Belonging and *Whakapapa*:

The Closed Stranger Adoption of
Māori Children into Pākehā Families

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Abstract

Between 1955 and 1985, approximately forty-five thousand closed stranger adoptions took place in Aotearoa New Zealand, with adoption directly affecting twenty-five per cent of the total population. A significant proportion of closed stranger adoptions involved children who could claim Māori ancestry through at least one of their birth parents. The majority of these Māori children were placed within Pākehā families.

This research explored the narratives of six self-identified Māori adults who were adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption. The study utilised a Māori-centred research approach, and a thematic narrative analysis of the participants' accounts was undertaken.

The study found that adoption is not a one off event, but is an on-going life experience. The multiple and complex ways the participants narrated their cross-cultural adoption experience reflected the diverse and contradictory narratives Māori adopted into Pākehā families navigate. The narratives clustered around the idea of 'walking between worlds', with two major themes of 'belonging' and 'whakapapa' emerging from the analysis process.

Participants told stories on a continuum between 'belonging' and 'not belonging' within their birth and adoptive families, and in Māori and non-Māori worlds. Specific to Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand is 'belonging' through whakapapa. Whakapapa is essential to a Māori identity and to whānau inclusion. This study found that without knowledge of whakapapa, Māori become socially and culturally invisible within te ao Māori.

In the telling of these narratives, participants have sought to repair the rupture in their lives when the dominant familial narrative of growing up in a birth family with a shared cultural heritage was not possible.

For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, their identities as Māori and as adopted people are inseparable.

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Over the past fifty years, white adoptive parents, academics, psychiatrists and social workers have dominated the literature on transracial adoption. These "experts" have been the ones to tell the public – including adoptees – "what it's like" and "how we turn out" … the voices of adult transracial adoptees remain largely unheard … transracial adoption is fundamentally an isolating experience … fear that expressing our opinions will estrange us from our white families, friends and colleagues. We have become accustomed to protecting our loved ones … others of us have been silenced through assimilation into white environments, and only in middle age do we reach a point when we can acknowledge and heal from the pain of isolation and alienation (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006, p. 1).

Chapter One: Untold Stories

Introduction

Ko Hikurangi taku maunga
Ko Waiapu taku awa
Ko Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki me Ngāi Tahu ōku iwi
Ko Michael James Collins taku matua
Ko Emere Te Tawhi Haenga taku kōkā
Ko Phillip Edward Duffy rāua ko Margaret Ellen Duffy (nee Ball) ōku mātua whāngai
Ko Maria Haenga Collins ahau

As a Māori child who was first fostered and then adopted into a Pākehā family I have always wanted to know how others who grew up in a similar situation developed a sense of self. This wanting to know about others is another way of wanting to know about myself. For adopted people life is a journey of trying to fit together the pieces of the puzzle, compartmentalising, questioning, searching. Over the years my journey has been one of learning, growth, contradictions, and a struggle to sit comfortably with myself, and within my world; my place to stand, a place to belong. Aware that stories are how we make sense of our lives and give meaning to our experiences, I have wondered about the stories Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families tell and why.

Between 1955 and 1985 it is estimated that in Aotearoa New Zealand approximately forty-five thousand closed stranger adoptions took place, with adoption directly affecting twenty-five per cent of the total population (Griffith, 1998). The term 'closed stranger adoption' refers to the practice whereby the adoption was closed or secret. Prior to the adoption, the adoptive parents were 'strangers' to the child: there were no social or familial links: identifying details of the child's birth parents remained confidential and could not be obtained; and the child's original birth certificate was unable to be accessed and a new birth certificate with the adoptive parents' details was produced (Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). A significant proportion of closed stranger adoptions involved children who could claim Māori ancestry through at least one of their biological parents (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1998). The overwhelming majority of these Māori children were placed within Pākehā homes (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009).

This study examines the narratives Māori adopted into Pākehā families use to make sense of their adoption experience, as Māori and as adopted people. Their adoption experience created a rupture within the dominant social narrative that children are raised in their own

family and that family members share a common cultural heritage. Adopted people in this study navigated this rupture through complex and sometimes contradictory narratives. These narratives provided a way for the participants to make sense of their experiences, and to position themselves as Māori and as adopted people.

This introductory chapter establishes the reasons for and aims of this study. Some background history is provided and the research question is stated. I draw attention to the intended audience, locate myself within the study and briefly introduce the participants. The chapter concludes with an overview of the whole thesis.

Aims of the study

Much of the past research about closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand focused on the general population of adopted people and their birth mothers (Perkins, 2009). To date there is very little research available specifically relating to Māori adoptees who were cross-culturally adopted into Pākehā families under closed stranger adoption. To the best of my knowledge, at the time of writing, there is no published research on this topic by Māori adoptees themselves.

An underlying premise of this study is the important role that race[1] has played in the privileging of who creates adoption policy, and the social and economic disparities between the birth families of adopted people and the families in which adopted people are raised. The vast majority of cross-cultural adoptions take place with children who are non-white and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and who are adopted into white middle class families (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006). Historically cross-culturally adopted people have not had the opportunity to articulate and express their own adoption experiences. The experiences of cross-cultural adoptees have been communicated by white adoptive parents and by privileged professionals, including social workers (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006).

The main aim of this study is to provide a space where the stories of Māori people who as children were adopted into Pākehā families can be told. Of particular interest is the examination of the narratives Māori adopted into Pākehā families tell to make sense of their adoption experience. These narratives provide insight into how participants' navigate their identity claims as Māori and as adopted people. Internationally, there is a growing body of

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[1] The concept of race, where people are classified in to biologically distinct hierarchical groups, is now widely rejected and is instead viewed as an artificial social construct with economic and political implications and impacts. While "race as biology is fiction, racism as a social problem is real" (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 16).

knowledge written by cross-cultural adoptees and this study will further add to that body of research. Further, this study adds to material specifically pertaining to Indigenous[2] Peoples with a unique focus on Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are many people in Aotearoa New Zealand with both a personal and a professional interest in closed stranger adoption. For Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption little is known.

The research question

As this research was unfolding, it was imperative to remain open and responsive to the experiences and concerns that the participants themselves wanted to address. During the planning stages for this thesis the focus was specifically on identity formation and how a Māori identity was formed and maintained. However during data collection it became apparent that rather than hearing stories of identity formation, I was gathering rich in-depth material on how the participants have navigated the numerous contradictions and tensions in their adoption and identity experiences. This led to the question of:

How do Māori adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption make sense of their experience as Māori and as adopted people?

Locating myself

I was motivated to undertake a study of the experiences of Māori adopted into Pākehā families for two main reasons. Firstly, as a Māori woman adopted into a Pākehā family as a child, I was interested in how other Māori have made meaning of their lives in response to their adoption experience. Secondly, as an Indigenous social worker I was interested in certain principles often utilised within the social work profession, including notions of 'giving voice' to those who are marginalised or have had their experiences silenced. For social workers there is a tension between working as 'an agent of change' and 'an agent of the State'. Social work is a continuously reflexive practice. As social workers played a pivotal role in the closed stranger adoption process, coupled with the fact that the majority of social workers came from white middle class backgrounds, I thought it important to examine the

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[2] Indigenous is used as a term to refer to Native or Aboriginal groups with historical ties in a territory prior to colonisation. Indigenous Peoples are regarded as the 'original inhabitants' of a region. While the term is used collectively to internationalise the shared experiences, issues, and struggles of some of the world's colonised peoples, it is also important to recognise that there are very real differences between Indigenous Peoples. Māori are the Indigenous People of Aotearoa New Zealand.

personal narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā families. I was interested in assessing the outcomes of both personal and systemic social work decisions that were routinely implemented in the period 1955 – 1985.

The participants

For this research, interviews were undertaken with six adults who identify as Māori and were adopted into Pākehā families as children. An introduction to each of these participants is provided in Chapter Four, by way of a short biography. In re-telling these stories I have endeavoured to convey a sense of each participant's voice. In the Findings and Analysis chapters I undertook an analysis of the participants' narratives and focused my attention on how identity claims, as Māori and as adopted people, are navigated by Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families.

Thesis overview

In **Chapter One** the purpose and structure of this thesis is outlined. The chapter introduces the chapters and provides a brief synopsis of each.

Chapter Two examines the socio-historical context surrounding closed stranger adoption. A review of the literature is undertaken with a focus on adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand and international literature pertaining to cross-cultural adoption. Due to the paucity of material available on the specific topic of Māori adopted into Pākehā families, information collected from three informants is also incorporated into this chapter. The chapter introduces the concept of whakapapa and looks at how the adoption experience is navigated.

Chapter Three explains the methodology and the research methods used. My use of both a Māori-centred research approach and western research methods is described. In this chapter I also explain the importance of narrative analysis within this study.

Chapter Four presents brief biographical accounts of the six participants. Each participant's unique story is placed in the context of closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1955 and 1985.

Chapter Five presents the first major theme identified by this research: 'Belonging'. An analysis of the narratives participants told about their experiences of navigating ways they do

and/or do not belong in their birth and adoptive families and in Māori and non-Māori worlds is presented in this chapter.

Chapter Six presents the second major theme identified in this research: 'Whakapapa'. This chapter explores the importance of whakapapa for Māori, and the consequences faced by Māori adoptees who have had whakapapa connections severed through closed stranger adoption. This chapter identifies the narratives participants use to make sense of this experience. In navigating their adoption experience there are consequences not only for the adopted person, but for their own children, future generations, whānau[3] and hapū.

Chapter Seven presents a summary of the findings and analysis chapters and provides questions for further research regarding Māori children adopted into Pākehā families, as well as research to explore the experiences of whānau who had children relinquished through this practice. The chapter concludes with my reflections on undertaking this study.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a summary of the thesis, which examines the experiences of six self-identified Māori adults who were adopted into Pākehā families, by way of closed stranger adoption. I have presented the aims of the study, made clear the research question, located myself within the study and introduced the participants. In the next chapter I explain the socio-historical context of closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand, examine the policy and practice of adoption and the consequence for Māori. A review of international literature pertaining to cross-cultural adoption is also presented, and the pivotal role the notion of race has played in adoption practices is made explicit.

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[3] Throughout this study whānau and whānau Māori are used interchangeably – but both refer solely to families of Māori origin and descent.

Chapter Two: The Socio-Historical Context of Closed Stranger Adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

> *Despite repeated claims that it centres on the needs and welfare of children, adoption is really about adult beliefs and desires and dilemmas. It is a socially constructed means of providing particular kinds of care for particular kinds of children at particular times. As such, it is also a vivid illustration of dominant beliefs in the recent past about children, parents and families, and how far society has been prepared to go in order to make the reality appear to match those beliefs (Else, 1991, p. xiii).*

The focus of this research is on the experiences of Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption. It identifies and explores the narratives which Māori adopted into Pākehā families have used to make sense of this experience. This chapter reviews the social and historical context of closed stranger adoption, the positioning of Māori within New Zealand's adoption practices, and links to international literature on cross-cultural adoptions.

A limitation of the literature specific to cross-cultural adoption is that much of what has been recorded has been by white non-adoptees (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006, p. 1). One of the aims of this thesis is to add to a growing body of literature which seeks to redress this situation. However, I acknowledge that Anne Else's book, *A Question of Adoption* provides much material for this review and is widely held as the authoritative text on adoption in New Zealand. Else (1991) undertook extensive research and interviewed key people who had inside knowledge of the 'behind the scenes workings' of closed stranger adoption policies and practice. Her work is comprehensive and contains valuable insights and information about adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Due to the limited material directly relating to Māori adopted into Pākehā families, this review also uses international literature to focus more specifically on cross-cultural adoptions. Much of the material is from the United States of America (USA). Some of this literature has an Indigenous perspective and represents the voices and views of cross-culturally adopted people (for example, Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006).

To complete this review, I also undertook interviews with three informants who have personal, professional, and legal knowledge and experience of closed stranger adoption and

Māori. I have integrated information from these three informants into this study to clarify important points not generally covered in the existing literature. The informants are Sir Edward "Eddie" Taihakurei Durie, Donna Hall Durie, and Ann Nation. When referring to their knowledge I cite them accordingly.

Closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand

Closed stranger adoption is situated in the context of western colonial discourses about sexuality, family life, and race. For this reason an examination of settler society will be undertaken before I explore traditional Māori adoption and the impact colonial practices such as closed stranger adoption had on Māori. In this section of the literature review, I show that the discourses which informed adoption policy and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1955 and 1985 intersected to create a particular New Zealand adoption experience.

European settlement and social innovation

From the time of early European settlement New Zealand was viewed as one of the most socially innovative countries in the developed world. According to Shirley (1993) New Zealand's distinctive approach to social policy led to its reputation as a 'social laboratory'. For example, New Zealand was the first country in the world to grant universal suffrage to women in 1893, and the Old Age Pension Act 1898 was identified as the most innovative legislation of the time (Shirley, 1993). Adoption too, was a focus for progressive legislative measures, with New Zealand becoming the first country in the British Empire to make any kind of legal adoption possible. Some forty years before Britain, New Zealand passed the Adoption Act 1881 (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). Prior to the Adoption Act 1881 the transfer of children to new parents was non-existent in common law (Else, 1991).

The Adoption Act 1881 was designed so people who reared other peoples' children would have the same rights and status as the birth parents of such children (Else, 1991). The Act was viewed as an incentive to persuade couples to provide homes for orphaned, abandoned or uncared for children, thus releasing the State from such responsibility (Ludbrook, 1990; Perkins, 2009). The colonial settlers prided themselves on breaking away from the British class system and adopting children was one way liberal social policy could be executed. Else (1991, p. x) noted that "the spectacle of colonial households absorbing 'indigent relatives, let alone totally unrelated children' amazed English visitors". However, such actions were not merely altruistic. Adoption was a valued means of providing 'extra hands' on frontier farms (Benet, 1976; Else, 1991; O'Halloran, 2009).

Over time, new ideas reshaped adoption practice. By 1955 the 'complete break' theory was driving adoption views and legislation (Griffith, 1991; Perkins, 2009). The complete break (or clean break) theory was based on the popular idea of *tabula rasa* which held that children were born as if a blank slate, and that character development was a consequence of experience rather than because of any inherent capacities. This concept aligned with adoption practice because it privileged 'nurture' over 'nature'. As such the birth mother would often not see her baby after the birth, or her access would be strictly controlled, as the baby was to go to adopters as a 'blank slate'.

In practice, the complete break was between the birth parents and adopted child. Perkins (2009, p. 9) draws our attention to the fact that this break was "not just through their [adopted person's] childhood, but for their entire existence". There would be no further contact between the birth parents and child and neither had access to information about the other (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1997; Perkins, 2009). Birth records were sealed, and closed. The birth parents and adoptive parents were unknown to each other. They were, and remained, strangers. New Zealand's reputation as a 'social laboratory' was reinforced with the introduction of closed stranger adoption. Other countries soon followed suit (Else, 1991).

A hallmark of closed stranger adoption was the secrecy which it imposed (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1991; Perkins; 2009). Under the Adoption Act 1881 there had been no secrecy about adoption and there was no requirement to change the child's original name, although the surname could be hyphenated to include the surname of the adopted parents if desired (Else, 1991). Influenced by the 'complete break' theory, it was believed that if a child was completely cut off from their birth family they would integrate and be just like their adoptive family. The nurture of loving parents would overcome the inherent bad nature associated with illegitimacy (Griffith, 1991). It was presumed that in a 'good' adoption the adopted child would not want to know or meet their birth parents (Else, 1991).

Gillard-Glass & England (2002, p. 24) link the secrecy of closed stranger adoption with "lies and social engineering". The widely held misbelief that it was illegal for the adoptive parents and child to have contact with the birth family was socially engineered and in keeping with the complete break theory, and with the stigma associated with both illegitimacy and the possible infertility of the adopting parents. However, such contact was never illegal. Rather, subtle law changes and policies designed and enforced by the Department of Social Welfare inexorably led to the secrecy surrounding closed stranger adoption. While professionals working in the area of adoption knew contact was not illegal, this information was not normally passed on to the members of the adoption triad (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002).

The moral context of adoption

Closed stranger adoption was informed by common law beliefs about the role of women and children within the family (Else, 1991; Mikaere, 2003). European family life was essentially based on the notion that women and children were the property, or chattels, of a man. Before marriage, a female child was the property of her father and, upon marriage she became the property of her husband (Mikaere, 2003). In short, only married couples deserved to have children, and a woman's sexuality was only legitimised within the institution of marriage (Mikaere, 2003; Shawyer, 1979).

Closed stranger adoption was primarily devised as a way of hiding, or legitimising, illegitimate births. Closed stranger adoption provided a way for childless married couples to become parents and complete the expectations of what constituted a 'normal family' (Else, 1991; Mikaere, 2003). As the colonial discourse around illegitimacy was one of shame, scandal and dishonour, the stigma associated with illegitimacy not only fell upon the birth mother, but also upon her family and her illegitimate child (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). Many birth mothers were put under extreme pressure from their families and from social agencies to have their illegitimate child adopted out (Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). Apart from providing a 'normal family' for a child who would otherwise be labelled as illegitimate, the thinking of the time also promoted closed stranger adoption as providing a 'fresh start' for an unmarried mother who had 'fallen from grace'. Women were told that the best and most loving thing they could do was to give their illegitimate child up for adoption, to put the adoption behind them, and to get on with their lives (Else, 1991). Getting on with their lives implied finding a husband and having more children within wedlock (Shawyer, 1979). The adoption process was thus socially engineered; "rescuing the child and helping the childless" (Else, 1991, p. 53).

To further promote the view that childless married couples were morally entitled to adopt, the notion that babies born to unmarried mothers were 'unwanted babies' was also constructed. As late as the 1970s articles were being published which advanced the 'unwanted baby' narrative (Else, 1991). Many social workers working within the field of adoption deplored the use of the term 'unwanted' for illegitimate children as they knew this was untrue, yet the term remained in popular use (Else, 1991).

The role closed stranger adoption played in normalising moral ideals about families is reflected in the provisions of the 1955 Adoption Act. The 1955 Adoption Act provided for:

- The automatic conferring of a new given name, and surname, on the adopted child;
- The consent to an adoption without the birth mother knowing the identity of the adoptive parents;
- The birth parents were not required to attend the adoption hearing;
- Adoption orders deeming the adopted child ceases to be the child of the birth parents and has all the legal rights of a child of the adoptive parents as if born to them in lawful wedlock (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002, p. 25).

Over the next two decades New Zealand would have the highest domestic adoption rate in the western world (Iwanek, 1997; Scherman & Harre, 2008). In 1970 seven per cent of New Zealand newborns were placed for adoption, and it is estimated that adoption directly affects twenty-five per cent of the New Zealand population (Griffith, 1998). Else describes closed stranger adoption as "a social experiment with unknown and uninvestigated outcomes, conducted on a massive scale" (1991, p.197).

The changing role of women

Patriarchal attitudes to women and their sexuality fostered the ideologies behind closed stranger adoption. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the feminist movement was working to resist oppressive practices and power structures. Incremental changes to patriarchal systems and structures were taking place and some major events occurred which significantly impacted on the lives of women and subsequently on adoption practices. According to Else (2011) significant events included: The Status of Children Act 1969 which removed the legal significance and stigma of illegitimacy; improvements in, and easier access to, contraception for women in the 1970s; the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) in 1974 which enabled women to obtain some financial assistance if they were the sole carer for a child born within or outside of marriage; and it became possible to access legal abortions in New Zealand under the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977. From the mid-1970s attitudes to marriage and the traditional image of the nuclear family began to change with statistics indicating a rise in the number of sole parents and partners living together outside of marriage (Patterson, 2011). These changes, coupled with the additional politicisation and activism of marginalised groups forced an examination of attitudes relating to human rights. In Aotearoa New Zealand, as in other parts of the world, it was a time of social change both within and outside of the family setting.

Rights of the adopted person

As children who had been adopted under the closed stranger adoption system were reaching adulthood in the 1970s, there was a growing demand for a law change which would allow adopted people access to their original birth certificates. Original birth certificates contained the birth mother's name, thus providing a means for adopted people to trace their birth mothers. A major stimulus for the organised movement for law change in Aotearoa New Zealand was the 1975 law change in England which provided adopted people eighteen years and older access to their original birth entry (Griffith, 1991).

In New Zealand, Adoption Support Groups and Jigsaw were organisations formed in 1976. They provided support for members of the adoption triad, and spear-headed a political thrust for the access to closed adoption records (Griffith, 1991). The Department of Social Welfare, most members of the legal profession, social workers, and the government opposed any law change which would allow adoption files to be opened. This widespread apprehension was steeped in anxieties about families breaking down once adoption secrets were disclosed (Griffith, 1991). Griffith reports the main argument raised against opening closed adoption records was that doing so would be an invasion of privacy for a birth mother who had 'lived down her past' and had never disclosed the adoption to a current husband. Such disclosures were viewed as likely to end otherwise happy marriages (1991, sec. 16, p. 6).

The Adult Information Act

Despite the reluctance of those in authority to legislate so that adopted people had access to their original birth records, the Adult Information Act 1985 came into force on September 1 1986. New Zealand was the first country in the world to legislate for both birth parents and adopted children to have access to information about the other party if no veto was in place (Else, 1991). It allowed adopted people, twenty years of age and over, the right to obtain their original birth certificate. The Department of Social Welfare aided in making contact with birth parents unless there had been a veto put in place. A veto meant that the birth parent did not give permission to have their name disclosed. Likewise birth parents were able to legally access identifying information, through social workers, about the child they had relinquished at birth providing that the 'child' was twenty years of age or over, had not placed a veto, or did not object to being contacted (Else, 1991).

Adoption and Māori

This section of the literature review focuses specifically on Māori involvement with adoption, both traditionally and within New Zealand's legal system. It examines the effects constructs of race and ethnicity have played in adoption practices and reviews international material on cross-cultural adoption. For transracially adopted people navigating between the culture they were born into and the culture they are raised in leads to a searching for their 'true identity' and a 'place to belong'. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, whakapapa is the site where this quest for identity and belonging is most apparent.

Traditional Māori adoptions

In Aotearoa New Zealand Māori have observed traditional adoption practices for hundreds of years (Griffith, 1991). That Māori held a positive view of adoption is illustrated by three Māori expressions: atawhai – "show kindness to, be liberal, foster, be inclined to, desire"; taurima – "entertain, treat with care, tend" and whāngai[4] – "feed, nourish, bring up" (Williams, 1971, cited in Metge, 1995, p. 211).

Whāngai adoptions were undertaken for a variety of reasons. Motives for whāngai adoptions included ensuring the child's survival and whakapapa line (in the case where the parent's home was affected by illness or ritual curse), providing care when parents have died, enhancing of family and kinship ties (a common practice was for grandparents to whāngai grandchildren), and assisting childless couples within the family (Mead, 1997; Metge, 1995; Perkins, 2009).

Unlike closed stranger adoptions, traditional whāngai adoptions were not shrouded in secrecy and shame (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). It was relatively common for children to be given to someone other than their parents to be raised. As long as children remained in the care of relatives, birth parents were "praised for their generosity" (Metge, 1995, p. 213). A child "adopted in the customary Māori way did not lose their culture, links with their birth families or their rights of succession" (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002, p. 24). Importantly, there was also no expectation that such adoptions had to be permanent (Griffith, 1998; Mikaere, 2003). Children were viewed as an integral part of the extended family, with the extended family taking responsibility for those within their kinship group. What remained imperative was that a child knew their whakapapa (Mead, 1997; Mikaere, 2003). The

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[4] Throughout this study the term whāngai is used.

common law view, brought from England, that women (wives) and children were the property of a man (husband/father) was non-existent within traditional Māori society where there was "no property in children and Māori children know many homes, but still one whānau" (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1988, p. 75).

However, colonial attitudes and values were incorporated in to New Zealand law by way of the English Laws Act 1858. This Act effectively superseded any Māori customary law at the time and was backdated to 1840 when New Zealand was annexed by Britain (Evans, 2010). Hobson said at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, "He iwi tahi tātou", most commonly translated into English as "We are now one people" (Orange, 2011). An adverse consequence for Māori of the 'one people' rhetoric was that it was Pākehā values and laws that Māori were to become one with.

Assimilationist policies

It was assumed that "the imposition of closed stranger adoption, modelled as it was on common law views of family, was a necessary step towards the civilization of Māori" (Mikaere, 2003, p. 106). The breaking down of traditional family patterns and structures was not only experienced by Māori but by other Indigenous Peoples, for example the boarding school experiences of First Nation and Native American children (Stark & Stark, 2006; Mitchell & Maracle, 2005). While the New Zealand Constitution Act 1852 acknowledged the practice of whāngai, legislation was to be introduced which ultimately displaced customary adoption by statutory processes (O'Halloran, 2009). The underlying beliefs behind such acts originated in eurocentric attitudes and values which were believed to be superior and more civilized than those of Indigenous populations (Tomas, 2004). Such attitudes viewed assimilation into European culture as in the best interests of Indigenous Peoples (Stark & Stark, 2006; Tomas, 2004).

In terms of adoption, the assimilation of Māori and the acquisition of Māori land were certainly influencing forces in legislative decisions (Herewini, 1984; Perkins, 2009). The 1901 Native Land Claims and Adjustment and Laws Amendment Act ruled that no person adopted as whāngai could succeed to the estate of whāngai parents who died after 31 March 1902 unless the adoption had been recognised in the Māori Land Court (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009). Further, the 1909 Native Land Act made it compulsory for Māori adoptions to be endorsed by the Māori Land Court (Else, 1991).

While legislation was impacting on traditional Māori adoption practices there was still some recognition of Māori cultural values. From 1915 there were a series of restrictions placed on accessing adoption records and information, but Māori Land Court adoptions remained open and Māori Land Court Judges understood "nothing should be done to conceal the relationship of an adopted Maori to his natural parents'" (Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court, 1946, cited in Else, 1991, p. 179). However, in 1962 the government ended the jurisdiction of the Māori Land Court in adoption. The stated aim was to "do away with one more of the provisions that differentiate between Maori and other New Zealanders" (NZPD, 1962, cited in Else, 1991, p. 181).

This equal legislative treatment hindered Māori wanting to make legal whāngai adoptions, thus reducing the risk that Child Welfare Officers would remove children who had been informally adopted (Else, 1991; Mikaere, 2003). While the 'equal treatment' sentiment implied 'equal outcomes' Māori were severely disadvantaged by the legislation. The cost to have legal affidavits drawn up by a solicitor increased the cost, from adoption in the Māori Land Court to the Magistrates' Court, by up to twenty-five per cent for each child. Yet a far more serious issue for Māori was the fact that in the Magistrates' Court many adoption applications were being rejected as the adopting parents were the child's grandparents (Else, 1991, p. 182). Not surprisingly, Māori were compelled to further maintain informal whāngai adoptions.

Rather than trying to understand from a Māori perspective why there was a subsequent decrease in Māori adoption applications, the Attorney-General concluded:

> *Maori parents are keeping their children, which is the normal practice with the Europeans … In this country we are two races but we are one people … Despite the differences of our cultural heritage, for the future the rights of the children and the obligations of the parents should be identical … obviously there was a practice - and a very widespread practice – of informal adoptions by grandparents. If that be a Maori custom … I think that is not a good thing. I come back to the argument that the best people to look after young children are the natural parents of those children. To the extent that the transfer of jurisdiction from the Maori Land Court to the Magistrates' Court has achieved that end, I think the legislative measure was well merited. (NZPD, 1965, cited in Else, 1991, p. 183).*

Closed stranger adoption and Māori

Although exact numbers were not recorded, it is known that a significant proportion of closed stranger adoptions involved children who could claim Māori ancestry through at least one of their birth parents (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1998; Perkins, 2009). The majority of these children were placed into Pākehā homes (Else, 1991). Closed stranger adoption conflicted with

traditional Māori adoption practices in that the adoption took place outside of the whānau and hapū, and the intrinsic secrecy surrounding the adoption separated the adopted child from all knowledge of their whakapapa. For Māori, placing children secretly with strangers was "severely frowned upon, for it means they are lost to grandparents and whānau as well as birth parents" (Metge, 1995, p. 213). None the less, aggressive assimilationist policies and the migration of Māori from rural to urban areas in large numbers from the mid-1950s resulted in more Māori children being placed for adoption outside of their whānau (Mikaere, 2003).

An often forgotten issue intrinsically linked to the adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families is the loss experienced by the whānau, hapū and iwi of the child who is placed outside of the family for adoption. As Donna Hall Durie explains it is an "incredible decision to place [Māori] children outside of their family. Extraordinary. … It's just not done … to find out [a child] had been adopted out from the extended family. It was terrible. The enormous hurt … the appalling sense of loss … [there is] the right of tribes and families to know when these children are going outside the [blood] line" (personal communication, January 20, 2011). Eddie Durie concurs stating: "It affects families. It is a very extraordinary decision to do that in a Māori context … it seems to be just an issue for the birth mother but for us [Māori] it is an issue of the extended family, the immediate family at the bare minimum (personal communication, January 20, 2011). While both informants agree that the birth mother has rights, these rights should not be put ahead of a wider family's right to claim their whakapapa.

Despite the fact that closed stranger adoption adversely affected Māori family values, the social and moral climate of the time resulted in enormous pressure being put on women (Māori and non-Māori) for illegitimate children to be placed for adoption (Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Perkins, 2009; Shawyer, 1979). Women were pressured into relinquishing an illegitimate child with arguments that the baby would be financially better off, to retain the baby would be selfish as illegitimacy was disgraceful and shameful, and that the birth mother could have more children when she was a respectable married woman (Else, 1991; Shawyer, 1979). Māori women were also instructed not to tell family members, as in most instances the family would not have supported a closed stranger adoption, opting instead to support the mother and claim the child (Mikaere, 2003; Perkins, 2009).

During the mid-twentieth century the urbanisation of Māori made it possible for young Māori women to hide a pregnancy from their families. Nevertheless, Else (1991) documents that a much smaller number of single Māori mothers, compared with single Pākehā mothers, agreed to closed stranger adoption. This is not surprising as placing a child in an unknown

family was culturally inappropriate to Māori (Else, 1991; Mead, 1997). Reasons then for the number of Māori children available for adoption was that this number included Māori children who had been made wards of the state, and those whose mothers were Pākehā and fathers were Māori (Else, 1991). Else records instances where Māori family members actively pursued the right to adopt related children who were being placed for adoption by Pākehā birth mothers. However, adoption law and practices, which did not recognise Māori concepts of family and kinship, meant adoption by Pākehā strangers was viewed as more desirable than adoption by Māori kin (Else, 1991). Applications made by grandparents to legally adopt their grandchildren were turned down on the basis that they were too elderly, and did not meet certain financial standards. Eddie Durie elaborates: "Social workers put a lot of blocks on grandparents adopting grandchildren … it [was] not written into statute at all, just a working policy adopted by social workers … not too many [Māori] met the [income] test" (personal communication, January 20, 2011). Māori grandparents, wanting to legally adopt a child were denied the right to do so as they were deemed to be "too old and too poor" (Donna Hall Durie, personal communication, January 20, 2011). Further, underlying racism and disdain for anything Māori meant that courts viewed a European upbringing as superior to that which a child would receive in a Māori home (Else, 1991).

Stigmatising of Māori

For unmarried women expecting a child, one possible solution for such a situation was for the woman to marry the child's father. (Else, 1991). According to Patterson (2011) it was estimated that over half of women marrying in the late 1960s were already pregnant at the time of marriage. Yet, for Pākehā women there was often added social and familial pressure not to marry a Māori. Thus, the option by default was to have the child placed for adoption. However, there were not enough adoption applicants prepared to adopt Māori children. Else (1991, p. 190) notes that by 1965 "Child Welfare was admitting that, 'Adoption of Maori children is a big and constant headache'". Māori children were being placed in short term foster placements or were adopted in to Pākehā families which social workers recognised were at the "dicey end of being approved" (Else, 1991, p. 190). Such families often had issues of concern which social workers overlooked as they were desperate to find homes for Māori babies (Else, 1991).

Matching for marginalisation

A prominent feature of closed stranger adoption was "matching children to families" (Else, 1991, p. 70). Such matching tried to match adoptive parents and the child as closely as possible. For example, matching of hair, eye and skin colouring, perceived intellectual abilities (taken from the birth parent's educational or social standing) and religious beliefs (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009). Matching adoptive parents and child as closely as possible was viewed as an important factor for the best possibility of a positive placement. Such matching, which especially focused on physical similarities, was also viewed as aiding in the secrecy of the adoption (Else, 1991).

This matching becomes problematic when adopting cross-culturally and led to 'matching for marginalisation' and 'the hierarchy of babies' (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009). Matching for marginalisation meant that Pākehā families who may not have initially been accepted as adoptive parents were accepted on the grounds that they would take a non-white child, as non-white children were marginalised or harder to place. This fed in to the hierarchy of babies where children who looked more European were easier to place than children who were darker in complexion (Else, 1991).

In the archives of Child Welfare offices it was found that babies who were available for adoption were identified by a simple colour-coding system. Blue for boys; pink for girls; red for handicapped; green for Jews; yellow for Chinese; black for mixed race (Else, 1991). As Else reports, "Though they saw all mixed race children as difficult to place, the degree of 'darkness' counted too, because some Pakeha couples said they would accept children who were light enough or whose non-European ancestry did not 'show'" (1991, p. 74). Written reports by social workers during the 1950s reveal how significant the child's appearance was; "The baby is rather sweet and quite fair, and has no characteristics at all of the Maori race" (cited in Else, 1991, p. 74). However, racial origins were often viewed as more important than skin colouring, with many adopters still not willing to consider a child with 'a little Maori blood' no matter how light skinned (Else, 1991).

Due to the denigration of, and the stigma attached to, Māori at the time, some Pākehā adoptive parents aware that their adopted child had Māori ancestry would themselves hide this fact. Ann Nation recalled how "people talked about the [Māori] child as being of Greek descent or Spanish descent … people told sort of fibs, about what the truth was, because they didn't want people to know" (personal communication, November 27, 2010).

Pākehā birth mothers would also attempt to hide the fact that the father of their child was Māori as they realised this would provide the child with a better chance of being adopted into a 'good' family (Else, 1991). Aware of this, social workers were known to check for Mongolian spots[5] on new-born babies. In the hierarchy of babies Māori and Pacific babies were the least sought after, with boys of 'coloured blood' being the hardest to place (Else, 1991; Mikaere, 2003; Perkins, 2009). Interestingly, it was not uncommon for Pākehā couples wanting to adopt to request non-white children from overseas, for example from Hong Kong or Vietnam (Else, 1991).

Race, ethnicity and a Māori identity

> *Ethnicity contains elements of both primordiality (located in the heart) and situationalism (a rational response to social and historical context).*
> *(Collins, 2004, p. 23).*

The issue of race and ethnicity has remained central to adoption policy in Aotearoa New Zealand (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009). However, rather than being made explicit in policy, a racialised discourse was implemented in practice. As with much social policy in Aotearoa New Zealand key drivers for policy remained implicit. Questions of 'who could adopt',[6] 'what babies were most sought after', 'what babies were hardest to place', 'whose cultural values were recognised in adoption laws and practice', all have answers linked to race, ethnicity and New Zealand's colonial past. For this reason it is important to review notions of race and ethnicity and the impact such notions have on Māori adoptees in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Māori ethnicity

A primordial view of ethnic identity emphasises fixed biological and tradition-based characteristics (Kukutai, 2003). Primordiality holds to the notion that there are certain fundamental, immutable and involuntary factors, such as physical characteristics and ancestry, which permanently bind members to an unchanging ethnic identity regardless of societal context (Kukutai, 2003).

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[5] Mongolian spot is the blue (sometimes blue-grey, blue-black) colouring usually found on the buttocks or lower back of 'coloured' new-borns. It normally disappears three to five years after birth.

[6] For example, between 1909 and 1955 Māori were unable to legally adopt Pākehā children (Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Perkins, 2009).

A situational view, on the other hand, emphasises self-identification and considers historical and political influences as determinants to one's formation of an ethnic identity (Durie, 1995; Collins, 2004). While it could be argued that a primordial position, where whakapapa which is genealogical and immutable, is the most common signifier of a Māori identity, the fluidity and the diversity of contemporary Māori realities also encompasses a situational response to identifying as Māori (Durie, 1995; Kukutai, 2003). Kukutai (2003, p. 8) elaborates:

> *How an individual reports his or her ethnicity is subject to a host of influences including parental ethnicities, upbringing, current circumstances and societal attitudes towards particular ethnic groups. …. People who report a single ethnicity are not necessarily from a single ethnic background. Most of those who report Māori ethnicity have non-Māori ancestry, and often a non-Māori parent.*

Durie (1995, p. 464) further emphasises the diverse social realities contemporary Māori live within:

> *Far from being members of a homogeneous group, Māori individuals have a variety of cultural characteristics and live in a number of cultural and socio-economic realities. The relevance of so-called traditional values is not the same for all Māori, nor can it be assumed that all Māori will wish to define their ethnic identity according to classical constructs.*

Kukutai (2003, p. 21) states that in both primordial and situational views of ethnicity "whakapapa is generally agreed to be the lynchpin of Māori identity". Therefore, identification with a particular ethnic identity, or multiple ethnic identities is not merely fixed, but is also a situational response. Such a response can be positioned within the context of the colonisation experience of Māori. Within Aotearoa New Zealand institutions have been established which instil and systematically reproduce the dominant western world views which serve 'mainstream' New Zealand best. (Borell, 2005). Māori have been conceptualised as the 'other' and have "developed mechanisms to retain their own cultural heritage in the face of colonisation" (Borell, 2005, p. 22). Identifying as Māori is a political act - an example of ethnicity "formed in relation to collective identities within racialised societies" (Webber, 2008, p. 81).

Blood quantum

A prime example of New Zealand being a racialised society can be found in the historically racist, and state sanctioned, practice where 'blood quota or quantum'[7] is used as a signifier

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[7] Subjugating people of colour to the politics of blood quantum has been used for economic and political reasons worldwide. For Indigenous Peoples, it promotes the acquisition of Indigenous lands by colonisers as indigeneity is 'watered down'. For non-Indigenous Peoples of colour it is used

of race (Te Hiwi, 2007). In this way, Māori have been categorised and their identity manipulated by non-Māori politicians, civil servants, and academics (Kukutai, 2003). In all there were over sixteen Acts which provided statutory definitions of 'Māori'. The Adoption Act 1955 defined Māori as "a person belonging to the aboriginal race of New Zealand, including half-caste and a person intermediate between a half-caste and a person of pure descent" (cited in Coates, 2008, p.15).

Blood quantum provisions existed in New Zealand legislation even as late as 1986 (Coates, 2008; Kukutai, 2003). As Coates (2008, p. 17) argues, these quantum provisions "tend to divide, assimilate or extinguish the Indigenous peoples of a land".

Māori renaissance

Assimilationist thinking prevailed in Aotearoa New Zealand into the 1950s and 1960s. However from the 1970s onwards Māori political activism sparked a renewed challenge to the inherently paternal and racist assumptions of Pākehā society (Royal, 2009). There was an increased determination by Māori to uphold Māori culture and identity against the colonial practices of assimilation (Jackson & McRobie, 2008; Spoonley, 1995). Such determination was driven by an increased awareness of the importance of a strong, positive cultural identity (Durie, 1998). During this period Māori were establishing health and educational programmes which promoted and fostered a strong Māori identity (Durie, 1998). The movement away from assimilationist ideology to that of the Māori renaissance set a space where Māori contemporary identity claims worked to resist existing oppressive colonial practices and power structures (Bell, 2004). As part of the divisionary and contemporary nature of modern racism, contemporary Māori identity claims are often challenged, with measures such as blood quantum still being used to assess levels of Māori authenticity.[8]

An authentic Māori identity

The issue of an authentic Māori identity is important to this study as it is central to the research question of "how do Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families, by way of

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to extinguish certain human rights. For example in the United States the 'one drop rule' dictated that if a person had 'one drop' of African blood they were categorised as Black and State laws banning miscegenation applied. Yet for Native Americans and Indigenous Hawaiians if a person was deemed to have less than the State prescribed Native blood quantum, they could not lay claim to tribal lands.

[8] The notion of an 'authentic' Māori identity is widely contested. The idea of an 'authentic' identity is socially constructed. However, just like the fallacy of 'race' but the reality of racism, Māori can still be defined within Aotearoa New Zealand by 'blood quantum' measures and/or by what could be termed 'classical' or 'traditional' Māori constructs. Being 'tūturu Māori'.

closed stranger adoption, navigate the contradictions in their identity narratives, as Māori and as adopted people?" Paradoxically, what was once considered valuable assets to being permanently placed in a 'good' Pākehā family, for example being light skinned, can now be viewed as a barrier to being accepted as Māori (Bevan, 2000; O'Regan, 2001). For Māori adopted into Pākehā families it is not uncommon for them to be challenged about their level of 'Māoriness'. Timoti Karetu reflects on what he views as a fragile Māori identity, "… those adopted into non-Māori families, who may look Māori and be identified as such by their peers, but that is where their Māoriness ends" (1990, p. 116).

Visual markers and identity are often linked. However, apart from phenotypical ascriptions other generally accepted markers of an authenticated Māori identity include such things as competency in te reo Māori, participation within te ao Māori, and strong whānau and whakapapa connections (Borell, 2005; Walker, 1997; Webber, 2008). The problem is that for many Māori adopted into Pākehā families access to such markers have been (at worst) denied and (at best) delayed. Mead observes Māori who have been adopted into Pākehā families experience a "traumatic, re-entry process [into te ao Māori] which is personally painful, difficult and terrible to witness" (1997, p. 209). He concludes:

> *… the practice of allowing Maori children to be brought up by Pakeha New Zealanders to be white New Zealanders is wrong and cannot be justified. … The Maori attitude is that a child born of a Maori parent, has a natural right to whakapapa, to the heritage of the Maori parent and to the culture (Mead, 1997, p. 209).*

The Adoption Act 1955, which sanctioned closed stranger adoption, did not take into account the importance of whānau and whakapapa connections for Māori (Bradley, 1995; Dyhrberg, 2001; Pitama, 1997). The importance of whakapapa and whānau are foundational to positioning oneself as Māori, and both are intrinsic to the development of a Māori cultural identity (Dyhrberg, 2001; Jackson, 1997; Pitama, 1997). As 'Mary' (cited in Else, 1991, p. 194) said: "To deny someone their whakapapa is one of the worst things I can imagine that can happen to you in Maori terms". At worst then, the Adoption Act 1955 can be viewed as disregarding Māori rights under the Treaty of Waitangi, and reflecting institutional racism "no less severe than the Aboriginal stolen generations" (Jackson, 1997, p. 5; Walker, 1997).

Whakapapa

Although whakapapa is not the sole requirement to claiming a Māori identity, it is the primary requirement (Coates, 2008). Jackson (in Coates, 2008, p. 26 – italics in original) has noted "Māori have always defined 'Māoriness' in terms of *whakapapa* or genealogy". Further,

whakapapa is utilised by Māori institutions, and a number of formal tribal structures, as a condition of registration and access to certain benefits and rights (Coates, 2008). However, the centrality of whakapapa has an exclusionary effect for Māori adopted into Pākehā families who may not have access to knowledge of their whakapapa (Coates, 2008).

It is one of the tragedies of closed stranger adoption that a number of adopted people, both Māori and non-Māori, have not been able to trace their birth parents. However, for Māori there is the added burden that with no knowledge of whānau and whakapapa their Māori identity is brought into question and they are found somehow lacking (Karetu, 1990). Borell illustrates how Māori are often defined and labelled in deficit terms, especially within the context of New Zealand's colonising history: "Māori are often described by characteristics they do not have, by what they do not achieve, the contribution they are not making and fundamentally they are defined in terms of who they are not, Pākehā" (Borell, 2005, p. 22). For Māori adoptees they may also be defined by the whakapapa they do not know. As Mead (1997, p. 208) states: "In this case the child loses all rights to the founding group, is vulnerable and open to abuse, and has no protection. In fact, the child becomes a non-person".

Race and cross-cultural adoption

The literature reveals race played a pivotal role in closed stranger adoption practices in Aotearoa New Zealand (Else, 1991; Mikaere, 2003; Perkins, 2009). The issue of race is perhaps most evident in cross-cultural and inter-country adoptions and is a contentious topic within adoption policy and practice both in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas (De Jong, 2001; Oparah, Shin & Trenka 2006; Simon & Altstein, 2000). This review will now focus on international material which specifically discusses cross-cultural adoption.

There are two dominant and conflicting discourses on cross-cultural adoption. Particularly prevalent among Black and Indigenous social workers in the USA from the 1970s onwards were claims that "transcultural adoption damages children of color, leading to low self-esteem, identity crisis, and difficulty relating to their communities of origin" (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006, p. 4). From this perspective, cross-cultural adoption was heralded by many as a form of cultural genocide (Jackson, 1997; Simon & Altstein, 2000; Perkins, 2009).

More recent public opinion, backed by research intent on disproving the importance race plays in adoption and the formation of a secure cultural identity, argues that early placement into a loving and stable home is of paramount importance (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006).

Such research by and large denies that children of colour adopted into white families suffer any adverse effects from such a placement, instead asserting that cross-cultural adoptions undermine racism by proving people of different ethnic identities can achieve similar outcomes if given similar opportunities (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006; Simon & Altstein, 2000).

Research on the experiences of cross-culturally adopted people shows adopted people themselves hold differing opinions on the practice of cross-cultural adoption, with some supporting, and others condemning the practice. However, this study is not primarily concerned with the debate around the advantages and disadvantages, rights or wrongs, of cross-cultural adoption per se. Rather, this study is interested in exploring the narratives Māori adopted into Pākehā families use to make sense of their particular adoption experience. However, there is no such thing as 'colour-blindness[9]' in racialised societies (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006; Quiroz, 2007). For this reason, cross-culturally adopted people are forced to navigate the constructs of race, ethnicity and adoption in their narratives.

The trauma of adoption

Many commentators and scholars agree that adoption is a traumatic life-long event (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Griffith, 1991; Kelly & Beavan, 1997; Ludbrook, 1997; Verrier, 1993; Verrier, 2003; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). Researchers recognise the need adopted people have to find both a 'true identity' and a 'place to belong' (Gillard-Glass & England, 2002; Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). Many argue that these needs are intensified for people adopted cross-culturally, as they are isolated from both the culture they were born into and the culture they were raised in (Small, 2003; Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006; Yngvesson, 2010; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). As more material written by transracially adopted people becomes available, it provides insights into the isolating effects cross-cultural adoption has on the adopted person (Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006). A recurring theme is that of walking between worlds and occupying a marginal space at familial, societal and cultural levels (Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006; Yngvesson, 2010). Yet, rather than focusing exclusively on pathologising the adoption experience, cross-culturally adopted people record stories of strength and resilience from living within the margins. Diehl (2006, p. 31) writes: "We on the periphery, learning and watching from the outside, have a particular power with revolutionary roots".

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[9] The colour-blind discourse involves the belief that people are colour-blind and do not 'see' or 'notice' race, culminating in the view race-based discrimination no longer exists (Quiroz, 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the socio-historical context of closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand. Since the time of early European settlement New Zealand was considered a socially innovative country which led to its reputation as a 'social laboratory'. Closed stranger adoption is part of the legacy of social experimentation.

The issue of race played an important role in the policies and practices of closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand. This chapter examined the effects of colonisation and assimilationist policies on the structure of Māori family life, and specifically the impact closed stranger adoption had on Māori accessing knowledge of their whakapapa. This literature review has also demonstrated the parallels between Indigenous Peoples' identities constructed and manipulated by legislative procedures out of their control, and adopted peoples' birth identities constructed and manipulated by the practice of closed stranger adoption. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families this manipulation is therefore two-fold.

The next chapter outlines the Māori-centred research methodology and narrative methods used in this study.

Chapter Three: Gathering Narratives

Introduction

> *Māori are utilising research to answer the questions that interest us, to find solutions to problems we know already exist, to seek 'new' and recover 'old' knowledge… (Rangahau, 2010).*

In the previous chapter I noted that a significant proportion of closed stranger adoptions involved children who could claim Māori ancestry through at least one of their birth parents (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1998). Many of these Māori children were placed within Pākehā families (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009). Such adoptions have been denounced by some as "assimilation by law" (Dyhrberg, 2001, p. 12) and "cultural genocide" (Jackson, 1997, p. 5), as they have alienated Māori from their whakapapa and whānau ties (Dyhrberg, 2001; Jackson, 1997; Mikaere, 2003). Such statements are made in the context that whakapapa is viewed as the foundational basis of a Māori identity (Else, 1991; Jackson, 1997; Metge, 1995; Mikaere, 2003; O'Regan, 2001).

What is not known is how Māori people adopted into Pākehā families have made sense of their adoption experience, as Māori and as adopted people, when access to their genealogical links were severed at birth. This study was therefore interested in exploring the experiences of Māori who were adopted by way of closed stranger adoption into Pākehā families. The research has focused on the following research question:

> *How do Māori adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption make sense of their experience as Māori and as adopted people?*

By exploring the narratives used by the participants to make sense of their cross-cultural adoption experience, this question can be answered. This chapter discusses the theories and research design chosen to explore and respond to the research question. The relationship between the methodology and the research methods used is explained, and the rationale for choosing to undertake this research in this particular manner is made explicit. Ethical considerations are also examined along with the participant selection process and information on how the data collection, and subsequent data analysis, was undertaken.

The conceptual framework: Māori-centred research with a kaupapa Māori understanding

Fragmentation is not an indigenous project, it is something we are recovering from (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005, p. 97).

There has been extensive research undertaken around the issue of adoption worldwide, yet the vast majority of this research has focused on western experiences of adoption and the adoption of children into families sharing the same dominant ethnic and cultural background as the adopted child. Of the research specifically pertaining to cross-cultural adoption little is from the perspective of the cross-culturally adopted person (Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006). In Aotearoa New Zealand there is no published research specifically concerning the experience of Māori children adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoptions.

Therefore this research is significant for a number of reasons:

- It presents a Māori perspective to the body of knowledge around closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1955 and 1985;
- It provides an opportunity for Māori adoptees raised in Pākehā homes to voice their stories and to have those stories recorded;
- It identifies emergent themes on the impact that closed stranger adoption practices have had on Māori;
- It contributes a Māori-specific perspective to similar research within other Indigenous communities (see Becker-Green, 2009; Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997; Sinclair, 2007).

In this respect the significant points relating to this study align with research programmes outlined by Linda Tuhiwai-Smith in *Decolonising methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005). These programmes exemplify ways in which Indigenous Peoples are utilising research to advance issues "such as cultural survival and restoration, self-determination and healing" (Rangahau, 2010).

This research is positioned within a Māori-centred research approach, yet draws heavily on kaupapa Māori research principles and philosophies. Cunningham (1998) and Walsh-Mooney (2009) note that there are many commonalities within Māori centred and kaupapa Māori research. Takino (1998) asserts that both research paradigms support anti-oppressive endeavours which promote Māori ownership and control of the research, while noting that

within kaupapa Māori research this is more pronounced. Māori-centred research and kaupapa Māori research both promote Māori ways of working, Māori language and Māori knowledge. However, Māori self-determination and exclusive Māori research autonomy are foundational to kaupapa Māori research. For practical reasons, this research has not been undertaken within an exclusive kaupapa Māori framework. For example, while I have engaged with Māori advisors, my two main supervisors were non-Māori. However, this research does reflect an understanding and respect for the philosophical principles of a kaupapa Māori research approach and such principles are incorporated into this study. Therefore the research methodology combines aspects common to both Māori-centred research and kaupapa Māori research, with both paradigms being referred to and drawn upon.

The central philosophical underpinnings, in terms of both the topic of this study and its methodological design, originate from a discourse of de-colonisation. Assimilation practices and the marginalisation of a Māori worldview informed the policies which sanctioned the closed stranger adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families (Dyhrberg, 2001; Else, 1991; Jackson, 1997; Mikaere, 2003). That this thesis is located within a Māori-centred research approach is a planned oppositional response to the colonial practices and assimilationist polices foundational to adoption practices between 1955 and 1985 where Māori concerns, interests, and the preferences of whānau were either ignored or not accredited equal value with European concerns, interests, and preferences (Bishop, 2004; Durie, 1996; Ruwhiu, 1999).

It is also necessary to address power imbalances between Māori and non-Māori and between participants and the researcher (Bishop, 2004). Arguably, the use of western research methodologies, when researching Māori, has often produced research and knowledge that has misrepresented Māori realities, and aided in the marginalisation of Māori from their own culture and from New Zealand society in general (Durie, 1996; Walker, 1997). Foundational principles of kaupapa Māori and Māori-centred research approaches originate from a desire, by Māori, for Māori control of the research process (Bosmann-Watene, 2009; Moewaka Barnes, 2000; Perkins, 2009; Walsh-Mooney, 2009). This process firmly places Māori, and Māori experiences and concerns, at the centre of the research (Bishop, 2004). Further, as this study focuses on a Māori-specific topic, and participants identify as Māori, the research aims to provide a methodological approach that is cognisant with Māori cultural values and practices. Such an approach recognises and incorporates Māori ontological and epistemological understandings of what constitutes knowledge and ways of knowing what we know. Kaupapa Māori and Māori-centred research approaches recognise and promote all aspects of Māori knowledge and understanding (Cram, 2001; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1996). This

was an important factor in planning for this research as some data included phenomena accepted as legitimate knowledge within a Māori worldview, for example, moemoeā and matakite. Other Māori specific concepts such as whakapapa, tūrangawaewae and whanaungatanga were also important in the participants' narratives. In addition, a number of Māori academics and researchers (see Cram, 2001; Bishop, 1996; Bishop, 2005; Mihaere, 2007; Ruwhiu, 1999) have identified Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's list of seven ethical principles as important considerations when undertaking Māori research and these principles were drawn upon in this study. The principles are:

- Aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people);
- Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is to present yourself face to face to people);
- Titiro, whakarongo, kōrero (look, listen, speak);
- Manaaki ki te tangata (share and host people, be generous);
- Kia tūpato (be cautious)
- Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the mana of people);
- kaua e mahaki (do not flaunt your knowledge) (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005, p.120).

In considering for example the principles of aroha ki te tangata, kia tūpato, and kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata, participants were recruited who self-identify as Māori. As such this study did not prescribe what constitutes a Māori identity. Conventional markers such as te reo Māori, tikanga, and tribal affiliations were not used as definitions that participants must have some degree of competence in, or knowledge about, as this can be another form of marginalisation within Māoridom (O'Regan, 2001; Selby, 1999), and recreates hierarchies of Māori so prevalent within assimilation policies and the adoption process (Else, 1991; Perkins, 2009; Selby, 1999).

However, Māori-centred research does not explicitly exclude the utilisation of western tools and methodologies. Rather, there is a commitment to advance active Māori participation, and to utilise methodologies and methods that are relevant and beneficial to Māori (Bosmann-Watene, 2009). A kaupapa Māori understanding includes ideas about reframing, celebrating survival, and connecting (Rangahau, 2010). As Smith (1999, p. 145) notes:

> *While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity.*

My insider status

I am a Māori woman who was adopted as a child into a Pākehā family. This 'insider' status is the catalyst for my curiosity and ultimately my reason for undertaking this study. My insider status complements a Māori-centred research approach which is interested in, "Who asks the questions? How and why?" (Ruwhiu, 1999, p. 13). Both Māori-centred research and insider research are concerned with providing accountability to the researched group, and pay specific attention to the disparities of power, culture, and class that commonly separate researchers and participants (Taylor, 2011; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1996). The advantages of conducting research from an insider position have been well documented (see Sprague, 2005; Taylor, 2011; Wolcott, 1999). Taylor (2011, p. 6) states: "Such advantages include: deeper levels of understanding afforded by prior knowledge … more detailed consideration of the social actors at the centre of the cultural phenomenon … [and] quicker establishment of rapport and trust between researcher and participants".

There is some critique around the importance and validity of an 'insider' epistemology (Fay, 1996). Fay argues that being an insider or outsider is not elemental to understanding a research topic or research participants, rather good research is based on whether the researcher "has the requisite openness, sensitivity, and acuity to grasp the significance of activities, experiences, and their expression" (Fay, 1996, p. 26). While this may be true, two important points remain. First, historically research conducted by outsiders has often misrepresented and further marginalised minority groups, such as Māori. (Durie, 1996; Walker, 1997). Second, if the research participants at least perceive that they will not be misrepresented because of the researchers 'insider' status, this may allow for less censored sharing which aligns with the concept that research interviews are co-constructed by the researcher and the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993).

It could be argued that insider research produces bias and confounding through decreased objectivity. However, the notion that 'there is never a view from nowhere' is felicitous and all research requires interpretation (Riessman, 1993, p.15). Insider research is therefore particularly transparent, as it clearly positions the researcher within the topic[10].

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[10] Further, while my 'insider' positioning is clearly elucidated, this study also incorporated strong reflexive practices through discussion with my thesis supervisors and peer advisors, and the use of reflexive journaling.

A narrative approach

"…narratives, as sense-making tools, inevitably do things – for people, for social institutions, for culture, and more" (Freeman, 2002, p.9).

This study is primarily interested in the narratives participants used to navigate their adoption experience. There are a number of reasons for this approach. Firstly, people "narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society … this is especially true of difficult life transitions and trauma" (Riessman, 1993, pp. 3 - 4). Cornell identifies difficult life transitions and trauma as "periods of rupture" (2000, p. 45) stating: "individuals turn to narrative as a means of making sense of situations of breakdown or deviation from expectations" (Cornell, 2000, p. 45). Closed stranger adoption is an on-going life event which deviates from the ideal of a child born and raised within the confines of their original family, with trauma a marked feature of the adoption experience (Griffith, 1991; Griffith, 1998; Mead, 1997; Oparah, Shin & Trenka, 2006; Shawyer, 1979; Verrier, 1993; Verrier, 2003; Yngvesson, 2010).

Secondly, narratives can be used by individuals and groups to reposition themselves, and other actors, in a way not previously acknowledged or understood (Cornell, 2005; Lindemann Nelson, 2001). These accounts are counter-narratives that resist dominant narratives generally told and re-told within society. Counter-narratives are political in nature, and telling such stories has been described as "corrective action" (Diehl, 2006, p.1). Within the context of closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1955 and 1985 there were a number of dominant narratives about 'unwanted babies' and 'the right of childless married couples to become parents'. These normalised and legitimated the adoption of many Māori children into Pākehā families, even though closed stranger adoption was oppressive in its secrecy, its disregard for Māori values, and in its silencing of those most affected by the practice. In this context, counter-narratives can also operate as narratives of repair. Narratives of repair act "to resist an oppressive identity and attempt to replace it with one that commands respect" (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 6). In terms of this research, narratives of repair have enabled Māori adopted into Pākehā families to make sense of their cross-cultural adoption experience. These narratives have sought to repair the rupture in the participants' lives when the dominant familial narrative of growing up in a birth family with a shared cultural heritage was not possible.

Thirdly, narratives provide a way to encompass great diversity (Spickard & Burroughs, 2000). Narratives are therefore a useful tool in examining the contradictions and tensions present in the stories told by Māori adopted into Pākehā families. Riessman (1993, p. 5) states that as a

narrative approach "gives prominence to human agency and imagination, it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity". The question of identity as both Māori and an adopted person is central to this study.

People create meaning through narratives, and live their lives according to the stories they tell themselves and the stories that others tell about them (Morris, 2006; Riessman, 2008; Spickard & Burroughs, 2000; Wells, 2011). Stories are central to our sense of identity, and these stories produce meanings in particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. As Bell (2004, p. 122) states: "We don't just construct our sense of identity out of thin air, but out of the ways of thinking and relating that we inherit from the past". Hence, "stories are necessary to weave a web of meaning within which we can live. We all live in story worlds" (Miller Mair, cited in Plummer, 1995, p. 1). Given the dissonance in the literature surrounding adoption (particularly cross-cultural adoptions), narrative approaches offer a way of identifying, analysing, and creating "a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected" (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). This fits with a Māori-centred research approach which aims to "tie all aspects of Māori experiences back together in a purposeful manner" (Ruwhiu, 1999, p. 37). A narrative approach is also "consistent with Māori oral traditions where 'stories' were recognised as calabashes (storage gourds) of social knowledge" (Walker, 1990 cited in Pitama, 1997, p. 77). Further, story-telling and oral histories are viewed by many as an integral part of Indigenous research (Rangahau, 2010).

Research design

This study focuses on the experiences of six self-identified Māori adults who were legally adopted by way of closed stranger adoption into Pākehā families between 1955 and 1985. The method of participation recruitment was by word of mouth and snowball sampling. An email, with the Information Sheet (see Appendix 1), outlining the study and providing my contact details was also sent to a Wellington based Adoption Group and was forwarded on to possible participants.

Participant recruitment

The initial selection criteria used to recruit study participants was that one must be an adult who identified as Māori and who had been adopted into a Pākehā family by way of closed stranger adoption between 1955 and 1985. One respondent for recruitment was excluded as her adoptive mother was Māori (although this respondent argued that her adoptive mother did not strongly identify as Māori and she – the respondent - again felt excluded and

marginalised because of her particular adoption story). In retrospect, her particular adoption story did in fact reflect the narratives other participants told within this study. Namely, the struggle of having lost all knowledge of whakapapa through closed stranger adoption. Another respondent was included in this study even though she could not 'prove' her birth father was Māori. Her inclusion in this study highlights the fact that many Māori children, who were adopted into Pākehā families, may never know for certain of their Māori heritage. Māori children were often told fictitious stories that they were of Spanish or Greek origin, while others were given no identifying information about their Māori fathers at all (Else, 1997).

Interviews were conducted either at the participant's home or at an office on the Massey University Campus in Wellington. This was convenient as the researcher and all the participants resided in the greater Wellington area. Participant biographies are provided in Chapter Four.

The interview process and ethical considerations

Over the last decade, social work researchers and academics have developed an understanding that research ethics and social work ethics have much in common (see Dominelli and Holloway, 2008; Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002; Shaw 2008). Peled & Leichtentritt assert that "social work values direct us to go beyond fairness in our relationship with research participants, and to use the research as an opportunity to contribute to personal and social empowerment" (2002, p. 148). As such, research ethics are always contextual and situated in "moral rules that are grounded in the local community and group understanding" (Denzin, 1997, p. 227). A Māori-centred framework provides a culturally appropriate context of respect for people and their mana; accountability to the participants and their wider community; generosity and hosting people, as well as the care taken with information given. These principles are viewed as necessary ethical considerations which need to be addressed throughout the whole phase of the research (Kvale, 1996).

Before conducting any fieldwork for this research, ethics approval was sought and received from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC)[11]. Prior to recording the one-on-one interviews, the researcher and each participant spent time making introductions. A koha in the form of a grocery voucher was given to each participant in recognition of the time they were giving to the research and as an acknowledgment of their generosity. In some instances other family members or a support person were present. Each participant was

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[11] HEC: Southern A Application 10/16

encouraged to ask questions relating to the study and their subsequent involvement. The Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 2) allowing the interview to be digitally voice recorded and used for the purposes of this research, was reviewed and signed by the participant. It was made clear that the participant could stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time. In order for a sense of power to be promoted, informed consent was designed to be an on-going process, "not a piece of paper or a discrete moment in time" (Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002, p. 156). For instance, the opportunity for participants to withdraw from the study at any time was enhanced as contact between the researcher and the participants was maintained throughout the duration of the research. This aligns with kaupapa Māori principles of showing respect for people, being cautious not to trample over the mana of people, and by not flaunting knowledge, or authority, as the researcher (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005).

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, consideration was given to minimise possible harm for all involved. Participants were informed prior to the interview that they could have a support person or family members with them during the interview. In my professional career as a social worker/kaimanaaki I was confident that I would be able to work through any immediate issues of distress that may result from the interviews. Time was spent after the formal interview to reflect and debrief. In keeping with a Māori-centred approach, food was shared. A list of counsellors working in the field of adoption, and Māori counsellors/ Kaiwhakaruruhau was made available to each participant should they, or any family member, require on-going support.

Confidentiality is also an area which needs to be addressed to minimise potential harm to participants and their family members. To help maintain confidentiality of the data, handwritten notes from interviews, the researcher's reflexive journals, and print outs of transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet. Digital voice recordings and word processed transcripts were stored on the researcher's laptop and locked with a password. To help safeguard the confidentiality of participants, the chosen pseudonyms were used on all documents, and in the participants' brief biographies place names as well as other identifying information was changed.

Empowerment-related aspects of the research process, and research-related benefits for participants and others are the areas of importance within both Māori-centred research, and in social work discussions around research ethics (Durie, 1996; Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002; Perkins, 2009). One noticeable benefit for both the researcher and the participants of this study was being able to meet and hear about the experiences of other Māori who had been adopted into Pākehā families. I hosted a hui at my home where a number of participants

came to share food and stories with each other. Uncovering the silence and isolation of adoption has been voiced by the participants as a healing and valuable experience, some of whom had never previously met with other Māori adopted into Pākehā families. Recording the experiences of Māori adopted into Pākehā families is also viewed as beneficial. Having one's story shared and recorded can be validating. A broader view of the closed stranger adoption practice and insight into the historical, social and political context of Aotearoa New Zealand is also of value. The possibility of further research focussing on future adoption policies which impact on Māori and whānau Māori may also be a research-related benefit.

In-depth interviews of approximately two hours duration were used to collect the data. At the first interview a Participant Consent Form was signed. The interview seemed the most appropriate technique for gathering information from participants because the research is premised on the understanding that conversation is a site for the social construction of self (Morris, 2006), and a narrative approach is also in keeping with Māori oral traditions (Rangahau, 2010; Walker, 1990). All interviews were conducted face to face, and were digitally recorded. Participants were asked to talk about their lives and their experiences of being Māori and adopted into a Pākehā family.

I have previous interview and counselling experience, enjoy the interview process, and was confident in creating an appropriate space for participants to tell their own story. However, I remained mindful that an interview is not a neutral site but is one where meaning is co-constructed by both the participants and the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 1993). This co-construction influences how interviews may be explicated and a particular challenge is to present information in a way that both honours participants' accounts while remaining accessible to others (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011).

The interview guide

Before any interviews were undertaken, I had envisioned my research would give insight as to how a positive Māori identity was maintained when a Māori child was adopted into a Pākehā family. My initial 'angle' was to focus on how a positive Māori identity was formed and maintained when a child had been raised without knowledge of their whānau Māori and their whakapapa. Interviews were to be semi-structured, and I had created an Interview Guide (see Appendix 3) with questions divided into four categories, which specifically addressed cultural resilience and the formation of a Māori cultural identity. The four categories included:

- Adoptive family identity
- Māori cultural identity
- Social factors influencing identity
- Sense of self

However, as the research was exploratory, I wanted the participants to tell their own stories and it was my intention to follow the 'narrative flow' with questions such as: "so tell me more about that?" This approach is not overly intrusive and gives participants the opportunity to share what they consider is most significant and appropriate. The approach is interactive and participatory (Tomlins Jahnke, 1997), and sits well with the principles of "kanohi kitea, … titiro, whakarongo, kōrero" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2005, p. 120).

For this reason I also created an Interview Schedule/Summary (see Appendix 4) which was less structured and comprised of three categories. These categories were:

- Prompts:
    - your childhood;
    - being in a family with Pākehā parents and siblings;
    - understanding your Māori identity;
- Unexpected circumstances: (anything unusual or unexpected which happens during the interview).
- Summary impressions: (interviewer's impressions immediately following the interview).

The interviews always began with the first question from the Interview Guide: "Where would you like to begin with your adoption story?" It became clear that this opening question prompted the participants to draw upon a life-time of stories around their adoption experiences which they wanted to share. The participants and I shared adoption stories, sometimes with prompts from the Interview Schedule. The interviews all concluded with the last question from the Interview Guide: "Is there anything else we have not talked about that you would like to share?" In this way I found I was gathering rich, in-depth, and complex narratives.

Analysing the data

Riessman (2008, p.4) has noted that "just as interview participants tell stories, investigators construct stories from their data". Transcripts were made of the interviews and a thematic

analysis was completed[12]. The transcripts were read and the interview recordings listened to numerous times over several weeks. From this exercise a list of words, phrases, notes on emotion, and historical placement were made and finally a grid of recurring narrative themes was created. Through this process, a central idea expressed by the participants was identified: 'walking between worlds'. This idea captured the way the participants' narratives navigated the intersections between their experiences of living within Māori and Pākehā worlds, and between their birth and adoptive families. From this central idea, two main themes emerged: 'belonging' and 'whakapapa'. 'Belonging' and 'whakapapa' were identified as crucial to how the participants made sense of their adoption experience, as Māori and as adopted people.

The concept of navigation was also important in the analysis as it recognised the participants' agency as they sought to repair the rupture in their lives caused by closed stranger adoption. Through their narratives they navigated between, and within, the tensions and contradictions that stemmed from growing up in an adoptive family. The concept of navigation straddles between fixed and fluid identities without judging either, and can take us towards a fixed or known point as well as taking us to a number of different and less certain points in describing the multiple realities for Māori adopted into Pākehā families. Navigation was also important as the participants' narratives were at times inconsistent and contradictory. As the Personal Narrative Group (1989) notes "when talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths … They give us the truths of our experiences" (p. 22 italics in original).

During the analysis, care was taken not to fragment "the whole interview, the whole story, the whole body of data" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 520). While my aim was to 'give voice' to the experiences of Māori adopted into Pākehā families throughout this study, I remained cautious in the achievability of this ideal. As Riessman (1993, p. 8) argues: "We cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret. Representational decisions cannot be avoided; they enter at numerous points in the research process". With this in mind, I took utmost care in constructing the brief biography of each participant. Each biography was given to the corresponding participant for comment and all participants approved of how they had been represented. At this stage participants also had thought of a pseudonym they would like used in this research.

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[12] Braun & Clarke (2006) assert that undertaking thematic analysis is a basic method of analysis within qualitative research. Identifying themes that are common in the interview transcripts and identifying quotations to support those themes is a common form of analysing research interviews (Abell & Myers, 2008).

However, the findings and analysis chapters (Chapter Five: Belonging, Chapter Six: Whakapapa) reflect less of how the participants may want to be known, and reflect more my analysis of their narratives. Although the participants were contacted prior to a final draft and had the opportunity to view their narratives in the context of these chapters, no participant thought changes would be necessary as they 'trusted' the researcher's motivations. In this instance, my 'insider' positioning and the fact that I had followed a Māori-centred approach whereby follow-up face to face meetings and one informal group meeting over shared food had taken place had provided a space for reciprocity and open and on-going communication and trust to develop.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods used in this research. The rationale for working within a Māori-centred research approach, while acknowledging kaupapa Māori principles and utilising western research tools was explained. The thematic narrative approach used in the research was explained and shown to be important in identifying the central idea of 'walking between worlds'.

The research methods used in this study sit well within a Māori-centred research approach. Participants were able to tell their stories, rather than have to respond to over prescribed structures where the researcher sets the perimeters. This is also a resistant stance to the assimilationist policies which prescribed whose stories were told, and within which perimeters, in the history of closed stranger adoptions in Aotearoa New Zealand. This approach has enabled an exploration of the narratives Māori adopted into Pākehā families use to make sense of their adoption experience, as Māori and as adopted people

In the next chapter a short biography of each of the six participants who were interviewed as part of this study are presented.

Chapter Four: The Participants

Introduction

This chapter presents short biographical accounts of each of the six participants who agreed to be interviewed for this study. These accounts are presented as a way of acknowledging the participants' stories as a unified whole, and places each unique story in the context of closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1955 and 1985. These introductions also provide background to the subsequent findings and analysis chapters; Chapter Five: 'Belonging' and Chapter Six: 'Whakapapa'.

Ana

I was quite fascinated really when my son was born because for the very first time ever, I looked like someone … and that was lovely.

Ana's work within the arts community frequently requires her to travel overseas, leaving behind her partner and four children. She is comfortable in the lifestyle she has created and views her 50 years of life experience as giving her the time to reflect and be philosophical about her adoption. "I'm proud of who I am. It's been a bit of a struggle sometimes but as I got older, I will tell you that it's nobody's fault. There's a whole lot of circumstances that simply exist, but what you make of that, I understand now, it's what you do with it, that's the important bit".

Born to Māori parents in 1960, Ana spent her first few months in numerous foster homes until she was formally adopted into a middle-class Pākehā family. The family already consisted of three children, but due to ill-health Ana's adoptive mother was advised to adopt if she and her husband wanted more children. Even though Māori and Pacific babies were harder to place, the family were happy to adopt Ana.

Ana remembers feeling totally part of the family and being given the same love and affection as her older siblings. However outside of the family Ana recalls being treated differently. At kindergarten she was sent home from a friend's house when it was realised her friend had brought a Māori home to play. She also found out, in later years, that some friends of her adoptive parents stopped associating with the family because of her adoption. Evidently

these friends hadn't approved of the family adopting a Māori child. Ana says of her adoption, "my parents were particularly brave, and slightly naïve as well".

Struggling in her formative teenage years to come to terms with her adoption and her ethnic identity Ana searched for her birth parents and other siblings. She was encouraged and supported by her adoptive mother. Ana made connections with her birth whānau, has undertaken Māori studies, and is now comfortable within herself. She does not beat herself up about not being a good enough Māori, daughter, sister, or live under other people's expectations. Her sense of acceptance is illustrated in the name she legally chose for herself. It includes the various names given both by her birth and adoptive parents. However, this hasn't been understood by everyone in her adoptive family. When called by her 'old' name Ana responds "I don't answer to that name anymore. That person doesn't exist anymore". The name change for her "feels so much better".

Ana has encouraged her own children to be true to themselves and she has supported them in connecting with their Māori culture and her birth families. She expects her children to carry the whānau mantle as "their given right".

Carole

I can still feel like I don't belong. There's all those core things inside of me. And it did matter. I think when they put me in with a Pākehā family, because my mother was Pākehā, they just assumed that I would be white and I wasn't even. Ever. You know. I was a little brown girl. Yeah. I still walk nowhere. I still walk in between worlds.

Carole is a successful business woman and an accomplished academic. She was born in the early 1960s and was adopted, soon after her birth, into a Pākehā family where there were already two older adopted children.

From a young age Carole knew she was 'different'. The others in her family were white and she was brown. When Carole asked her adoptive parents why this was, she was told they had tipped a bucket of brown paint on her. Her older siblings would sometimes tease her with racist taunts.

Carole's adoptive parents were both alcoholics and she remembers a childhood of deprivation. "… a 'Once Were Warriors' Pākehā version…". Friendships during her Intermediate and College years were mostly with Māori whose families also came from "the wrong side of the tracks". Carole joined the school kapa haka group and learnt te reo Māori. However, Carole felt she didn't fully belong. This was especially noticeable when she was

questioned about her whakapapa. She found Māori, when unable to place her within the context of whakapapa, would shut off from her. "They stopped recognizing me ... It was quite a difficult thing".

Carole is a woman of colour, who relates and mixes with Māori but has never felt she can authentically claim herself to be Māori because she just doesn't know for sure. Describing the inner turmoil this has created, "at times it was utterly heart-breaking", she has spent many years struggling to come to terms with the missing pieces of her cultural identity.

Meeting her birth mother, who is Pākehā, has helped in giving Carole a sense of self and a "groundedness". However, to date, she still has been unable to trace her biological father and so continues to wonder if she is Māori or not, even though she has the "heart sense" that she is.

Cordelia

There were two of me and one hated the other one.

Cordelia now knows that she was probably conceived through the incestuous rape of her mentally ill and institutionalised mother. Her mother had several children and all were adopted out. Cordelia was adopted into a Pākehā family which would eventually consist of an adopted Samoan sister and two younger siblings born to the adoptive parents.

The two adopted sisters were treated very differently from the other two siblings and received severe beatings which often left them bleeding, with bruises, and in one instance Cordelia's arm was broken. Much of the physical abuse was carried out by their adoptive mother and justified as religious training. The family held strict religious beliefs and were part of a close-knit religious community. Cordelia remembers other people being aware of the extreme physical abuse but she and her adopted sister were instructed to forgive and be grateful for the home they'd been given. While Cordelia describes her childhood as "miserable" she believes that her musical ability and the intervention of some concerned adults during her childhood made it possible for her to achieve to exceptionally high standards both musically and academically.

As a young adult Cordelia was able to reconcile her Christian and Māori values and became a voice in her community for both. She married a man from a large Māori whānau. While attracted to the family being tūturu Māori there were also unresolved issues of abuse. She

decided to stay in the marriage because of her Christian values and also because she wanted to give her children something she had never had – a place to belong, and access to their Māori culture. Despite this desire the marriage dissolved and Cordelia remained on her own, raising her four children, for the next fifteen years.

During this time Cordelia had more contact with her birth family, caring for her dying birth mother, and connecting with other birth siblings. An attraction developed between herself and one birth brother and both sought counselling and advice. They learnt that genetic sexual attraction (GSA) is not uncommon during adoption reunions. It is not something they had planned for and committing to a relationship as a couple, which is now in its fifth year, has cost them dearly – access to their children, loss of lucrative careers, living a secret life, and for Cordelia being cut off from her church family and supports. Cordelia views the situation as caused by a departmental decision – to have children adopted out from the same mother with no knowledge of each other growing up. "I don't know him as my brother, I don't know anyone as my brother".

Cordelia is very much aware of the impact adoption has had, not only on her and her birth siblings, but on all the generations involved.

Elizabeth

I feel totally surrounded by people who support me.

Elizabeth was born in the early 1970s. She was adopted and grew up in a very stable and loving Christian family in a white, middle-class community. She always knew she was adopted, but didn't know her father was Māori until she gained access to her adoption records as an adult.

Both Elizabeth and her adoptive family were surprised to find out about her Māori heritage, as this information had not been passed onto them at the time of her adoption. Elizabeth regrets that she did not have this information growing up, and believes had she known about her Māori ancestry she would have actively pursued involvement in things Māori when she was younger. "I missed out on Māori culture. I missed out for twenty years".

On meeting her whānau Māori, Elizabeth talked about knowing she belonged but having a crisis of confidence as suddenly she was in situations, such as tangihanga, where she felt

out of place and had no prior knowledge or experience. Elizabeth remembers it took a while to find her feet, "I didn't even know what an iwi was!"

However, the love and support of both her adoptive family and her birth families have made the process of integrating her Māori identity into a positive experience. Elizabeth's birth father is a well-known and respected representative within his iwi and has openly welcomed Elizabeth's birth mother and her adoptive parents onto his marae and included them in hui and other celebrations. Elizabeth attributes much of the inclusion she has experienced within te ao Māori to knowledge of her whakapapa, "If you can name where you're from you're totally accepted. You're in".

Elizabeth is widely travelled, has a professional career, is married and has three children. Elizabeth and her Pākehā partner have learnt te reo Māori and their children are at kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa. They want their children to know their Māori culture as a "given right" and not something they have had to work and struggle for, as Elizabeth feels she has had to.

Kaare

Validation's what I've always craved for.

The term takatāpui encapsulates for Kaare both his sexual and Māori identities. He was adopted as a baby into a Pākehā family and was raised on a South Island farm with two younger siblings born to his adoptive parents.

Kaare remembers having dreams and talking with tūpuna when he was young, but never really understood that he was adopted and that he was Māori until he was about nine years old and wondered why he didn't look like other family members. Kaare recalls that his adoptive father "used to jump in and stop people from being too racist", which would often happen with strangers who didn't know the family. In such situations Kaare would often be ignored, but at other times he was verbally abused.

At secondary school, working through his Māori identity was secondary to working through his sexual identity, which for him was much more pressing. As a young man he left the farm and became involved in "the gay scene in Wellington, the sex industry, the queen scene, the gang scene…" This was his first experience when "Māoritanga became a living vibrant thing because I was part of it". Much of his knowledge of tikanga and te reo Māori was learnt on the streets.

Kaare reconnected with his Pākehā birth mother as an adult, but has been unable to locate his birth father. Not knowing his whakapapa has been problematic when interacting with other Māori, "I can't reach out to another Māori, whakapapa to them…" Not knowing his whakapapa has also meant that Kaare feels there are certain things he cannot fully undertake "… if I'm actually learning Māori I must learn to get my whakapapa first, and go back to the marae and learn … I have no right to go into another iwi and learn the reo there…".

Kaare is planning his own big birthday celebration in the year ahead where he will bring together both his birth mother's family and his adoptive family. He has always known he has a special gift for drawing people together, yet his deepest longing remains, "the hope that there would be whānau out there that would actually come", thus providing him with knowledge of his whakapapa.

Marion

I've built my own history, and I don't know if it's for me yet, or if it's for my children … I was trying to attach myself to things that had been taken away from me. I desperately wanted to be part of my culture.

Marion is married with five children, and has two grandchildren she loves spending time with. Her family have supported her in her search for her birth families and have integrated her dual Cook Island Māori and New Zealand Māori cultures into their everyday lives. She has many years nursing experience and continues to work part-time.

Marion was adopted by an elderly, middle class couple who had four of their own children. She was brought up on a farm where she "had lovely clothes [and] an expectation to do well". There was no mention of adoption until Marion was ten and asked her adoptive father why she looked different from the rest of her family. She was told it was because she was 'chosen'. Marion later learned that her birth mother was an 'Islander', an unwed mother who had tried to keep her but was financially unable to support a baby. Marion's birth father was in prison and so she was placed for adoption at six months.

Marion felt a closeness to her adoptive father as her birth mother had once worked for him briefly. He described Marion as "the spitting image" of her birth mother. Although wanting to meet with her birth mother, out of her own sense of duty and respect, she never began a search for her until both her adoptive parents had passed away. Gaining knowledge that her

birth mother had actually come from the Cook Islands, Marion started attending Cook Island functions hoping to somehow reunite with her. It was almost ten years before such a reunion took place.

Marion also met her mother's six other children. These children had always been aware of having another sister and were delighted when she finally appeared in their lives. Marion also discovered her birth father to be New Zealand Māori. His family too knew of her existence. Unfortunately Marion's birth father had passed away before she could meet him. She has visited the urupā where he is laid to rest.

Marion has actively pursued and maintained connections with both her Cook Island Māori and New Zealand Māori families and cultures. She regularly makes trips back to her tūrangawaewae on both sides of her family. She collects books and artefacts so she can learn and hold on to tangible expressions of her cultures. Her children have been given both Cook Island and Māori names by their Nan and Great Aunt.

Marion believes that even when she didn't know who her birth parents were, she was drawn to certain things in her life because of her ancestry; the religious beliefs she eventually adopted; kapa haka; and her sense of belonging when on marae. She is very much respected in both her birth families. Her husband and children are proud of her. Her children are also proud of their dual Māori and Cook Island heritage.

Conclusion

These biographies situate the participants' lives in both a personal and social context and were written to acknowledge the participants and the totality of their lived experience. The narrative analysis presented in the following chapters further explores the practice and impact of closed stranger adoption in the participants' lives.

Chapter Five: Belonging

Introduction

> *In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage, to know who we are and where we have come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning; no matter what our attainments in life, there is the most disquieting loneliness (from 'Roots' by Alex Haley, in Freundlich, 2007, p. 3).*

Closed stranger adoption is a life event which deviates from the expected life story of a child born and raised within the confines of their original family. In undertaking this research it became clear that for Māori adopted into Pākehā families there are a number of complexities and contradictions associated with their particular adoption experience. This exploratory study seeks to address the question:

How do Māori adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption make sense of their experience as Māori and as adopted people?

In the following two chapters, the narratives of Māori adults who were adopted into Pākehā families as children are explored. The complexities and contradictions in the participants' narratives reflect the complexities and contradictions Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families have navigated throughout their lives as Māori, and as adopted people. The rich, in-depth narratives cluster around the idea of 'walking between worlds', with two major themes of 'belonging' and 'whakapapa' identified in the analysis process. This chapter (Chapter Five) focuses on the narratives associated with 'Belonging' and the next chapter (Chapter Six) will focus on 'Whakapapa'.

In relation to their sense of 'belonging', participants told stories on a continuum between 'belonging' and 'not belonging', both within their birth families and their adoptive families and within Māori and Pākehā cultures. Specific narratives included: 'How you came to belong to us'; 'The gratitude story - I was saved'; 'The same yet different'; 'Breaking out of the pretence'; 'The physicality of belonging'; 'Death - the second leaving'; 'Navigating the unfamiliar'; 'Navigating the taboo'; and 'I was remembered - there was a place waiting for me', and 'Walking between worlds' which was the central idea that the sub-themes came out of. These narratives offered ways of navigating the rupture which occurred when the more expected familial narrative, of growing up within one's birth family with a shared cultural heritage was not possible.

How you came to belong to us

In general, adopted people are given an adoption story of how they came to be adopted into 'their' particular family. I use the term 'given' as Ann Nation highlights such stories were "open to the different perspectives and beliefs of the adopted parents and the vagaries of society's views at the time" (personal communication, November 27, 2010). While some stories were based on fact, other stories were manufactured in the belief that what was being told was beneficial to the child. For example, Māori children were sometimes told that they were of Spanish or Greek descent, as this was viewed as 'better' than being Māori. (Else, 1991). Else (1991) and Griffith (1991) note that adoptive parents wanting to do the right thing by their adopted child were advised by social workers of the time to tell the child that they were special or chosen. The 'how you came to belong to us' stories remain vivid in the memories of participants:

> *Cordelia: … my adopted family had told me that my mum couldn't look after me and that's the reason why they had me and I was loved and I was special.*

> *Marion: [My adoptive father] told me that I was chosen. That was his words, I was chosen; no mention of the word adoption. So my picture that I built up was these rows of babies somewhere, I'm assuming a hospital, and so he just went along and picked that baby.*

> *Kaare: I was told that I was picked up off the special counter … I had to go to the supermarket for babies and I was on the special counter so they got me ... And that's it, how they chose me. And my mum and my dad chose me over all the other children that were there.*

These narratives reflect the ways in which families who adopted children built their own truths for the children they adopted. One way Māori adopted into Pākehā families chose to navigate the 'chosen' narrative was with the counter narrative of being a rebel. It is a way an adopted person can assert their own identity and test how 'special' they are, and perhaps how wanted. According to Ann Nation, some form of rebellion is common for most adolescence, but for adopted people this need to rebel is to be expected as "a normal consequence of an un-normal situation" (personal communication, November 27, 2010).

Kaare: At one stage, yeah when I was, I don't know how old, a bit of a kick back stage of, oh yeah special; I'll show you how special I am. 'Hmm' and away I went. Self-destruct.

A 'rebel' narrative was one way Māori adopted into Pākehā families tried to make sense of where they belonged. Cordelia illustrates how difficult it is for Māori adopted into Pākehā families, especially when there is little or no guidance available, to either the child or the adoptive family.

Cordelia: So I was special! Felt like special needs! And I stuck out a mile all the time, and I had a strange name! The Māori didn't know what to make of me; thought I was a Pākehā. And I always felt too Māori to be Pākehā, and too Pākehā to be Māori, so what does that mean? No-one told me that was actually okay.

The rebellion response to the 'chosen' narrative also gives the adopted person a voice. In contrast to being 'given' an adoption story, rebellion is a way to assert one's own story. It draws attention to the 'secret' and the 'silence' associated with being adopted (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1991). Consequently it is a way adopted people can position themselves, even if only temporarily, outside of their adoptive family.

Ana: When I got into my teenage years it [adoption] helped me even be more rebellious. … you go through those formative years. I think they must have been very difficult for all children but I wore my adoption sometimes like a badge, as a, "Oh you think you've had a bad time ... you know, this is me!"

Part of navigating a sense of belonging for Māori adopted into Pākehā families involved recognition that they had been adopted. Utilising a rebellion narrative made it possible to make tangible the fact that the adopted person had a connection with another, even if unknown, family.

Marion: Suddenly I didn't get on with my [adoptive] mother … whenever we had a row or something, it was always, "Oh well, you didn't want to adopt me anyway," and the adoption thing often came out in arguments. "Well, I'm gonna go and find my family" type stuff. It was always sitting there.

Adoptive parents were encouraged by those working within adoptions to tell the adopted child that they were especially chosen, while the actual adoption experience remained

masked in secrecy (Else, 1991). One way that the participants were able to create an identity and to challenge the secrecy of adoption was by rebelling in some way within the adoptive family. Rebellion made adoption tangible and allowed the adopted person to create their own identity as opposed to the identity, which was imposed through the adoption process.

The gratitude story - I was saved

The 'chosen' narrative implies being saved and being given a better life. It is not surprising then that another way Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families have navigated their adoption experience is through a narrative of gratitude.

A 'gratitude' narrative allowed participants to express a genuine gratitude to their adoptive parents for the opportunities and love they received. Such narratives recognised that in many ways Māori adopted into Pākehā families did have a 'better life' because of their adoption. This is particularly true in terms of material wealth and access to education and more middle-class opportunities (Else, 1991). In this study all participants hold a university degree or have some form of tertiary education.

The gratitude narrative also sets up a comparison between the adoptive family and the birth family which was ultimately told at a societal level and replayed and retold at both the familial and individual levels (Else, 1991). On meeting a birth sister who has a drug habit Marion confessed:

> *Marion: I kept on thinking, "I could have been here too". You know. And I was ever so grateful … and here's me always thinking I had missed out … in some ways [I have missed out], but I think I've done alright."*

To be grateful is an expectation directly or indirectly placed upon the adopted person by the adoptive family and society in general (Shawyer, 1979). Cordelia gives an example of this:

> *Cordelia: The principal stepped in and told Child, Youth and Family that actually this was a spiritual problem not a physical problem, and that the parents were very good; it was just us, two [both adopted] very ungrateful basically nigger kids! They didn't call us that but that's definitely the implication, and gave me a big book on un-forgiveness and said that the problem was mine and that I had created the issue [of being physically abused].*

Within the gratitude narratives told by Māori adopted into Pākehā families there was a tension between the gratitude which was expressed and the grief over the loss that inevitably was also part of the adoption story. These tensions reveal themselves in the participants' lives.

> *Ana: …my mother probably did me lots of favours by adopting me out. However, you know the thing is that even though I have [birth] brothers and sisters, and I love them; I really do love them ... I don't have any history with them.*

The loss experienced by Ana is associated with missing out on a shared history with her birth siblings. The gratitude narrative is a useful tool to compensate for the loss Māori adopted into Pākehā families have experienced at both a familial and cultural level. Elizabeth gives a further example of communicating grief over the cultural loss experienced as a Māori child adopted into a Pākehā family while framing this grief within a gratitude narrative.

> *Elizabeth: …there weren't too many highs or too many lows [within the adoptive family]. It was really stable and caring, and you know I had lots of opportunities … Like, I guess my adoption, it's really sweet … But the thing is, the only thing that I'm annoyed about is that I wasn't told that I was Māori … I just can't believe that no-one thought that was important enough to tell me.*

> *Elizabeth: I feel like I missed out for 20 years … you miss all those things that just happen in life … I missed that. I missed that with [my birth mother] … I missed it with [my birth father] and I missed it being Māori.*

Interestingly, becoming more proficient in some aspects of Māori cultural knowledge than siblings who remained within the Māori birth family, could also be part of the gratitude narrative for Māori adoptees. However, the gratitude narrative also maintained a sense of underlying loss. For example in the following two extracts, note Marion's beginning phrase "… I knew I had to *try* and feel a part of it" (italics added) and Ana commenting, *"whatever* that means" (italics added).

> *Marion: It was a journey I knew I had to take to try and feel a part of it … but I've probably done more, from what I can gather, because of the adoption thing. I think I've done more in my learning of my culture and my language than I think people who have grown up with it.*

Ana: For me, I clearly identify as being from my whānau. I clearly identify as being Māori and again for my children; however … I always used to resent that I didn't know my language, my family, and all of that sort of stuff and use that element of blame … But as I got older I also look at my brothers and sisters and understand, well they didn't actually have language either, no-one spoke Māori at home, that they weren't pā kids, so they didn't all hang around on the pā and they didn't hear - intrinsically pick up … all of those tikanga things and they don't understand a lot of that stuff. So, on that basis they're pretty much the same [as me]. In fact, in lots of ways because of varsity, I know slightly more, whatever that means.

These narratives demonstrate the distinction between the lived experience of growing up Māori, as opposed to the learnt experience of things Māori. The lived experience can be defined as being comfortable around other Māori and in Māori specific settings, such as tangihanga. For Māori who did not have the opportunity to associate with other Māori, or access to Māori cultural activities, they may be judged as culturally lacking by both Māori and Pākehā (Borell, 2005; Karetu, 1990). Given the aggressive assimilationist nature of closed stranger adoption (Mikaere, 2003) such judgements seem particularly grievous. As Bell (2004, p.124) notes Māori pressured to assimilate are later "patronised and belittled for doing so". Having to learn 'their Māoritanga' as an adult is not easy for Māori adopted into Pākehā families (Mead, 2003).

Cordelia: I learnt my Māoritanga under extreme duress and stress.

Elizabeth: I'd never been to a marae and I'd never eaten hāngī; I've never done anything about that cause I just didn't have those opportunities. And I felt when I had met my Māori family I was like, I've heard about these things; what are they?

The gratitude narrative also plays a role in making sure the adopted person remains loyal to, or mindful of, the adoptive parents. This is most notable when participants talked about remaining conscious of how a possible reunion with their birth parents may affect their adoptive families. While Māori adopted into Pākehā families wanted to know where they had come from and to make connections with their birth families they were aware of the potential pain that searching for a birth parent could bring to the adoptive parents. Not wanting to hurt the adoptive parents resulted in Marion waiting many years before she began the search for her birth mother.

> *Marion: I was very close to my [adoptive] father … I think he wanted to say more [about my adoption and birth mother] but he didn't want to say more, and I never wanted to hurt him, so that's why I never did anything [to search for my birth mother] while they [adoptive parents] were alive. I thought, "I can't do that at the moment".*

Elizabeth talks about being respectful of her adoptive parents when contact had been made with her birth families:

> *Elizabeth: It all was like kind of being respectful and having time for my family that I grew up with. I was also wanting to know the new families that were like there and not wanting to exclude anyone, and that took ages.*

A gratitude narrative affirms the societal prescription of adoption creating a 'normal' family (Else, 1991), and positions the adopted person within this context. Through this narrative the adopted person is compelled to show gratitude for having been chosen, which in turn requires certain behaviours. Within a 'normal' family a child would not have another set of parents to search for. Māori adopted into Pākehā families are acutely aware of the expectation that they should be grateful to their adoptive parents and any search for their birth parents should not disrupt their adoptive family.

The same yet different

A foundational principle within closed stranger adoption is that the legal status of the adopted child becomes "as if born to" the adoptive parents (Else, 1991; Griffith, 1991), thus creating a 'normal family'. Several commentators emphasise that closed stranger adoption based on this foundation fostered secrecy, pretence and lies (Gillard-Glass & England, 2000; Griffith, 1991). It perpetuated the ideal that adopted children would fit seamlessly into their adoptive family and that it was best, for everyone involved, to pretend the adoption had never happened, or at least play down the fact that it had (Else, 1991; Shawyer, 1979).

This story of fitting in with, or being the same as, the adoptive family has a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it gives credibility to the thinking of the time that closed stranger adoption was in the best interests of all parties concerned. Secondly, it reassures the adoptive parents that they have done a good job; that the child has felt loved and is well adjusted. One of the hidden pressures placed upon the adopted person is to be grateful for having been chosen.

Consequently, one way this gratitude can be shown is by fitting into, and being the same as, the adoptive family.

For Māori adopted into Pākehā families there were stories of being the same as other members of the adoptive family. Such a narrative positions the adopted person as grateful and provides recognition that the adopted parents had loved and raised the adopted child "as if born to" them. However, the adopted child cannot be protected from those outside of the family noticing, and at times acting upon the child presenting as physically different from the adoptive family.

> Ana: I never looked in the mirror, standing beside any of my brothers and sisters, and ever felt any different from them, never. It was only when I was old enough to go to school that it became apparent that, apparently there was a difference between us.

> Carole: I'd get lots of responses from people like "ahhh is that your family?" You could tell I didn't fit in.

The physical difference is relayed back to the cross-culturally adopted child by others and undermines the construct of the 'normal' family. This is an additional factor in the lives of children adopted cross-culturally (Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006). Griffith (1991) also draws attention to the fact that the adopting family is usually unprepared for the direct racial discrimination and negative community reaction the adopting of a non-white child into a white family may solicit.

Even when adopted people have felt they have had the very best of opportunities and the most loving of homes, the truth of their difference still emerges in their stories.

> Kaare: … even though they said that I was loved, I never felt I belonged. Yeah, there was just something that wasn't there.

> Cordelia: When they chose who I was to go to, I was given completely different people who were not emotional other than angry, who didn't know how to deal with feelings, who were very staid and very proper … I must have been a shit load of a shock to them.

While siblings born to the same parents may be very different, adoption and being a Māori child within a Pākehā family can be used to legitimise any difference. Speaking out about any

differences between the adopted person and the adoptive family provides an opportunity for Māori adopted into Pākehā families to find a voice within the secrecy surrounding adoption, thus challenging the status quo of closed stranger adoption practices and outcomes. Alternatively, the adopted person may through the 'same yet different' narrative express a reason why they never felt they truly belonged. It is one way in which 'not belonging' can be navigated. It can also expose the comparisons, and assumptions society generally made between the birth and adoptive families. One common assumption fostered from the late 1950s was that children put up for adoption, and Māori children in particular, came from "bad blood" (A. Nation, personal communication, November 27, 2010) and this idea was central to the stigma associated with illegitimacy and adoption within Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1950s – 1970s. (see Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002 and Shawyer, 1979).

Another dominant view informing the practice of closed stranger adoption was that 'nurture' could overcome 'nature'. This positioned the adopted person within one of two possible narratives. First, if all went well with the adoption placement, the adoptive parents had done a good job and their nurture had overcome any inherent bad nature. The adopted child had indeed been 'saved' (Else, 1991). Alternatively, if the inherent 'bad' nature of the adopted child had not been able to be tamed, and the adopted child remained in some ways outside of the adopted family, then adopted children often faced the burden of any misbehaviour or psychological issues being interpreted as originating from the inherited 'bad blood' of their birth families, rather than being a response to the trauma of adoption (Stark & Stark, 2006; Verrier, 1993).

> *Ana: … what do they say, nature or nurture eh? And at the end of the day, however you nurture your child I think nature takes over because I literally was the black sheep of my family. I was brought up exactly the same as my brothers and sisters but I don't share any of their views particularly; you know, and we had the same schooling, the same parenting, the same love and affection.*

Ana provides an example of how pervasive the nature/nuture debate was and how participants retold narratives, that they had acquired, consciously or unconsciously, within the narratives of their adoptive families or from larger societal narratives.

Under closed stranger adoption the adopted child was to become "as if born to" the adoptive parents. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, as for other cross-culturally adopted people, this is never fully possible. Even if the adoptive family is 'colour-blind', society most certainly is not (Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006; Yngvesson, 2010).

Breaking out of the pretence

For Māori adopted into Pākehā families it has been necessary to navigate the different ways they do not 'belong' to their adoptive family. One particular narrative used is 'breaking out of the pretence', which allows for differences to be acknowledged and the feelings of rejection and isolation, often told in adoption narratives, to be expressed (Trenka, Oparah & Shin, 2006, Verrier, 1993; Verrier, 2003; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000).

One of the pretences, or secrets, in closed stranger adoption originates in the production of a new birth certificate containing the adoptive parent's details and the subsequent closure of files containing any information about the birth parents. (Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). The Adult Adoption Information Act 1985 made it possible for adopted people, twenty years of age and over, to gain access to their original birth certificate and to the names of their birth parents. Naming or renaming oneself is a way Māori adopted into Pākehā families have been able to reassert their identity in another form. For Ana it was important for her to change from the name she was given when she was adopted to a name which reflected both her family of origin and her adoptive family, even though such a decision wasn't accepted by everyone in her adoptive family.

Ana: I'm going to change my name … I'm gonna go and be who I need to be.

Throughout the participants' narratives names and naming were important to the participants' navigation of their identities. Several participants chose pseudonyms for this study from names that were given to them at birth or which in some way connected them with their birth mother. Narratives around names and naming make it possible for Māori adopted into Pākehā families to compose a narrative repair over the loss of their original birth identity.

Confronting a loss of identity, and acknowledging a lack of 'belonging' is painful, but allows a counter-narrative which expresses the realities of loss associated with adoption to be articulated and explored. Below is an example of a participant directly acknowledging that she did not belong to the adoptive family.

Cordelia: I'm not going to try anymore to belong to you [adoptive family]. I'm going to accept that actually, I don't.

Cordelia: I had no-one and I don't think people know when they're not adopted what it's like to have no-one, to literally feel like you have no-one who has your back.

Such disconnection can be narrated as rejection. A 'rejection' narrative mirrors the wider societal narrative during the period of closed stranger adoptions which presented unmarried mothers as having 'unwanted babies' (Else, 1991; Shawyer, 1979).

> *Kaare: … just that core thing of rejection and not belonging, and not feeling adequate enough, and not feeling like I could be a positive in the equation. I always felt like I was a negative, a subtraction as such, or something that was distracting from the actual flow.*

> *Carole: I can still feel rejected in a second, I can still feel like I don't belong. There's all those core things inside of me.*

> *Ana: … adoption really does do your head in babe, that whole being given away and abandonment and there is a real level about that …*

The sense of rejection can also be traced back to the 'chosen narrative' where adopted people "personalise their placement for adoption as rejection. To be chosen they must first be rejected" (Kaplan, 1991, sec. 2, p. 1). This is yet another way a comparison is constructed between the bad (rejecting) birth family and the good (choosing) adoptive family. Even when this comparison is not directly made by anyone, the adopted person is likely to internalise this social script (Griffith, 1991; Shawyer, 1979).

A narrative repair to 'not belonging' within the adoptive family is to find 'belonging' with the birth family. Māori people adopted into Pākehā families told stories about wanting to belong and wanting to reconnect with their families of origin.

> *Kaare: I hold on to the hope that there would be whānau out there that would actually come, but it's just that in my experiences I can't see my lot too forthcoming.*

> *Cordelia: I so wanted them [birth family] to take me with them; being my family, cause I know this lot [adoptive family] ain't.*

Regardless of the quality of their adoption experience a deep sense of rejection and loss were constant themes presented in the narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā families. This remained a catalyst for participants wanting to seek a connection with their birth families, and any reconnection would also potentially connect participants with their Māori

cultural heritage. Breaking out of the pretence of adoption, and the hope of a positive reunion experience, was used as a way to navigate the narratives of rejection and loss.

The physicality of belonging

The physicality of belonging refers to a range of physical attributes and connections. Firstly, there is the issue of physical resemblance which in a western context is linked to essentialist ideas used to express power as well as connection, and raises issues of 'blood', 'race', and 'colour'. Secondly, there is the experience of touch. Touch recognises the embodied physicality of kinship relations and connections. Māori adopted into Pākehā families told stories about physicality and how this was significant in their relationships within their adoptive families, in their reunion stories, and when they had their own children.

Belonging through sight

Skin colour and physical features are particularly relevant in the narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā families as physical features were an important part of matching babies with families. For Māori adoptees, a physical dissimilarity with their adoptive Pākehā family could elicit curious comments and racist reactions. The lack of physical resemblance within the adopted family contributed to a narrative of disconnection for participants.

> *Carole: … we used to have a little book called 'The Little Black Sambo', and my brother, my older brother wrote on the top of it 'nigger' and said it was me, and put my name there. … and those are my first memories of being different.*

> *Elizabeth: They didn't look like me … I always knew I was adopted … so I always knew I was different from them [adoptive family].*

> *Marion: I didn't look like anybody else. I was darker than everybody else [in my adoptive family].*

These comments illustrate how Māori adopted into Pākehā families recognised that they looked different from their adoptive families, which led them to view themselves as different. Thus, a significant divide was created.

Conversely, being physically able to connect to someone through sharing a similar physical appearance holds special significance in the narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā

families. It provides a narrative repair to not belonging with, or being different from, the adoptive family. This type of connection provides a healing narrative during the reunion process and provides a sense of belonging. Elizabeth explains:

> *Elizabeth: So the sense of belonging when I met [my birth mother's] family, was a sense of physically and mentally having a connection that I didn't have with my family growing up…*

For Marion, being "the spitting image" of her birth mother facilitated her being able to locate her birth family.

> *Marion: I'd go to all these Island things [searching for birth mother] and I got a phone call one night saying, "There's this man that we want you to meet. He thinks that he might be able to help [find birth mother]" … So I went there and he said, "I think I know your family". And it was all purely to do with looks; that's how they done it.*

This narrative not only provides a physical link with the birth mother but also suggests a cultural and spiritual link. Again such narratives offer repair to the rupture of separation from one's family of origin and culture. There is also a realisation that belonging through physical resemblance is a 'taken for granted' part of life for people living within their own birth families (Griffith, 1991).

For Māori adopted into Pākehā families such repair through physical resemblance is not isolated to the birth mother, or parents, but can include birth siblings and the adoptee's own children. For example Ana talks about the birth of her son and the joy of physically recognising herself in him:

> *Ana: I was quite fascinated really when my son was born because for the very first time ever, I looked like someone. Cause that was something that really got me when I was little. Once son was born; I just thought, "Yay!" For the first time in my life I looked like someone and they looked like me and that was lovely.*

The narratives based around physical resemblance allow a way to navigate the 'not belonging' in the adoptive family, while providing a sense of connectedness to members of the birth family, or those connected by 'blood'. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, being able to physically identify with 'blood' relatives breaks down the legislative positioning

whereby they were to become "as if born to" the adoptive parents. It enables adopted people to confront the reality that in fact they had not been born into the adoptive family. The adoption experience is no longer denied. It is a way to navigate the loss of having grown up within a family where you did not have a physical resemblance to anyone else, and did not see mirrored back to you any recognisable physical attributes.

Belonging through touch

Stories around touch played an important role in the way participants navigated narratives on the continuum between belonging and not belonging. The lack of physical touch reinforced the disconnection Māori adopted into Pākehā families may have felt growing up within their adoptive families. In some instances a lack of physical affection is recalled.

> *Cordelia: my adoptive mother was just inapproachable and I'm quite a tactile, love affection-type person and she didn't manage that.*

Such narratives provide another way of navigating being adopted and not 'belonging' within the adoptive family.

Conversely connecting through touch is a way of navigating the adoption experience especially in relation to connecting with the birth family. Performing acts normally associated with childhood was one way participants and birth mothers related in the early days of reunion. Physical connections and acts of parenting become memorable moments of bonding.

> *Marion: The other thing she did when I first met her was, our very first night actually … she came and tucked me in. I remember that very clearly.*

Showering together with her birth mother was for Marion the physical act she remembers most clearly that finally bonded them.

> *Marion: When I first met her [birth mother] she was just a person, and that was something I didn't know whether other adopted people felt. It's taken me a long, long time to respond I suppose; to actually bond with her and it kind of happened, I went to back to a wedding … I said, "Go here, go and have your shower." She said, "We haven't got time!" She said, "You have to get in here too". You know,*

here I am, I'm stripping off and I'm in the shower with my mum … and it was from then, for the very first time I really could say I loved her.

The narrative of touch is a way of navigating the disconnection, and loss, which is part of the wider adoption narrative. Ann Nation asserts touch "is a way for some people in reunion to recreate the lost mother/child relationship and to relive experiences associated with childhood and the developing parent/child bond" (personal communication, November 27, 2010). Narratives of touch at the basest level provide a repair to the initial physical separation which usually happened at the time of birth or shortly thereafter.

Carole found that not only did she and her mother connect physically, but they also re-storied her childhood as if they had never been separated. This brought a tremendous healing and the relationship provided Carole with a sense of belonging and "groundedness".

> *Carole: One time just out of the blue I said to her, "When I was little I used to do ballet didn't I?" and she went "Yes you did, and I used to have to take you on the back of my motorbike". And I remember thinking, "Oh my god she just absolutely responded to what I said". So we kind of re-storied my childhood, and what I did was always talk to her about things I wanted as a kid, such as "When I was little I had lots of dolls didn't I?", and she went "Yes. You had about 30 of them and every time I'd have to go in and we'd have to put them to bed at night", and she'd just give me this whole story, and I remember thinking, "Oh my god she's incredible". How she just wouldn't even flinch. She'd just carry on with the story.*

In re-storying her childhood Carole and her mother constructed a narrative repair of the rupture in the 'normal' narrative of having been born and raised with one's birth mother and within one's birth family. Together they created a fictional shared history which is an interesting counter-balance to the fictitious adoption stories created within Carole's adoptive family, and within society, of which she had no input.

The way we look, from physical features to skin colour, divide or connect us to our parents, siblings and eventually our own children. The participants, Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families, navigated their awareness of looking different from their adoptive families with narratives which renewed their sense of belonging in the recognition they received on seeing a physical resemblance with their birth families and their own children. Poignant descriptions of reuniting with birth mothers in adulthood include the value of physical touching, the new memories of a mother tucking a daughter into bed, and the deep impact of re-storying one's childhood beside one's birth mother.

Death and Dying

Caring for a sick, or dying, birth parent gave participants the chance to connect physically in a more intimate way with their birth mothers than what might normally be expected. Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families told stories about how the experience of caring for a sick or dying parent brought them together.

> *Cordelia: So I went back down to look after her [birth mother] and she died in my arms. Yeah. I got to know her in that time.*

There is a universal yearning for touch and affection between parent and child. A terminal illness provides an acceptable societal excuse for adults to hold and touch each other. It is one way that the dislocation between an adopted child and their birth parent can be bridged for 'practical' reasons with no further explanation needed.

> *Carole: Because I don't have family and she [birth mother] didn't have family I was her main carer and that was an absolute, incredible privilege. Absolute privilege … there were special moments when I was the only one who could lift her up and you know, lots of lovely times.*

Carole provides a narrative which come to terms with not 'belonging' in her adopted family and aligns herself with her birth mother who also has no-one to 'belong' to. Such a narrative provides an exclusive kinship connection which transcends the separation and loss associated with adoption. Being with her birth mother at the time of her death also gave Carole a unique opportunity to reflect on her own relinquishment as a baby.

> *Carole: I watched her die, and when I watched her die, I realised, I had an adult experience of what I watched as an infant, or what I experienced as an infant. Yeah, so that was really, really profound. I watched her leave. So there was nothing I could say, no words. I saw that last breath and yeah, for some reason, at that time, it connected to me being taken from her as an infant.*

A terminal illness provides a valid opportunity for an adopted person to connect physically, and perhaps more emotionally, with a birth parent. Normal social barriers around touching someone who is not intimately known (even if it is a birth parent) are dispensed with.

Navigating the unfamiliar

Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families told narratives of loss associated with not having the usual familial and cultural socialisation a child would experience with their birth families. Reunion narratives bring cohesion, and some sense of order to the profound experience of an adult meeting for the first time their birth parents, and perhaps other birth siblings. Reunion narratives position the adopted person within their birth family, creating a context to interact in. Of the initial reunion, Māori adopted into Pākehā families told stories of having to manage the unfamiliar, of having to learn about their 'new' family, and also having to learn about their 'new' cultural heritage.

> *Elizabeth: I kind of walked into a huge Māori whānau and didn't know really my place at all … But I kind of felt, straight away like I belonged. I mean there's still some sort of cultural stuff that I didn't know what to do … I felt really out of sorts and not confident. I had spent my childhood feeling really confident and having a real sense of belonging, and it kind of got a bit knocked - like that confidence, not through anything bad that happened and they were really welcoming but I just felt like I didn't know ... I didn't know.*

Elizabeth illustrates on one hand feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance within her birth family, but on the other hand not meeting her own expectations and recognising the loss of connection which had taken place due to her adoption experience. Elizabeth goes on to describe how learning her mihi helped her find within herself a sense of belonging. Such narratives navigate through the pressures placed upon Māori to meet some standard, either set by themselves or others, of 'Māoriness'.

> *Elizabeth: When I didn't know where I was from; that's when I felt really a sense of not belonging. Like when I couldn't say that [mihi] and I was just really shaky about all of it.*

Māori adopted into Pākehā families make sense of the dislocation from their birth families and from their Māori cultural heritage by telling narratives of detachment. This detachment is born out of the unfamiliar and provides a way to navigate any uncomfortable, or unmanageable, expectations placed upon the adopted person by themselves or by those around them. A detachment narrative offers protection from, and counter-balances, the 'not belonging' narrative.

> *Marion: It's a bit of a limbo thing. Although I personally identify myself with Cook Island people and Māori people, I don't feel I belong. This is ridiculous because anybody else in this world is Cook Island or Māori who was born to their parents and grew up with them, is no different to me … cause I was born to those people too. But for some reason there's a bit of detachment.*

Persistence and determination are characteristics evidenced in narratives describing how participants engaged with their birth family and certain Māori cultural practices, even when there were feelings of uncertainty and stress. Such persistence brought with it stories of being accepted and creating a place to belong both as an adopted person within the birth family and also as Māori within a Māori world.

> *Elizabeth: Through meeting uncles and aunts and cousins, you know it was really obvious that there was a whole side of my family that was Māori and that I belonged to them, to that.*

Having been raised in Pākehā families, and often without any social contact with other Māori, a challenge that Māori adopted into Pākehā families are forced to navigate is being in new and unfamiliar situations, both as someone coming into their birth family with no shared familial knowledge or history and as someone who identifies as Māori, but who may have no lived experience of what that might require especially in Māori specific situations. For the adopted person this can be traumatic as their sense of self and authenticity can be challenged.

Navigating the taboo

It is now well documented that over fifty per cent of reunions between an adopted adult and a member of their birth family results in some form of sexual attraction (Greenberg, 1993; Steele, 2006). Genetic Sexual Attraction (GSA) is the phrase used "to explain the sexual feelings between family members who were separated at birth and reunited as adults" (Steele, 2006). GSA encompasses elements of physicality including a heightened sense of belonging through physical resemblance and the need to connect through touch (Greenberg, 1993; Steele, 2006). Because of the sensitivity and perplexities attached to GSA this is something that may not be readily talked about. However, it is something which Māori adopted into Pākehā families need to navigate. Studies into GSA recognised that although couples are biologically related, in cultural and anthropological terms there is no kinship affinity (Greenberg, 1993). As Greenberg explains:

The emotional atmosphere of a reunion might be anticipated to trigger unpredictable reactions. The expectations, hopes, anxieties and trepidations will tend to make the reunion a highly charged affair. The need to demonstrate a closeness and intimacy, which has been feared lost, could well translate itself, between sexually active adults, into sexual intercourse; and this likelihood might be reinforced by a physical similarity which adds to the attraction (Greenberg, 1993, pp. 6 - 7).

Cordelia spoke of the attraction which developed between her and a birth brother who had also been placed for adoption, the distress it caused, and the advice she was given:

Cordelia: I felt like I was going mad … Oh we went through all that stuff about when you're starting to remember, and we had to touch one another … We know this stuff happens. … the best help I ever got was from the psychotherapist. And she was so very clear about the fact that with adoption, the rules go out the window. They do not apply anymore; not in this situation.

In the above quote Cordelia specifically mentions both the need to touch and the recognition that GSA does exist. The 'taboo' narrative is expressed in terms of the confusion that arises in the context of GSA. On one hand the attraction is technically incestuous and so does not fit within accepted social norms, yet on the other hand knowledge that GSA does commonly occur authenticates the experience. Authorities on the subject of GSA have labelled "barbaric" the stigmatisation and the legal prosecution of adopted people caught up in the phenomenon of GSA (Steele, 2006).

Cordelia stressed that the attraction that developed between her and her birth brother was totally unplanned and unexpected. The 'taboo' narrative considers closed stranger adoption responsible for the occurrence of GSA, as it denied the usual bonding and social conditioning which typically happens between close family members when they grow up together and relate with each other from a young age. It also mirrors the silencing which happens in the adoption process and the need to speak out and break out of the pretence.

Cordelia: I don't know what it even means to have a brother. In fact I don't actually know what it is to have whānau. … I should be allowed to be given a voice and I shouldn't be punished for a decision that was made by this department [Department of Social Welfare] forty something years ago.

The 'taboo' narrative also reflects upon the loss and alienation representative of other narratives presented by Māori adopted into Pākehā families.

Cordelia: So we've both lost a lot of stuff through being adopted and being Māori … We're walking on new land especially the double sense of isolation of being Māori, being adopted into a Pākehā whānau, and being involved in this type of relationship…

Genetic Sexual Attraction is a common occurrence in the reunion experiences of adopted people and is something which Māori adopted into Pākehā families need to navigate. The 'taboo' narrative gives voice to the anguish such an occurrence generates and attributes the lack of 'normal' familial socialisation, through the process of adoption, as being responsible.

I was remembered – there was a place waiting for me

One form of the 'belonging' narrative told by Māori adopted into Pākehā families was 'I was remembered – there was a place waiting for me'. This narrative firmly positions the adopted person within the birth family and counters the common narrative found within the adoption literature, of adopted people believing they had been 'given away' because their birth mothers didn't want them (Else, 1991; Shawyer, 1997; White Hawk, 2006).

Marion: Apparently my mother had told all my brothers and my sister … she used to make my step father take her to where I was adopted and try and find me. They were telling me that she'd sit in the street and they'd [parents] sit in their car and hope that I'd go past or they hoped that something would happen. And it never, never ever did. And the kids used to sit at home saying, "Have you brought our sister home yet mum?" So they'd lived a long time with that knowledge. My father's family all remember me as a baby.

Elizabeth: Him [birth father] and my [birth] mother had kept in touch so that when I was 20 they would find me … they kept in touch all those years for the purpose of finding me, yeah. Yeah, it was cool.

The 'I was remembered - there was a place waiting for me' narrative also demonstrates the resistance shown by some birth families to the advice advocated by social workers and the social agencies of the time, and the dominant 'silencing' narrative of 'it's better for all involved to forget it ever happened and get on with your life' (Else, 1991; Shawyer, 1979).

Walking between worlds

In Aotearoa New Zealand Māori and Pākehā are the two dominant cultural groups. However, Māori adopted into Pākehā families report that they do not have a secure sense of belonging within either culture. They sit uneasily in-between worlds, while navigating both by necessity. The narrative of 'walking between worlds' can be used to navigate loss, grief and rejection in terms of not having a 'complete' sense of belonging as an adopted person or as Māori.

> *Carole: When they [Department of Social Welfare] put me in with a Pākehā family because my mother was Pākehā, they just assumed that I would be white and I wasn't even. Ever. You know. I was a little brown girl. Yeah. I still walk nowhere. I still walk in between worlds.*

> *Kaare: There's still not a sense of belonging totally to one or the other. It's like being in a no-man's land.*

> *Carole: I really feel I walk not in the Pākehā world, but neither do I walk in any ethnic world. … So I can't fit into that [white] world and yet I don't fit into the Māori world, which at times is absolutely heart breaking.*

> *Elizabeth: You can't ignore what you've grown up with. I think I just sort of struggle with the Māori way and the Pākehā way.*

Conversely, this narrative can be used to navigate having to fit somewhere between both the birth and adoptive families and Māori and Pākehā worlds. Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families told stories of not fully belonging in either culture or family, yet their introductory biographies in Chapter Four demonstrate the skills they have amassed to successfully navigate and inhabit both spaces.

Conclusion

The adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families resulted in the dislocation and disconnection of Māori from their birth parents, their whānau, hapū, iwi, and their cultural heritage. This chapter highlights the impact that the 1955 Adoption Act had on Māori children placed for adoption in terms of the experienced loss of cultural and family history and a compromised sense of belonging.

Closed stranger adoption is a life event which deviates from the expected life story of a child born and raised within the confines of their original family. This chapter specifically explored the narratives Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families used to make sense of their adoption experience and to navigate a sense of identity as Māori, and as adopted people.

The theme of 'belonging' was important in the narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā families. As participants navigated their identity and made sense of their life experiences, they created stories on the continuum between belonging and not belonging, both within their Māori birth families and their Pākehā adoptive families, Māori and Pākehā cultures, and worlds. These stories countered the dominant adoption stories participants lived with while growing up, and could be utilised by the participants as narratives of repair

The complexities and contradictions in the participants' narratives reflect the complexities and contradictions Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families have navigated throughout their lives. This chapter has focused on the narratives associated with 'Belonging'. In the next chapter (Chapter Six), the analytical focus is 'Whakapapa'

Chapter Six: Whakapapa

Introduction

> *In short, whakapapa is belonging. Without it an individual is outside looking in. (Mead, 2003, p.43).*

Within Māori society, whānau, hapū and iwi are bound by a common whakapapa. Whakapapa links the individual to the wider world and is the basis of group affiliation (O'Regan, 2001). In terms of making a familial connection, Roberts observes "whanaungatanga embraces whakapapa and focuses upon relationships" (2006, p. 6). The importance of whakapapa to a Māori identity, and to whānau inclusion, is essential (Jackson, 1997; Mead, 2003; O'Regan, 2001).

However, having had knowledge of their whakapapa links severed by closed stranger adoption, participants have had to make sense of this experience in their narratives. Cornell observes that:

> *individuals turn to narrative as a means of making sense of situations of breakdown or deviation from expectations, when things are not as they should be. In search of meaning they narrate the unexpected or disturbing, creating a sense of order … through the imposed order of narrative (2000, pg. 45).*

In terms of cultural identity, the narrative form "becomes most salient in periods of rupture, when the taken-for-grantedness that characterizes most collective identities is disturbed" (Cornell, 2000, pp. 41 - 42). In this context, periods of rupture are defined as "… those periods when identities, for one reason or another, are questioned by those who carry them, are called into question by others, or are severely tested by events" (Cornell, 2000, p. 45).

Both whakapapa and whanaungatanga were very much prioritised within all the participants' stories. These concepts hold multiple levels of meaning for the participants in this study, most significantly around re-connecting with birth families and claiming a Māori identity. For the participants, both as Māori and adopted people, the focus on whakapapa as an important marker of both familial and Māori identification is explicit. The narratives explored in this chapter are organised within two major sub-themes: stories of the unknown whakapapa and stories of the known whakapapa.

For Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption there was a significant rupture in access to the usual identity sites of whanaungatanga and knowledge of whakapapa. Specific narratives were necessarily produced in response to this rupture. Some participants used more than one narrative. Some narratives varied between participants, others were shared. Some narratives changed over time, or changed within the different contexts in which they were situated.

However one thing remains constant - there are only two possibilities for the participants of this study, or in fact anyone of Māori ancestry, and that is whether they have access to the knowledge of their whakapapa, or not. Here, a distinction is consciously drawn between 'having' whakapapa and access to knowledge of that whakapapa. All people 'have' whakapapa. Māori view everything in the universe as having whakapapa (Roberts, 2006). We all have our own genealogical links by virtue of birth. However, not all people have access to the knowledge of their ancestry and their genealogical links. It is the knowledge of one's whakapapa that provides family names and claims to tribal and hapū affiliations. Anyone can be challenged on their claim to being Māori, but no-one can be challenged on whakapapa (O'Regan, 2001). When you know your whakapapa that is enough to stand on. No one can deny who your ancestors are and who you have descended from (Mead, 2003; O'Regan, 2001).

Stories of the unknown whakapapa

A repeated theme within the narratives of Māori adoptees unable to trace their whakapapa and make genealogical connections with their whānau is one of being 'shut out' or made to feel like 'a non-person'. Such narratives are framed within the context of a Māori worldview where "everything and everybody has a genealogical link that inter-connects and inter-relates to each other" (Roberts, 2006, p. 4). Sidney Moko Mead specifically states the importance of whakapapa in regard to the adopted child: "The *whakapapa defines the child*, both as an individual and as a member of a social unit" (Mead, 1997, p. 211 – italics added). Without the knowledge of whakapapa people are, as in one definition of whakapapa, laid low and struck down (Williams, 1971).

When claims to whakapapa are unable to be made, participants experience a rupture in their identity. This rupture is characterised by narratives of isolation and pain.

> *Carole: Māori would recognise me as one of them and they'd say "Oh who's your whānau?", or "Where are you from?", then when I couldn't do that, then they*

would not recognise me … I used to feel it really strongly, that as soon as you can't whakapapa you're just not recognised by Māori at all. It's just not fair.

Kaare: I never knew my whole whakapapa. Still don't. And that's still within this time of that age of political correctness and Māori awareness and tinorangatiratanga, and everybody standing up for their rights. I find there's a lot of Māori bashing from Māori because I don't speak the language, I don't know my whakapapa.

Carole: Hanging out with the Māoris I would get their parents or whatever saying "What's your last name girl?", and I'd say what it was, and it was like "oh" and there'd be no kind of recognition. Or people would say, "Are you Māori?" and I'd be like "I don't know. I'm adopted".

These narratives speak particularly about the socio-cultural invisibility of Māori adopted into Pākehā families who have not been able to trace their Māori genealogy. Within a Māori worldview connecting through whakapapa is how individuals and groups make sense of who you are, and also of who they are in relationship to you. If an individual does not have knowledge of their whakapapa, this positioning cannot take place. Consequently, the lack of recognition occurs because the task of inter-relating in a culturally specific way is hindered.

This inability to relate also illustrates the loss experienced by whānau, hapū and iwi who had children placed outside of the family for adoption. It needs to be remembered that the loss of children through closed stranger adoption also adversely affected many whānau. Such whānau are aware of related children who were placed for adoption, but the processes and practices of closed stranger adoption denied them access to those children.

A major concern expressed in relation to closed stranger adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand in general is the right of adopted people to know who they are and where they come from (Griffith, 1991). For Māori, whakapapa is what defines a child both individually and socially (Mead, 1997) in short providing the child with knowledge of who they are. Without knowledge of one's whakapapa, a Māori child, and future adult, cannot make sense of their own place in the order of things.

Carole: … you know I had to learn a mihi … and they had to include in mine "kāore au i te mōhio" – "I don't know who I am" – I don't know. I can't whakapapa.

It is common practice for Māori to name their ancestors and tribal markers such as mountains, rivers and marae when they give their mihi whakatau both in formal and informal situations. To not be able to do so evokes narratives of invisibility, isolation, and loss. Unfortunately, this loss is inevitably passed on to future generations.

How the unknown has been navigated

Given the major identity rupture that has taken place for Māori who through the practice of closed stranger adoption have not been able to access knowledge of their whakapapa, a number of repair or counter narratives have been told as a way to navigate this deviation from the usual way one would expect to be able to position oneself within the Māori context of whakapapa and whānau. These familial narratives have the ability to tell the story of one's Pākehā ancestry yet frame such stories within the Māori concepts of whakapapa, mana, and papakāinga, thus providing the teller a way to navigate through and towards a Māori identity.

Whakapapa Tauiwi

One way a familial narrative can be navigated when Māori adopted into Pākehā families have not had access to the knowledge of their whakapapa Māori is to become expert in the whakapapa of their adopted Pākehā family. It could be suggested that the desire, or need, to whakapapa is so great and so intrinsic to a Māori worldview and ultimately individual well-being and identity that when unable to make connections to one's whakapapa Māori, becoming the carrier of whakapapa within the adoptive family takes on special significance. It positions oneself in 'doing Māori' in a way that is traditionally recognised by Māori, but within a non-traditional context. For Kaare the non-traditional site is his adoptive Pākehā family.

> *Kaare: Going through all the old pictures that I've gone click, click, click, click, and grief - there's my [adoptive] uncles and aunties ... just to be able to think that I've got those memories, I can carry them through for their grandchildren, their great grandchildren, cousins ... When they look me in the eyes I'll be able to see the grandparents and I'll be able to share the life that was there and understand the stories of where they come from, and it's just getting that grounding and remembering that … I was very close to all of my [adoptive] grandmothers and my [adoptive] great grandmothers. I can remember all of them as a child so that means … I carry that generation. My [adoptive] grandparents have all gone. My [adoptive] parents who are going and I'm here but I've*

got now three generations after me that are coming through so the fifth generation, sixth generation…

The 'whakapapa Tauiwi' narrative affords Māori adopted into Pākehā families with no direct or confirmed access to their genealogical links, a way to navigate and repair the rupture of not knowing one's own Māori genealogy. It does this by utilising what could be considered a Māori cultural approach and offsets the perplexities of not having whakapapa Māori to connect to. As Kaare states:

Kaare: In some cases I suppose it's overcompensating because I never knew my whole [Māori] whakapapa; still don't…

It is easier for adopted people to trace their birth mother, and to make contact with her in the first instance (Else, 1991). Else devotes a chapter in her book *A Question of Adoption* to looking at the social construction of 'the invisible unmarried father' (1991, pp. 14 - 22). It is often more difficult to make contact with one's birth father, in fact in some instances it is impossible. For children whose birth fathers are Māori this means they may never have access to knowledge of their whakapapa Māori.

Kaare: There's actually no information as far as iwi, hapū, whānau, no name, [on the original birth certificate] and I also think that my birth mother; she never told my father she was hapū and so therefore being Pākehā, young and pregnant, out of wedlock, to a Māori no less! Back then in the 50s it was just not the done thing!

Another way 'whakapapa Tauiwi' is managed is through the connection with the Pākehā birth mother. Such a connection can again utilise aspects common in whakapapa Māori, such as positioning oneself in relationship to land and the papakāinga of parents.

Carole: I've found out my [Pākehā] birth mother was from Wellington … so now I feel like I belong and feel like I belong in Wellington – so that's made a huge, huge, difference to me - it's my whenua.

Undertaking narrative repair in this way provides a place to belong because of whakapapa. Framing universal phenomena, such as a strong affinity to a specific location or parent in a traditional Māori way helps to narrate a Māori identity, even when the parent is non-Māori, as this narrative positions the teller within a Māori context. For example Carole talks about the mana of her mother and how identifying with her mother has given her a groundedness, a sense of belonging, and a spiritual connection.

Carole: Amazing woman and, because she's got so much mana in her world that it's kind of made me have a really, really strong sense of who I am … just knowing her was enough to feel kind of that groundedness … no matter where I go in the world I think not knowing her, or not having such a strong connection, it was always I didn't belong anywhere – you know you have that sense. Whereas now wherever I go, or whatever I do I know who I am through her.

Stories of the known whakapapa

As has already been noted, a prerequisite for access into te ao Māori is to have knowledge of whakapapa. Therefore it was not surprising to find that the most significant aspect for those Māori adopted into Pākehā families who were able to trace their whakapapa was the level of acceptance as Māori, by other Māori, and the ability to connect with their whānau.

Elizabeth: Going back to your whakapapa and when I've gotta say where I'm from that kind of goes a long way, you know. It does when you are Māori eh? It goes a long way to be able to make that connection. … Like a really early on question is, "where are you from?" And then you're kind of like straight away accepted. In my experience, if you can name where you're from, then you're in.

How the known has been navigated

However, even when whakapapa has been traced there still remains, for Māori adopted by way of closed stranger adoption, the experiential rupture of having been for many years dislocated from their birth family and whānau Māori. Again, a number of narratives were told to navigate this deviation from the taken for granted way one would expect to be able to position oneself within the context of whānau. There are narratives about the impact that cross-cultural adoption has had on the adoptees parenting choices, and ultimately on their own children. Although the narratives differ, each narrative does provide a way for subsequent generations to carry on with their whakapapa links. Each narrative also illustrates the sacrifices Māori adoptees make for their children in the desire that their children will not have to live with the loss of not knowing about, and not being able to participate in, the Māori world.

My descendants take me

Māori adopted into Pākehā families may struggle with some cultural and familial dissonance when relating to their birth families. One way this rupture can be repaired is when the children of the adopted person becomes a bridge between the adoptee and their Māori birth family. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, one way a more tenuous interaction with their whānau Māori can be navigated is by placing the expectation of carrying the whakapapa line onto their own children.

> *Ana: I find myself being slightly more removed from things … I would never expect that for my own children. I'm really hard on my eldest boy and there's an expectation that he'll always look after his brothers and sisters. And that he has to understand that he has to have a relationship with his nanny and all of them [birth family]. [He] is the one that has to carry the mantle for us. And he carries it for me really too because I refuse to ... they've got this stuff about whānau that I can't really engage with ... as if this is a whole psychological exercise going into it.*

Positioning oneself through one's children is a useful navigational tool for a number of reasons. Firstly, as the adopted person's own children are a step removed from the actual adoption, the relationship with the birth family is set in a different context and does not hold the same meaning or have the same levels of expectation around belonging that an adoptee might experience. In this way the adopted person can manage how they participate within the birth family without being totally removed. Secondly, such navigation also allows the adopted person's children access and knowledge of their whakapapa and whānau Māori. Further, for adoptees who had connected with their Māori birth families before their children were born, their children have always known their whānau Māori. In this instance the children grow up knowing their whānau and whakapapa. This creates a normalising experience in keeping with the usual way one would be received from birth into the extended family.

Claiming whakapapa for my children – to have what I never had

Some Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families had at some time believed that they could not, on their own, provide strong links to whānau, whakapapa, and tikanga Māori. Therefore, as parents to their own children these adoptees may work extremely hard to provide their children access within te ao Māori. They may position themselves in situations which are unfamiliar, challenging, or at times abusive. This particular narrative offers repair

through hard work and sacrifice. An example of such a sacrifice was evidenced when one participant remained in an abusive relationship in order for her children to have access to te ao Māori.

> *Cordelia: My kid's dad was quite abusive. And they were hard times, and through that time I made a commitment to my children that they would be unapologetically Māori and I would make sure that they had everything that I never had.*

Part of the abuse endured in this particular relationship was that the adopted person was subject to criticism and disrespect from her Māori partner in regard to her perceived lack of whakapapa, even though she had made contact with her whānau. This reinforces the important role whakapapa plays in te ao Māori and illustrates the vulnerability of Māori who have been adopted into Pākehā families and the shame experienced when they are not able to strongly assert their own whakapapa.

> *Cordelia: … my kids' dad used that as an excuse that I was a nobody because I was adopted … Māori being Māori, that whole, if you don't whakapapa, you're no-one. He used that fairly well … so I made sure my kids had whānau and they knew who they were … you get to the point where now they just say, "Mum, we know who we are. We know we're Māori, okay. You can shut up about it now … Well I don't want [my children] to know what it felt like to be a non-person in a Māori world; even my kids' dad had used it against me.*

When Māori adopted into Pākehā families have reconnected with whānau, they make efforts to ensure their own loss is not transferred to their children.

The politics of being Māori – 'a given right'

Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families as children and who had no access to any aspect of Māori culture chose to make sacrifices so that their children would have the opportunities to know their whakapapa and whānau, and participate comfortably within a Māori environment. Such sacrifices included making oneself vulnerable by entering into previously unfamiliar settings so that their children would be able to access their Māori cultural heritage as 'a given right'. The narrative of 'a given right' has gained currency in the social scripts of identity and minority politics. 'A given right' is a way to navigate through any potential barriers (such as not having grown up with access to a whakapapa and tikanga

Māori) and in doing so positions the teller as actively searching out and resisting an oppressed, colonised status, if not for themselves then at least for their children.

> *Ana: I've gotta think about whānau now. I find it all quite difficult … And I mean, they chucked [me] the whole whakapapa thing, and it did sit for a while But there's an expectation that my children will connect with them [Māori birth family] but I actually find it quite difficult about expectations, around what I can do. And actually I don't want to have to do a lot to be honest. But in saying that this is their [my children's] whakapapa, my whānau up North and also my father's people, and that's theirs; it's of right, and I expect for them to make a connection with that. But as for me ... I feel a connection but it's so difficult, eh…*

A narrative which can be used in this context is the 'political regeneration' narrative. The rupture and loss of cultural identity can be repaired by challenging the status quo and opting for a kaupapa Māori lifestyle.

> *Elizabeth: And I guess it's sort of like a bit of a lost generation thing; like I really want to be proactive in making that available to them [my sons] and part of them. [My son's] four and a half and you know he plays in Māori. He'll play, and his language of choice is Māori and yeah, that's cool eh? And he just sings all the time in Māori and there's not many other providers of early childhood that have waiata for an hour a day, every day. So that's what he does so ... My aspirations for my boys are that they know their whakapapa, that they relate to things Māori, and processes and systems that are Māori, because they're gonna have enough Pākehā. I just think if they have those connections they'll just be more adaptable, I mean growing up and confident. And that's a huge thing isn't it? Knowing who you are and where you come from, as a Māori and that journey.*

When questioned about her own aspirations for the future Elizabeth comes back to the hope she has for her children – the regeneration of things Māori for the next generation and beyond.

> *Elizabeth: I think my aspirations for the future lie in my boys, feeling that they have that Māori culture as a given right and that's something they didn't have to work and they didn't have to struggle for…*

Creating a cultural heritage is part of repairing the rupture of cultural loss Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families have experienced. They want their children to experience

tikanga and te ao Māori in a natural way and not have to "struggle" to "learn" things considered to be a cultural right.

> *Elizabeth: So that's been like an interesting sort of thing because I want my boys to be fluent in te reo and I want my boys to have been born and grown up with Māori culture because I think that I missed out on that. I didn't get that, and I don't want them turning in their twenties saying, "What's going on? What's this about?" I want them to know waiata. I want them to know it cause they've heard it for the last twenty years, not have to learn it like I've learnt it…*

> *Marion: If I go to these places [where her birth families originate] I've built my own history, and I don't know if it's for me yet, or if it's for my children, I'm not sure yet … and I try and get my kids to be a part of it 'cos it's part of their world, and I want it to be a natural part of that world, unlike me who has had to learn it.*

Creating a cultural history is also a counter narrative to the history that adopted people were given at the time of their adoption, which was the history of their adoptive family where they were to be "as if born to" the adoptive parents. This ultimately resulted in the loss of knowledge about the adopted child's whakapapa Māori. Māori adoptees therefore spend a great deal of time and energy creating a cultural heritage not only for themselves, but for their children and for future generations.

Spiritual connection - the ancestors with me

Another narrative used to navigate whakapapa and whānau connections and repair the rupture experiences by Māori adopted into Pākehā families is 'the spiritual connection, the ancestors with me'. This narrative is told by adoptees who have, as well as adoptees who have not, been able to access knowledge of their whakapapa.

A narrative of spiritual connection can offer validation and a reassurance to those who have not been able to trace their whakapapa. It is a way to navigate the reality of the unknown, and offers a connection which makes whakapapa more tangible.

> *Carole: I've always aligned with Māori I've always felt … this thing of the heart connection … and [people] they'd say to me "You're Māori because you say you are. You're Māori in your heart".*

> *Kaare: It was just the wairua guiding me through my path. It's always been the wairua connecting me with tūpuna.*

For those who have traced their whakapapa, a narrative of spiritual connection is a repair narrative of always having belonged, of a life-long connection with the ancestors confirmed on meeting whānau. It is a narrative which validates one's place in the whānau, not only through the physical realm, but also through the spiritual realm.

> *Marion: I always went through kapa haka at school and all those sorts of things. I was always drawn to it and would go to marae and I'd think, "Yeah, gee its nice here; I like it here. I feel comfortable here." I could never understand why … And then it wasn't till, when I found out my father's Māori, I thought, "Oh, now I know; now I know that's why I was drawn to that part of my life as well".*

> *Marion: Some of the other things that were odd in my life which I could never explain is I converted to Catholicism in my life 25 years ago, even a bit longer, because I always felt comfortable in the Catholic church; I didn't know why but I did … When I met my mother one of my questions was, what religion was she and she said, "I'm Catholic." And I thought, "Oh, okay, that answers that question now."*

> *Marion: So I'm standing in the middle of the cemetery and I said, "Oh well, he's [birth father] just behind me." And she [birth father's sister] said, "How do you know?" I said, "I don't, but I think he is." So I turned around and the grave was there. His grave was there!*

By making connections to a Māori identity on a spiritual level Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families are reassured of their place as Māori, with or without knowledge of their whakapapa. Such narratives make possible an understanding of whakapapa that can be experienced through connections to tūpuna and 'knowing' at a deeper level. Some adoptees had these experience of spiritual connection confirmed in adulthood.

Conclusion

Whakapapa is foundational to a familial and cultural identity for Māori. The Adoption Act 1955 did not take into account that within Māori society, whānau, hapū and iwi are bound by common whakapapa. As such, whakapapa links the individual to the wider world and is the

basis of group affiliation. A repeated theme within the narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā families is the vital role whakapapa plays in being able to participate fully in te ao Māori.

This chapter explored the narratives participants told in regard to 'the unknown whakapapa' and 'the known whakapapa'. For Māori adoptees who were unable to trace their whakapapa and therefore make connection with their whānau Māori, stories of being 'shut out' or made to feel like a 'non-person' were told. With whakapapa claims unable to be made the rupture within caused by their adoption led to accounts of isolation, exclusion and socio-cultural invisibility. Their inability to connect with whānau parallels the irreconcilable grief many whānau and hapū experienced through the loss of their children and mokopuna relinquished for adoption and subsequently never located.

Participants also navigated the 'unknown whakapapa' with narratives which still clearly positioned them within a Māori cultural framework. For Māori adoptees who have traced their whakapapa, there are narratives of repair whereby the adoptee's children become carriers of whakapapa, bridging the loss between birth families, the adopted person and future generations.

Chapter Seven: Listening to the Silenced

Introduction

This research investigated the experiences of six Māori adults who were adopted as children into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption. The thesis specifically looked at the narratives used by Māori adopted into Pākehā families to navigate their unique adoption experience. With closed stranger adoption directly affecting an estimated twenty-five per cent of New Zealanders (Griffith, 1998) there are many people, including adopted people, birth and adoptive families, professionals such as social workers, counsellors, educators, health providers, and policy makers, who can gain some insight into the experiences of Māori adopted into Pākehā families through the narratives the participants have shared in this study. The major findings of this study illustrate participants' identities as Māori and as adopted people are inseparable. They also demonstrate the significant impact of colonisation and the role race played in closed stranger adoption practice and policy.

This concluding chapter revisits the research question:

How do Māori adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption make sense of their experience as Māori and as adopted people?

The chapter reviews the research processes and findings, considers the limitations of the study, and offers some thoughts on future research and policy, as well as my reflections on undertaking this study.

The research reviewed

The main aim of this study was to provide a space where the stories of Māori people who as children were adopted into Pākehā families could be told. I was motivated to undertake a study of the experiences of Māori adopted into Pākehā families for two main reasons. Firstly, as a Māori woman adopted into a Pākehā family, I was interested in how other Māori have made sense of their adoption experience. Secondly, as an Indigenous social worker I was interested in certain principles utilised within the social work profession, for example, notions of 'giving voice' to marginalised groups whose experiences have been silenced. As social workers played a pivotal role in the closed stranger adoption process, examining the

narratives of Māori adopted into Pākehā families inevitably revealed outcomes of both personal and systemic social work decisions that were implemented between 1955 and 1985.

The historical and social context

Closed stranger adoption originated in western colonial views about sexuality and family life. Adoption was socially engineered as a way for illegitimate children to be removed from birth mothers who had 'fallen from grace', and placed into the morally deserving homes of childless married couples (Shawyer, 1979). Thus, closed stranger adoption was primarily devised as a way of hiding, or legitimising, illegitimate births. Subsequently, a hallmark of closed stranger adoption was the secrecy it imposed which ultimately culminated in the Adoption Act 1955 (Else, 1991; Gillard-Glass & England, 2002). Influenced by the 'complete break' theory, there would be no further contact between the birth parent and the child and neither had access to information about the other. The adoption files were 'closed' and the adoptive parents, and newly acquired child, remained 'strangers' to the birth family (Else, 1991).

Māori and closed stranger adoption

The issue of race played an important role in the policies and practices of closed stranger adoption, not just in Aotearoa New Zealand but internationally. Aggressive assimilationist policies saw the breakdown of traditional Māori family structures and supports (Mikaere, 2003). Traditional whāngai adoption practices were ultimately displaced by statutory processes (O'Halloran, 2009), resulting in a significant proportion of Māori being adopted into Pākehā families by way of closed stranger adoption. The narratives presented in this study by Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families illustrate the rupture in the participants' lives when the dominant familial narrative of growing up within a birth family with a shared cultural heritage was not possible. Participants have navigated their cross-cultural adoption experiences through a number of different, and at times contradictory, narratives. Their narratives gave rise to the major idea, 'walking between worlds'. In addition, themes of 'belonging' and 'whakapapa' were key sites for navigating the ruptures caused by closed stranger adoption.

Summary of findings

The study found that adoption is not a one off event, but is an on-going life experience. The multiple and complex ways the participants narrated their cross-cultural adoption experiences represents the diverse 'adoption' stories which have been told, and retold, by society and by the participants themselves. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, their identities as Māori and as adopted people are inseparable. The rich, in-depth narratives collected as part of this study clustered around the idea of 'walking between worlds', and two major themes of 'belonging' and 'whakapapa' were identified in the analysis process.

Several sub-themes were identified under the theme of 'belonging' and generally reflected the ways in which families who adopted children built their own truths for the children they adopted. These truths were usually endorsed by the dominant social scripts of the time. Closed stranger adoption led to narratives revealing tensions and contradictions, and placed the participants on the continuum between 'belonging' and not 'belonging', within both their Māori birth families and adoptive Pākehā families. These adoptees live on the periphery, never feeling a true sense of belonging in their Māori/Pākehā worlds, or their birth/adoptive families. However they are able to navigate both spaces. It was also found that adopted people take responsibility for their adoption experience, and often for the experiences of others in the adoption triad.

Such tensions and contradictions were most apparent in the navigation of gratitude and grief; being the same yet different; the lived experience versus the learnt experience of being Māori; reconnecting through touch, and the resistance to the silencing of adoption shown by some birth families in remembering and telling about the adopted child.

Race played an important role in New Zealand's adoption history. Decisions made at both legislative and practice levels were inherently racist and based on assimilationist strategies which did not take into account Māori cultural values and practices. This, coupled with the stigmatisation of Māori during the period of closed stranger adoption, severely disadvantaged Māori families who tried to keep a child relinquished for adoption within the whānau.

Systemic and personal social work decisions, which were in the 1950s – 1970s influenced by the 'clean-break' theory, can in hindsight be seen as having aided in the marginalisation and loss of identity for Māori adopted into Pākehā families. Further, it was found that as Māori children were harder to place than non- Māori children, Māori were often placed in homes which were considered marginal in some way, hence the term, 'matching for marginality'.

Even when Māori were adopted into secure and loving Pākehā homes they were forced to navigate the constructs of race, questioning themselves, or being questioned by others on why they looked different from their adoptive family. Some participants also experienced racial discrimination within and/ or outside their family setting. We do not live in a colour-blind society.

This study found, and reiterates, the importance of whakapapa to a Māori identity, and to whānau inclusion. For the participants, both as Māori and adopted people, the focus on whakapapa is an important marker of both familial and Māori identification.

One of the tragedies of closed stranger adoption is that some adopted people, both Māori and non-Māori, have been unable to locate their birth parents. However, for Māori this presents an added difficulty that without knowledge of their whakapapa their identity as Māori is questioned and they become vulnerable and isolated within te ao Māori. Access to, and knowledge of, one's whakapapa provides family and tūpuna names and is essential to claims of tribal and hapū affiliation.

A common theme within the narratives of Māori adoptees who have been unable to trace their whakapapa and make physical connections with their whānau Māori, is one of being 'shut out' or made to feel like 'a non-person'. Such narratives speak about the socio-cultural invisibility of Māori adopted into Pākehā families who have not been able to trace their Māori genealogy. Within a Māori context connecting through whakapapa is how individuals and groups understand their pasts and their futures, and make sense not only of who you are, but also, of who they are in relation to you. If an individual does not have knowledge of their whakapapa this positioning cannot take place. Without knowledge of one's whakapapa, a Māori child (and future adult) cannot make sense of their own place in the order of things.

Narratives were therefore created which framed universal phenomena in a traditional Māori way, such as a strong affinity to a specific location or parent, making it possible for the teller to be positioned within a Māori context. Navigating a narrative through the spiritual realm also offered validation and a reassurance to those who have not been able to trace their whakapapa Māori. It is a way to navigate the reality of the unknown identity and provides a site which makes the whakapapa connection possible and more tangible.

Intrinsically connected to the loss experienced by Māori adoptees who were unable to trace their whakapapa, is the loss experienced by whānau, hapū and iwi of their children and future generations. As a prerequisite for access into te ao Māori is knowledge of whakapapa,

it was found that for Māori adoptees who were able to trace their whakapapa Māori, there was a level of acceptance as Māori, by other Māori, and an ability to connect with their extended family. These participants told narratives which illustrated the sacrifices Māori adopted into Pākehā families made for their own children in the desire that their children would not have to live with the loss of not knowing about, and being able to participate in, te ao Māori. Further, as Māori adopted into Pākehā families may struggle with some cultural and familial dissonance when relating to their birth families, one way this rupture can be repaired is when the children of the adoptee bridge the divide between the adoptee and the Māori birth family. This research found that for Māori adopted into Pākehā families, one way a more tenuous interaction with their whānau Māori can be navigated is by placing the expectation of carrying the whakapapa line onto the adoptees' own children. It is hoped that through these children not only will whakapapa links be strengthened, but future generations will be reconnected to their Māori heritage.

The research processes

In-depth face to face interviews were conducted with six self-identified Māori adults who were legally adopted by way of closed stranger adoption into Pākehā families between 1955 and 1985. Interviews were undertaken with the understanding that conversation is a site for the social construction of self (Morris, 2006), and a narrative approach is in keeping with Māori oral traditions (Walker, 1997, Rangahau, 2010). Due to the sensitive nature of the research, consideration was given to the well-being of all involved. Participants were encouraged to have family members, or a support person, with them during the initial interview and a list of adoption counsellors and Kaiwhakaruruhau was made available. The researcher had opportunity to talk through any issues and concerns with thesis supervisors, academic peer supports, and cultural advisors.

As assimilation practices informed the policies which sanctioned the closed stranger adoptions of Māori children into Pākehā families (Mikaere, 2003), this study was deliberately located within a Māori-centred research approach while drawing on kaupapa Māori research principles. Kaupapa Māori and Māori-centred research both originate from a desire, by Māori, for Māori control of the research process (Moewaka Barnes, 2000), firmly placing Māori experiences and concerns, at the centre of the research (Bishop, 2004).

In analysing the data and writing up the research findings a narrative approach was used which sits well with Māori-centred research. Given the levels of multiplicity this study found on the topic of cross-cultural adoption, narrative analysis was a way to impose "a meaningful

pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected" (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). This corresponds with a Māori-centred research approach which is aims to "tie all aspects of Māori experiences back together in a purposeful manner" (Ruwhiu, 1999, p. 37).

The concept of navigation was presented within this thesis as a way to manoeuvre between, and within, the tensions and contradictions in the participants' experiences and was also a way that participants could make sense of those experiences. Navigation is an important concept as it straddles between the fixed and the fluid without judging either.

Future research and recommendations

While this research was primarily interested in the narratives Māori adopted into Pākehā families told to make sense of their particular adoption experience, there are a number of broader questions and issues that arise from this research.

- There is a challenge within te ao Māori to find a space for people who cannot identify their Māori families or who cannot give account of their whakapapa Māori. Within a culture where genealogy is foundational to one's identity and "right to stand", to not know your whakapapa leaves one culturally marginalised.

- Conversely, as a collective Māori remain aggrieved for the loss of their whakapapa, through the loss of Māori children who were adopted away from their Māori families. The loss of a child through closed stranger adoption has adversely affected many whānau Māori who are still grieving for a child they missed out on raising, or whom they have still not been able to locate. The potential of the adopted child, including the child's future offspring, are lost to the whānau, hapū, iwi. The stories of these affected whānau need to be gathered and recorded.

- The 'two races but one people' argument (more recently "the one nation" rhetoric) needs to be seriously challenged and its outcomes analysed. The people who support this view are usually not the people who are disadvantaged by its outcomes, as is witnessed in the outcomes of adoption legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- The narratives told by the participants in this study raise important issues of identity which can be more generally applied to other situations such as inter-country adoptions, surrogate pregnancy and In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) through a sperm

donor. Specific to Māori, as this research has shown, knowledge and access to one's whakapapa is of utmost importance to a secure Māori identity.

- Currently the Adoption Act 1955 is under review. Part of this review considers the issues around cross-cultural adoption and the debate about a birth mother's individual right to decide on placing a child for adoption versus the whānau or tribal right to a child. This is something which needs to be further researched and documented, especially in regard to the loss whānau, hapū, and iwi suffered from having their children adopted out without consultation.

Limitations of the study

A limitation of this study is that this is only a small part of a significant story, relating to Māori and closed stranger adoption, yet to be more fully explored and told. For example:

- The adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families has not been examined from the viewpoint of the whānau, hapū, and iwi.
- This study did not include people who can identify as Māori, but at this point in time choose not to identify as such.
- This study excluded Māori who were adopted into families other than Pākehā, including families with at least one Māori parent. These adoptees also experienced loss of access to their whakapapa through closed stranger adoption.

My reflections

In undertaking this research I had envisioned a study that would lift the spirit and tell a story of cultural resilience, the strength of whakapapa and the construction of a secure cultural identity. While this study did indeed touch on these ideas and themes other stories occurred during the interviews with participants. Stories of secrecy, silence, stigma, rejection, lies, racism, sexuality and attractions, marginality, reunion, and healing also emerged. I have been privileged to be a listener, sharing in the telling of stories with the participants of this study.

As James (2004, p.53) observed "in the course of writing … certain issues have been elided, others have not been addressed, and yet others have been insufficiently substantiated or perhaps glossed over". In this research there are several issues that have not been attended

to. However, two experiences stand out for me: The enthusiasm of participants to share their stories (some for the first time); and the desire for Māori adopted into Pākehā families to connect with others who have shared the same adoption experience.

Concluding statement

The experiences of Māori adopted into Pākehā families, recorded in this study, point to a much larger phenomenon to be pursued. It is our responsibility to understand, and attend to it.

In finding out about other Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families, I have also found out more about myself. The narratives utilised by Māori to navigate their cross-cultural adoption experiences are complex and at times contradictory. For Māori adopted into Pākehā families, our identities as Māori and as adopted people are inseparable. While we may feel as though we walk between worlds, never fully belonging in either, we are able to navigate both spaces. This is the strength illustrated in the participants' narratives.

Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Hāngī	earth oven/food cooked in earth oven
Hapū	sub-tribe
Hui	to gather; meeting
Iwi	tribe
Kaiwhakaruruhau	counsellor
Kapa haka	concert party; Māori cultural group
Kaupapa/ Kaupapa Māori	topic; theme/Māori topic/theme
Koha	gift; contribution
Kōhanga reo	Māori language pre-school
Kura kaupapa	Māori language school
Mana	prestige; integrity; power; status
Māori	Indigenous/Native New Zealander
Māoritanga	Māori culture, practices and beliefs
Marae	communal Māori meeting place
Matekite	second sight
Mihi/Mihi whakatau	welcome/introductory speech
Moemoeā	dreams
Pā	village
Pākehā	non-Māori New Zealander of European descent
Papakāinga	original home base
Takatāpui	close friend of the same gender; gay/lesbian
Tangihanga	funeral
Te ao Māori	the Māori world
Te reo/Te reo Māori	the language/the Māori language
Tikanga/Tikanga Māori	custom/Māori custom
Tūpuna	ancestors
Tūrangawaewae	domicile; place where one has rights to reside through whakapapa
Tūturu Māori	someone who is steeped in Māori culture
Urupā	cemetery
Waiata	sing/song
Wairua	spiritual dimension
Whakapapa	genealogy; family tree
Whakapapa Tauiwi	non-Māori genealogy

Whānau	family/extended family
Whanaungatanga	relation; relationship
Whāngai	Customary Māori adoption; adopt; adopted; adoptee
Whenua	land

Appendices

Appendix 1   Information Sheet

Appendix 2   Participant Consent Form

Appendix 3   Interview Guide

Appendix 4   Interview Schedule

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Māori Children Adopted Into Pākehā Families By Way Of 'Closed Stranger' Adoption

INFORMATION SHEET

Who is performing this research?

Tēnā koe

Ngā mihi mahana ki a koe

My name is Maria Haenga-Collins and this research is being undertaken as part of my Masters degree at Massey University.

I am interested in this topic because I am myself a Māori woman who as a child was fostered, and later adopted, into a Pākehā family.

My Chief Supervisor for this research is:

Professor Robyn Munford
School of Health and Social services
Massey University
Private Bag 11-222
Palmerston North
(06) 356-9099 ext. 2825.

What is this research about?

This research is about the life stories and experiences of Māori adults who were adopted into Pākehā families by way of 'closed stranger' adoption.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand there is a substantial amount of literature about adoption, and some studies pertaining to traditional Māori adoption practices, but to date there is very little information about the experiences of Māori who were adopted as children into Pākehā families, by way of 'closed stranger' adoption. Therefore this research aims to:

[Type text]

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

- Provide a Māori perspective to the body of knowledge pertaining to 'closed stranger' adoptions in Aotearoa/New Zealand;
- Provide an opportunity for Māori adoptees raised in Pākehā homes to voice their particular stories;
- Identify emergent themes on the impact that closed stranger adoption practices of Māori children into Pākehā homes has had on Māori well-being and the formation of a Māori cultural identity;
- Provide a Māori specific perspective to similar research within other indigenous communities (Australian Aboriginal, Canadian First Nations).

Who can participate in this research?

If you identify as Māori and were legally adopted into a Pākehā family, by way of 'closed stranger' adoption, between 1955 and 1985, I would like you to consider being part of this research.

What will happen if you agree to participate?

If you agree to participate you will need to be available for an interview where you will be asked to share your life story/experiences of having been adopted into a Pākehā family.

The interview will take place either in your home or in a private room/office at Massey University (Wellington or Palmerston North). Whichever location is most convenient for you. The time will also be organized for your convenience. It is expected that each interview may take approximately 2 hours.

The interview will be recorded.

Pseudonyms will be used so that no identifying information can be linked to you.

If any direct quotes are used from your interview, a copy of the quote/s will be sent to you so that you can make sure the quote is being used in the correct context. If you wish to make changes to your quote/s (or any other aspect of your kōrero) I will be happy to discuss this with you.

A list of registered counsellors/personal support services, in your area, will be made available to you at the time of the interview should you want to further discuss any issues which may arise. This list will also be given to a family member/support person present at the interview and to any other family members, not present, if requested.

[Type text]

At the completion of the research you will be sent a summary of the research findings, and extracts from the data that do not include identifying information may be used in publications and presentations.

Recorded data and consent forms will be destroyed after being held in secured storage for five (5) years.

A koha in the form of a $20 food voucher will be given to you, as partial reimbursement for your time and any possible travel.

If you choose to take part in the research, you have the right to:
*
- Have a support person/family member present with you during the interview
- Withdraw from the study at any time
- Decline to answer any particular questions
- Ask for the voice recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used
- Ask questions about the study at any time during participation
- Contact me and/or my supervisors if you have any queries/issues
- Be given a summary of the findings of the study at completion of the research.

If you are interested in taking part in this research project then please contact me and I will answer any questions that you may have.

- I can be contacted by email: m.haengacollins@gmail.com
- I can be contacted by mobile: 021-1893973
  (you can phone me, or you can text me with your contact details and I will phone you)
- You can contact me through my Chief Supervisor:
  (06) 356-9099 ext. 2825 (Palmerston North)
  (04) 801-5799 ext. 2825 (Wellington)

[Type text]

Appendix 2

Massey University
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

SCHOOL OF HEALTH
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North 4442
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Māori Children Adopted Into Pākehā Families By Way Of 'Closed Stranger' Adoption

Participant Consent Form

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the research explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being recorded on a voice recorder.

I wish/do not wish to have a recording of my interview returned to me.

A digital recording saved on CD will be mailed to this postal address

▶..
....
....

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

I understand that I can withdraw from this research at any time.

Signature: ....   Date: ....

Full Name:
(printed)   ....

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Māori Children Adopted Into Pākehā Families By Way Of 'Closed Stranger' Adoption

Interview Guide

Where would you like to begin with your adoption story?

What kinds of stories were you told about being adopted and how did these stories influence you?

Adoptive Family Identity
- What kinds of messages did you receive about yourself from your adoptive parents and other family members?
- How would you describe your sense of belonging in your adoptive family?

Maori Cultural Identity
- What have been the major Maori cultural influences in your life?
- How have these cultural influences shaped who you are today?
- What were some of the barriers for you in developing a positive Maori identity?
- What things assisted you in developing a positive Maori identity?

Social Factors Influencing Identity
- Tell me a little about the friendships you have had at different times in your life and how they have influenced who you are as a person today?
- How did other social organisations (school, employers, social/religious groups, sports teams/cultural groups) influence you?
- How did the media influence your sense of self as Maori? (stereo-types? Maori renaissance?)

Sense of Self
- What have been the biggest challenges for you as a Maori adopted into a non-Maori family?
- What have been some positive aspects for you?
- What are some of the factors that contributed to your desire to find out more about your whakapapa Maori
- What was that process like for you?
- What have you learned about yourself through this process?
- **Is there anything else we have not talked about that you would like to share?**

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Māori Children Adopted Into Pākehā Families By Way Of 'Closed Stranger' Adoption

Interview Schedule

Participant:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

1. **Prompts:**

   - Your childhood

   - Being in a family with Pākehā parents and siblings

   - Understanding your Māori identity

2. **Unexpected Circumstances:**

3. **Summary Impressions:**

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