, were gifted with the skills of whatu. Their generations were intended to assimilate, and in the case of my mother, Catholic schooling and a relatively urbanised upbringing precluded training in traditional weaving. These select whānau members were, however, designated kaitiaki of taonga tuku iho (treasures from the past handed down to us) and korowai as well as many other treasured heirlooms which were, in my whānau, hapū and iwi, retained in the safekeeping of kaitiaki perceived, by their life's conduct and accomplishments, as capable of bearing the ongoing responsibility of guardianship and knowledge transfer.

Māori have customarily displayed korowai on the occasions of death. Unique flax-crafted cloaks which had previously demarcated social classifications that in modernity have, by contrast, come into less use. The tūpāpaku (body of the deceased) is always treated with reverence, and publicly seen in garments befitting the appropriate level of prestige and status. In 1952, during the tangi (funeral) of my kuia Te Pae, two of her treasured korowai were draped over her tūpāpaku in Uruika, our Ngāti Pīkiao wharenui. On the removal of her tūpāpaku for interment, the korowai and other taonga were conveyed to her sole living daughter, my kuia Irihapeti. When my kuia Iri departed this world in 1981, those same korowai and taonga were again appropriately displayed draped on her tūpāpaku, until it was removed from the wharenui for interment; and in the absence of another female of their lineage, her brother, my koro Tutere became kaitiaki. When in 2006

my koro eventually followed in the universal journey of death, my beloved mother became the designated kaitiaki, until her passing in 2009, at which time I inherited my mother's estate. They had kept each of my kuia Te Pae's revered korowai in white pillow cases that had been hand-embroidered with the symbols of the Rātana Church. These were in turn wrapped in plastic, and safely stored in the wardrobe awaiting use. The treasured significance of korowai often required that they be stored in places where they were well protected. Mead cites a case in Te Teko where korowai were stored in the wharenui at the marae, and another case on the East Coast where the korowai and whāriki (flax woven mats) used for tangihanga were kept in a neighbouring church. Some korowai were retained by the hapū, and others moved from place to place. Mead describes "the traveller" that circulated throughout tangihanga with whānau (1969).

As humble and humbled kaitiaki, my kuia, koro and mother fulfilled their unspoken obligations of guardianship without exception, and the silent conveyance of our taonga to appropriate tangihanga was unquestioned. In their twilight years, when ill health meant they could not be physically present at tangihanga, then we, the next generations, would be instructed to uplift the taonga, deliver them immediately to the wharenui, and ensure their presence was overseen, until such time as they were returned. Each whānau occasion of death, whether at marae or not, saw my kuia's special flax treasures fittingly draped over the burial vessel until interment. By various means, the korowai always arrived at the appropriate tangi, and always returned to their kaitiaki. Upon reflection, I now realise that the role of kaitiakitanga was, and still is, distinct from modern notions of ownership. In wider society, ownership of valued commodities, as a rule, generally involves an identifiable possessor, who likely has an accompanying deed or formal document of purchase or entitlement. This is most often not the case with Māori. Certainly in my whānau, I know of no circumstances in



which korowai were documented as part of the chattels of a private estate, and to the best of my knowledge, kaitiaki received the taonga just prior, or immediately following, the death of the former kaitiaki.

These noteworthy familial guardians also often find they have to mediate in disputes of utilisation, as observable in this extract from a 2010 interview with my Arawa whanaunga (relative), whaea Rohataitimu, a respected kaitiaki of taonga tuku iho, from three hapū around the lake, Rotorua:

I look after the whānau kākahu. I'm from a whānau where I have been whāngai by my grand-aunt. She brought me up and she looked after the taonga. She weaved, my kuia was the weaver who made these kākahu, and her mother also worked in flax. So we've got three generations of kākahu, dating from the 1870s, that I look after—and that's just on one family line. The fuzzy areas are my father's family, who are pōhara [poor] in kākahu. They think that they should be able to share in the kākahu of my mother's family, and I get phone calls from them, from my own family when someone dies, "can you bring down your kākahu" and you know it's like every time I have to say "no, they don't belong to this whānau, they belong to my mother's side". It can get a bit tetchy, and my simple answer is "get someone in the whānau to make a kākahu for you, for us, but these belong to my mother's family". I get calls from funeral parlours, wanting to borrow kākahu. If they've got a tangi and one of the funeral directors knows me, they think "well ring up Rohataitimu and ask if we can use one of theirs". I as a rule don't allow our kākahu to be used by anyone else but my mother's family. They are old, in some places the kiwi feathers are getting loose, and they could be lost... and my kuia always said those are for our whānau.

The often taken-for-granted, discrete presence of korowai at tangihanga is evocative, and can

speak a thousand subtle though significant words, whilst their observable absence can be deafening. For Ngāti Pikiao of Te Arawa and Ngāti Whare of Tūhoe, it is rare, though not unheard of, that a tūpāpaku will be present in our wharenuī without, at the very least, a korowai—which raises the issue of the significance of korowai draped over burial vessels during their time on our marae.

Korowai embody, as well as compel, both spatial and temporal connectivity, revealing aspects of liminality which engage the past within the present, subsequently acting as the corporeal conduits of what the ethnologist Van Gennep (1997) called a tripartite process. That is to say that, in this context, while the tūpāpaku is perceived as being in a state of "in-between here and there", the korowai acts as an anchor, connecting the deceased to both the "now" and the "before", which correlates to the whānau who are present today, and the deceased tupuna from which the whānau descended. Mead relates how the korowai acts to mark "the importance of the deceased during transition from corpse to ancestor" (1969, p. 179). He refers to the transitional period during which korowai were used to ensure the deceased is kept warm. In *The Art of Clothing*, along a similar line of thinking, Corey-Pearce asserts that feather cloaks evoke a bird-like stature, which "may be advantageous when performing ceremonial roles, as birds occupy a liminal space—that between sky and earth—and have long been believed by Māori to mediate between the living and the dead" (2005, p. 79). The korowai may thus be perceived as acting to keep the tūpāpaku warm whilst still in the embrace of the whānau; anchoring it while in liminal transition, until such time as the tūpāpaku is returned to Papatūānuku.

Today, our reasoning for continuing the critical tradition of tūpāpaku being cloaked during tangihanga remains multi-faceted. Speaking from my whānau experiences, we, the current generations, are ensuring the perpetuation of earlier traditions and practices which our elders

taught were significant to our indigenous identity as Māori; setting us apart from our modern non-indigenous contemporaries; demarcating the “them”, and the “us” so as to better comprehend ourselves and our place in the wider, ever-increasing global reality of our nation, and world. To bear a cloak in death reflects familial respect, honour, love; signifying degrees of tribal mana publicly acknowledged. To bear more than one cloak reflects increasing respect, honour, love; signifying the public acknowledgement of the mana of perhaps more than one tribe grieving their collective loss. In some cases, such as in Tainui, multiple korowai may be seen to adorn the wall behind the deceased. One of the most dramatic illustrations of this occurrence was seen during the immense 2006 tangi of Dame Te Ātairangikaahu, with the mahau of Māhinaarangi enhanced by remarkable korowai. This spectacular layering of textiles was also observed during the tangihanga of the doyenne of whatu, Diggeress Te Kanawa (1920–2009), in an awesome display of whānau creativity. However, such impressive and stunning spectacles are by no means common; though each clearly infers public acknowledgement of pan-tribal mana and collective grief shared across the nation. With these notions in mind, it is understandable that the atypical absence of korowai during tangi can prompt hushed, though obvious, remarks of disdain whispered surreptitiously amongst workers toiling in the kitchen, or kuia curled up in the back of the wharenuī blissfully gossiping. Social apprehensions have been known to be heard openly, though quietly spoken, by manuhiri milling in the car-parks, catching up quickly with whanaunga, smoking and gossiping before their contingents simultaneously depart homeward bound. In so stating, I cannot in truth assert the latter as pan-tribal social behaviours, but I can personally attest to such informal, and to my mind disheartening, privately public scenarios coming to pass on both my Tūhoe and Arawa marae. I say disheartening because unlike my Arawa whānau, there

are many whānau who are not blessed with possession of taonga tuku iho such as korowai passed down through the generations, or open access to suchlike; each being the case in my Tūhoe whānau. For many Māori, korowai became too aged, and so were disposed of, and often the modern demands of urban life precluded following generations from learning and perpetuating the art of weaving, so their reparation simply was not possible. There is prolific material regarding the industries of Ngata who, alongside others, foresaw such eventualities and who fought hard and long to counter them. The efforts of many Māori and iwi to re-invigorate our indigenous arts continues; and I can attest that Ngāti Pīkiao of Te Arawa are gradually, albeit incrementally, increasing our number of weavers.

One of the final rituals of tangi on our marae occurs at the closing of the liminal juncture, when the korowai are removed and ritually cleansed, in order that they may be kept above ground and used again. Alternatively, and at the



FIGURE 3 My koroua, Apotoro Tutere Michael Hohepa, in 1950. Ngāti Pīkiao elders recall that a Te Arawa contingent of my tupuna travelled to Parliament in 1948 to petition the government to lower the legal age for ordination as a Church Minister to 20 so as to allow my koroua to enter the Rātana Church. I believe they failed but he nonetheless became ordained when he was 21. Image courtesy of a private whānau collection.

behest of the kaitiaki, korowai may also accompany the tūpāpaku for interment, returning it from whence it came, back to Papatūānuku. Sadly, and poignantly for my generation, the latter is what came to pass of both my kuia Te Pae's treasured flax-woven korowai, one which accompanied my mother, and one that attended her father, in that ultimate journey of death.

My koro, Tutere Michael Hohepa (1929–2006) (Figure 3), was an Āpōtoro Takiwa o te Hāhi Rātana (District Apostle of the Rātana Church), and the acknowledged patriarch of our whānau. He was many things to many people, and he steadfastly advocated our lifelong responsibilities to the Rātana Church at the same time that he cultivated our Māori heritage. Each time he donned his regally imposing ministerial robes, he made a striking impression from out of the full length layers, folds, and hues of the exclusivist religious attire. When he passed away, we conducted his tangihanga



**FIGURE 4** My mother, Cairo Makarena Te Wao Hohepa Ohlson, and I, in 2006, on the occasion of my Bachelor's graduation at Waikato University. My mother can be seen wearing the last of the korowai *above ground* which our kuia Te Pae had woven and in which mum was interred in 2009. I am wearing another korowai which is part of our private marae collection. Image courtesy of a private collection.

in traditional manner at Uruika, on the shores of Lake Rotoiti. For the duration, whanaunga and manuhiri (visitors) were observed covertly whispering that he had not been dressed in those very same robes which for decades had both mesmerised and transfixed so many of us. However, my mother had reluctantly followed his privately conveyed final wishes that *the robes of the church were to remain above ground with the living, as was their purpose*. Instead, and in a mix of both modern ideology and customary practice, he had stipulated that his tūpāpaku be dressed in a simple plain black suit, and then wrapped, discretely, in the older and larger of his mother's korowai. My koro had determined that its aged condition warranted its timely return to Papatūānuku; in this case shrouding his tūpāpaku so that, in his mind, he could return it himself taking it personally from this world to where our tupuna and his beloved mother awaited him in death. Much to the disappointment of whānau and whanaunga, whose preference would have been to retain the korowai above ground, my grandfather's final wishes were carried out without dispute.

Then in 2009, my much-loved mother followed her father in that journey of death, and again we adhered to her final personal wishes, dressing her tūpāpaku in a bronze and gold suit she had only ever worn on the occasion of my 2006 Bachelor's graduation (Figure 4). My sisters adorned her with Rātana jewellery specifically designed with the symbols of the church, and placed her treasured Rātana hymn book in her hands. With tear-filled eyes we then followed the instructions stipulated by our koro prior to his death. In the presence of our sisters, my older brother and I gently proceeded to discretely wrap our mother's dressed tūpāpaku in the flax-woven folds of my kuia Te Pae's final remaining, treasured, aged korowai; repeating the earlier example of combining both a modern ideology (using contemporary clothing) with a customary practice (the flax-woven korowai), returning it from whence it came.



There were subsequent familial ramifications of using kuia Te Pae's final feather and flax korowai to shroud our koroua's and mother's tūpāpaku, some which came to the fore when the hapū addressed the whānau on the matter, before finally departing the marae; other ramifications remain ongoing and unresolved. At the formal conclusion of tangihanga, my whānau come together kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) on the mahau (porch/veranda) of our carved house, to account for financial aspects of the tangi. Notably, this tradition was once popular amongst many whānau, but I am informed it is now becoming less practised. Nonetheless, it is during this hui that questionable actions, which may impact the entire whānau, can be raised for discussion, "... the last act in the drama of the tangi is a business meeting of the 'family', at which accounts are settled and all loose ends tied up" (Metge, 1962, Lecture 5, p. 8). Even so, no meeting could satiate the very real and deep heartache of whānau and whanaunga who questioned our choice of adhering to the final wishes of our koroua Tutere and our mum; familial individuals who had not been given the benefit of bidding farewell to their revered taonga. To this day, I still hear whispers of discontent on our marae, accompanied by short sideward glances in the direction of my family. We are not socially shunned as such, as has been known to occur in the whānau though for distinctly other reasons; and neither is the mana of our kuia Te Pae, koro Tutere, or our beloved mother at all diminished in any way, they were all too loved for this to occur. But in my whānau, specifically with my generation and siblings, we are socially, quietly, even silently with the simplest of glances, reminded that we made a decision for the hapū which, as decisions go, belonged rightfully to the hapū. This perhaps indicates the multi-faceted complexities that can arise when adhering to the final wishes articulated by kaitiaki, particularly if those wishes seemingly disregard the collective interests of the sub-tribe. If required, my siblings and I would, regardless though regretfully, do the

same again. The older members of the whānau are determined to somehow replace what was (for their part) so unceremoniously taken from them. In so saying, how this will come to pass, or even when, is yet to be determined. We, sadly, have no current weaver within our own uri whakatipu (descendants) capable of such art, yet.

Suffice to also say that korowai have many uses other than being brought to bear during tangihanga. They have been seen to act as proxy entities, used in lieu of absent tūpāpaku. For example, Mead cites the 1820s case of the Perekiko whānau reported by Cruise, in which "... the family of Perekiko wept over the cloak of their son who died at Parramatta... the family gathered around it and cried over it as though it were the corpse" (1969, p. 176). Correspondingly, and almost two centuries later, in 2005, an impressive feather-adorned, flax-woven korowai was seen draped over the vacant member's seat of the Green Party, co-leader Rod Donald as Parliament paid their respect on the occasion of his sudden death. Hirini Moko Mead, Peter Buck and Elsdon Best (who each cite the likes of Cruise and Te Rangikaheke) have all discussed the use of korowai as gifts, some acting to nullify hostilities, both historical and potential. Mead (1969) mentions Te Rangikaheke's earlier work, which noted korowai as crucial components in compensatory gifts; where an arranged marriage, intended to pacify combating family and/or tribal factions, required that the bride and her whānau were appropriately presented with taonga. Te Rangikaheke discussed a case where a tattooist received gifts, which included korowai, in lieu of moko (tattoo) work. "To undercut the value of such taonga was unthinkable, and Te Rangikaheke, in his manuscript on moko, offered salient advice on the appropriately substantial payment for the services of a moko artist..." (Te Awekotuku & Nikora, 2007, p. 61). They were known to be offered as bereavement gifts; evident social mechanisms intended to strengthen genealogical



**FIGURE 5** My koroua, Apotoro Takiwa Tutere Michael Hohepa, in 1995 standing in the front of the tall arched gateway leading to the Rātana Pa, in Wanganui. He was an impressively humble man, yet staunchly commanding with his parishioners and determinedly demanding of the uri whakatipu. He was as loved as he was feared in the whānau. Image courtesy of a private whānau collection.

connections. Certainly korowai privilege the occasion at which they are used, and to my mind they are silent woven repositories which discretely speak a thousand silent words.

During the 2009 occasion of my Master's graduation dinner, one of my uncles shared a touching story about his reluctance, many years earlier, to don a korowai at his Bachelor's graduation. He related how the korowai had been quietly delivered, with instructions from my koro Tutere (Figure 5) that he was to wear it over the requisite University robes. On the basis that this korowai had laid on the burial vessels of numerous whānau throughout the course of multiple tangihanga, he refused. My gentle and learned uncle was seemingly resolute that he did not want this exceptional occasion coloured by any connection to a garment which he associated as used during the tangihanga process. It was not often that people refused my grandfather's requests, which admittedly we more often than not perceived in the manner of commands. My uncle shared with all those gathered at my graduation how at his own earlier graduation my koro Tutere had arrived, only to learn of the korowai dilemma. My koro had then quietly emphasised to my uncle that donning the korowai was not for the purpose

of that particular, albeit monumental occasion, but rather a public acknowledgement of all the tupuna who had come before; and whose lives had led my uncle to that moment in time. He was subsequently conferred in full University regalia, with my kuia's korowai proudly draped upon his broad shoulders.

In concluding, korowai are familial, and often trans-tribal, taonga tuku iho that subtly weave combinations of events, histories, genealogy, and love, into the hard-sought flax threads out of which they originate, becoming cultural objects which bear the hallmarks of preceding generations. Of course, from the moment that korowai depart our indigenous environments, their ownership and form raises new social questions. Korowai continue to be unique indigenous artefacts sought after by tourists, collectors, museums, and increasingly, Māori alike. At the same time they act as a unique and rare exemplar for proceeding generations who continue, albeit perhaps incrementally, to perpetuate the ancient skills of whatu. Korowai continue to provide a symbol of the mana of the weaver, and that weaver's whānau; transposing, and accumulating mana for the whānau to whom they come to belong to. The select, and often unsung, kaitiaki of korowai ensure their protective safekeeping, selection for particular tangihanga, whether or not they will be used during tangi, eventual disposal, as well as overseeing any alternative utilisation. Above all, however, they remain as revered taonga tuku iho of the people to whom the art of weaving korowai remains distinct, while the legacies of generational kaitiaki verify that their safekeeping, selection, and use at tangihanga are in good hands.

### Acknowledgements

This study is part of the Tangi Research Programme—a collaboration between the School of Māori and Pacific Development and the Māori and Psychology Unit at the University

of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Grants for this research were received from The Royal Marsden Research Fund, Rotoiti 15 Trust, Rotomā No. 1 Incorporated, Te Whaiti Nui a Toi Trust, Te Tahuna Trust, Whangamoā Trust, Paehinahina Mourea Trust, Onuku Māori Lands Trust, and Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga.

## References

- Corey-Pearce, E. (2005). Surface attraction: Clothing and the mediation of Māori/European relationships. In S. Kuchler & G. Were (Eds.), *The art of clothing: A Pacific experience* (pp. 73–87). New South Wales, Australia: Cavendish Publishing, UCL Press.
- Mead, S. M. (1969). *Traditional Māori clothing: A study of technological and functional change*. Auckland: Reed Publishers.
- Metge, J. (1962). *Māori society today: Discussion course*. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- Neich, R. (2001). *Painted histories: Early Māori figurative painting*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Puketapu-Hetet, E. (1999). *Māori weaving*. Auckland: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.
- Te Awekotuku, N. (1991). *Mana wahine Maori: Selected writings on Maori women's art, culture and politics*. Auckland: Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd.
- Te Awekotuku, N. (1993). Traditional fibre art of the Maori: Te pa harakeke. In S. Coney (Ed.), *Standing in the sunshine* (pp. 278–279). Auckland: Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd.
- Te Awekotuku, N., & Nikora, L. W. (2007). *Mau moko: The world of Māori tattoo*. Auckland: Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd.
- Te Kanawa, D. (1992). *Weaving a kākahu*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.
- Van Gennep, A. (1997). *The rites of passage*. London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wallace, P. T. A. (2007). He whatu ariki—he kura, he waero: Chiefly threads—red and white. In B. Labrum, F. McKergow, & S. Gibson (Eds.), *Looking flash: Clothing in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 12–27). Auckland: Te Waka Toi Arts Council for Māori and South Pacific Arts.