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HE AROHA WHAEA, HE POTIKI PIRIPOHO

**THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF MĀORI ADOPTIVE MOTHERS IN
THE 'CLOSED STRANGER' ADOPTION SYSTEM**

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ABSTRACT

'Closed stranger' adoption in Aotearoa / New Zealand from approximately 1940 to 1990 involved the practice of a complete break between the birth mother and her child and the legal transfer of the child to adoptive parents. In Aotearoa / New Zealand between 1940 and 1990, 108,899 adoptions took place, and most consisted of 'closed stranger' adoptions. These adoptions have caused much joy as well as some heartache for parties involved in the experience namely, birth mothers, adoptees and adoptive mothers and their whānau. This thesis reports original research which aims to investigate the unique experiences of Māori adoptive mothers in the 'closed stranger' adoption period and enable the impact of legal adoption on these Māori women who have not previously warranted research, to be valued.

A qualitative methodology, Māori-centred research and unstructured kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) interviews were utilized to gather data from six Māori adoptive mothers. The intention of Māori centred research as its name suggests, is to locate Māori people and Māori knowledge at the centre of the research action. A thematic analysis utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used.

The unique experiences of Māori women legally adopting in the 'closed stranger' adoption system were about whānau business, and grouped under that superordinate theme were experiences of 'not blood', land succession, naming and caring for whānau. The stigma of adoption resonated throughout the women's narratives. As well, most of these Māori adoptive mothers found that they experienced 'closed stranger' adoption as a 'rollercoaster of emotions'.

KEYWORDS: 'closed stranger' adoption, Māori adoptive mothers, indigenous, Māori land succession, whāngai, stigma.





HE PEPEHA

Ko Tararua te maunga
Ko Manawatu te awa
Ko Ngāti Raukawa ki te tonga te iwi
Ko Ngāti Rākau te hapū
Ko Tainui te waka
Ko Edward Charles Devonshire tōku pāpā
Ko Rawinia Te Orata Devonshire nēe Renata tōku māmā
Ko Valerie Perkins ahau.

MANA WAHINE

Me aro koe ki te ha o Hineahuone
Pay heed to the dignity of women

“Te mana wahine is the concept which symbolises and defines the status, power and authority of Māori women. In the context of Māori culture, mana wahine is a reminder of Māori women’s matrilineal descent from Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother. It is the vital source of Māori women’s contemporary power and authority. It justifies their status in Māori society and carries the promise that that status will continue for future generations of Māori women” (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1990, p. 126).

He mihi nui ki a koutou he wāhine toa. Tēnā koutou katoa.





HE TIMATANGA

(THE BEGINNING)

*Mai i te timatanga ko te kore
Ka puta ki waho te kore tino nui
Te Po
Te Po Roa
Te Po Nui
Ka puta ki waho Ko-Te-Ata*

In the beginning there was Te Kore
The Nothingness
Out of this great Nothingness came
Te Po, the Night,
Te Po Roa, the long Night,
Te Po Nui, the Great Night
Eventually came Te Ata, The Dawn.

*Taukuri e! Ko Ranginui
Taukuri e! Ko Papatuanuku.
E awhi ana ia rua.*

Behold! There was Ranginui, The Sky Father
With his beloved Papatuanuku, The Earth Mother,
Cradled in each others arms.

*Tane Mahuta, tetahi o nga tama,
I wehe ona matua.
Ranginui ki runga,
Papatuanuku ki raro.*

One of their children, Tane Mahuta,
Forced them far apart,
The Sky Father above,
The Earth Mother below.





*Ka tangi tonu a Ranginui mo Papatuanuku
Mai i te wehenga tae mai ki tenei ra.*

Ranginui wept bitterly for his beloved
And his tears are the rain that falls to this very day.

*Ka kakahutia e Tane a Papatuanuku ki nga korowai o ana tamariki.
Ngā manu me ngā ngangara o te whenua.
Tane ki a Ranginui ko te korowai o ngā whetu Te Ao Turoa.
Ngā taonga a Tane ki ona matua
Ko te Ra me te marama.*

Tane clothed Papatuanuku in the plants, the trees, the forests.
He gave the birds of the air and the insects of the earth.
He gave Ranginui a beautiful cloak of stars.
The sun and the moon were gifts for his parents.

*Ko Tane Mahuta te Atua o Te Ngahere.
I kokiri te maramatanga me te matauranga ki Te Ao Turoa
Maramatanga me te matauranga,
Te Po me Te Ao Marama.*

And so it was that Tane Mahuta, God of the Forest
brought Light and Knowledge into the world.
Light and Knowledge.
Night and Day.

Tihei mauri ora!

This kōrero was originally presented at the opening of the Aotearoa / New Zealand Law Society Conference, Dunedin, April 1996. It tells the story of creation according to a Māori worldview.





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Ehara taki toa taki tahi,
Engari he toa takitini

My strength is not from me alone,
but the strength of the people

Here then are some of the people who have given me strength when I needed it.

My tupuna ever present.

Thanks to Dr. Rangi Matāmua (my cultural adviser) who reminded me that “whāngai is not a new concept to Māori. Māori have many ideas and thoughts in relation to whāngai and its impact on the individual, the whānau and collective. The most important aspect for Māori is ensuring the child is nurtured in a safe and loving environment; me poipoi i te tamaiti, whether the child is a whāngai or your actual child. While this might not deal to all of the issues that whāngai have, it does support them to develop in life”.

On his advice the title was chosen to be the whakataukī, 'He aroha whaea, he potiki piripoho'. “Essentially it refers to the relationship between the child and caregiver... If the parents show love and care for their children, they will be good children. This supports the idea of nurture rather than nature”

(R. Matāmua, personal communication, October 27, 2009).

My adopted son Anselm without whom this thesis would not have been written. It has certainly been a rollercoaster of emotions but I have learnt so much from you. I love you unconditionally.

My participants. Thank you for your willingness to share your stories with me and to give me a glimpse into your lives. Your aroha, your humility and your wisdom will remain with me. I am grateful.





Te ihi, te wehi, te mana, o te wāhine. Ngā mihi nui wāhine mā. He ataahua te mauri kei roto nei. He mahana. E tu! E tu! E tu! Wāhine mā. Ma te Atua koutou e manaaki.

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