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Notes from a Firefly.

The reality of Isarn woman in the cross-cultural space.

An extended essay presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the post-graduate degree of Master of Fine Arts

At Massey University, Wellington, Aotearoa.

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Nara-Ratch Poa Boontoum

To my dearest

Universe, Families, Teachers and Friends.

This journey can never come so far without your guidance and support.

Thank you so much for never giving up on me,

for always believing and have faith in me.

I am just a tiny point of light.

The web that we weave together have made my world so bright.

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My Name is Poa Boontoum

Kwan Aye Kwan Ma.....

Kwan Yu Sai Nor Yark Si Hai Por Yai Mae Yai Tarm Tid Gun Mar...

Mar Peng Kwan Peng Jai Hai Koi Nae Der.....

Aye.....

An elder called across the open room of my grandmother's house, where his voice filled the interior. Also inside and spilling out into the courtyards that were village elders, families and friends who had gathered for the Su Kwan ceremony. Following the call, prayer began where their collective voices become one aural vibration. For me, in that moment, I became aware of the spaces as more than physical, but that also the presence of a non-physical dynamic. The Su Kwan ritual was deeply moving, for the sense of shared spirit and belonging and the feeling that the blessing will remain within me where ever I go in the world.

This transformatory experience occurred for me in 2013, when I returned to my family homelands in Sisaket, a town in the Northeast province of Thailand. This gave me a sense of grounding, of community and also the surety of my identity as an immigrant and photographer in an international context.

สวัสดิ์ค่ะ, สะบายดี

ฉันชื่อ นางสาว นารารัตต์ บุญท้วม (ปอ)

ฉันเป็นคนไทย เชื้อสายอีสาน

दान เป็นแผ่นดินเกิดของแม่ฉัน

แม่ห้ามูล เป็นแม่ห้าของฉัน

แม่ใหญ่ จัน เชื้อคำ เป็นบรรพบุรุษของฉัน

บ้านदानคือหมู่บ้านของบรรพบุรุษของฉัน

พ่อของฉัน นาย สุรินทร์ บุญท้วม เป็นคน ไทยเชื้อสายมอญ-จีน มาจากจังหวัด ราชบุรี

แม่ของฉัน นาง ปราณี เชื้อคำ เป็นคนไทยเชื้อสายลาว-อีสาน มาจากจังหวัด ศรีสะเกษ

ฉันมีภูมิใจที่ได้รู้จักบรรพบุรุษของตัวเอง ฉันภูมิใจที่เกิดเป็นลูกอีสาน ลูกมอญ ลูกครึ่งจีน เพราะสิ่งเหล่านี้

ทำให้ฉันรู้ที่มาของตัวเองว่าฉันเป็นใคร.

My name is Nara-Ratch Poa Boontoum

I come from Thailand.

My Land is Darn

My river is Mun.

My ancestor is Yai Jun Cheuakhum

My tribes are Darn.

My father 'Surin Boontoum' comes from Ratchaburi Provinces.

My mother 'Pranee Boontoum' comes from Sisaket Provinces.

I am proud to celebrate the being of who I am.

This is my 'mihi', reflecting a Maori protocol to acknowledge my ancestors, my land and my people, to introduce who I am, where I come from. Like the mihi, this paper marks, my journey that uncovers a sense of my own identity and knowledge that is informed from re-appraising my work, created within a mainstream academic context as I draw from aspects of an Indigenous worldview and methodological framework. This mihi leads my research project as an Indigenous Thai-Isarn immigrant, who has settled in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the medium of photography an exploration of one's own identity as what it means to be an immigrant and an indigenous in the 21st century influenced by multi ethnic cultures that inform one's own sense of hybrid identity. This research project is a personal relational-based experience that is located within a post-colonial context. The body of this essay will reveal the theme of indigenous being, identity and gender. Nineteenth century historical references and contemporary context of colonial and postcolonial theoretical discourse and the work of key artists will interweave through the writing.

Chapter 1

Photographic representation from past to present.

I am a wahine, I am my own waka, and the Master's research project is my journey. Photography is my medium to express identity, my sense of being, feeling and creativity. I liken the course of this project as crossing oceans, often treacherous and frightening and rarely comfortable, but through this path, different layers of my identity unfold and reveal different dimensions about myself. The tide is rough, the night is cold, but I feel the freedom in my soul. This paper is a landing point.

Photography as a practice.

Photography is a medium of representation that allows me to share my inner voice. As an invention of the nineteenth century, photography sits in between science and art to challenge western modes of representation. As a medium it records, engages and bears witness in the human social context. Photography can engage both personal (photographer) experience and political realities. The unique qualities of the photographic medium is centred on the ability to mechanically reproduce multiple copies from negatives (and increasingly digital files) and to record accurate details of the world through the reaction of light and chemical process onto the two-dimensional paper or a digital equivalent. Photography can, in this respect be seen as effectively substituting for the representational task previously accorded to painting" (Wells,2009,p.17).

Throughout the photographic history, the nature of the photographic medium shifts and changes. During the nineteenth century camera is an instrument used by the aristocratic class and scientists to record their international expeditions and scientific studies. The ontology of photography during the Victorian period was concerned with underpinning aesthetics focus on a scientific framework that classified humans through a stratified colonial ideology. These visual records were disseminated within educated or specialised networks.

In the postmodern context, photographic images are embedded component of our social and cultural lives. The camera became mass-produced and photographs highly accessible through to the reproducible forms through digital data. The aesthetic values and intent of photographs have expanded

to meet the requirements of the photographic visual function within the postmodern social, cultural and technological phenomena. "Photography as such has no identity" (Tagg as cited in James, 1997, p.18). "Thus, in postmodernity, it may be that the photograph has no referent in the wider world and can be understood or critiqued only in terms of its own internal aesthetic organization" (Wells, 2009, p.23). To understand the vocabulary of the photographic image one can employ a range of theoretical and historical contexts such as, socio-political, scientific and modernist aesthetics, to bring a layered narrative to photography and photographic images.

Locating my photographic approach.

The historical reference of the nineteenth century photography has various anchor points that can be interrogated from a different photographic discourse. The underlying platform of which these points touch down to is colonialism. Historically photography has been used as a tool for scientific anthropological study to document, record and classify indigenous people organized within a colonizing hierarchy of racial and gender types. Photographs of indigenous people captured by the colonial anthropological viewpoint were a reflection of the west European worldview upon indigenous people to set apart as 'Other' (Said, 1978). I locate my photographic practice within the post-colonial field of study, interrogating and unpacking the ongoing dominant frameworks of aesthetics and meaning within visual representation from an indigenous worldview perspective. I bring a voice into view; articulated from my impressions through my personal experience as a Thai-immigrant. The visual narrative is rarely heard and seen, as the means of production and access into this visual arena continues to submerge or give only a light consideration to non-European female voice. This communicative intention intersects both physically and metaphorically with the photographic, that technically allows light through an aperture to record a time-based assumed reality of the world. In terms of content, the light that is delivered to the photographic surface reveals and presents both a lived reality.

Colonial Photography: aesthetics and scientific study.

Within nineteenth century colonial photography, Imperialism is a key term widely discussed within the post-colonial discourse. It has a political implication that covers a system of control, territorial acquisition, economic expansion, the exploitation of resources and cultural formation of attitudes, beliefs and practices that are imposed upon the rest of the world (Ryan, 1997). Ryan (1997) mentions that within the spectrum nineteenth century photographs, from a family album to a photographic archive of landscape, place and people can be considered evidence of “collective colonial memory” (Ryan, 1997, p.12) that includes compelling views of Britain’s Imperial past, that did and continues to be projected upon the rest of the world.

The Enlightenment is a framework of which the origin of the term ‘civilization’ was applied, to signify the prosperity of the Victorian cultural domain (Ryan, 1997). The camera as a tool was used as a symbol of control, for the western spectator to then expose and capture different races and social groups under the mantle of scientific, aesthetic or anthropological study. A mixture across the photographic image spectrum from the data-based surveys through to discoveries of the mysterious and unknown, feeding the British imaginary for colonial expansion of geographical and cultural space.

Nineteenth century photographs of native people and landscape can be regarded as mere props for this imaginary. An example is a studio portrait of a native person, seated and poised in front of painted backdrop. This colonial photographic trope interprets the native subject as an exotic object but assimilated into an ideal colonial vision of control over people and land.



Figure 1 & 2: Andrew, T. (1890). Studio portrait of a young Samoan woman wearing a necklace and holding some leaves.

The photographs of indigenous people and landscape have been depicted as picturesque, primitive, bizarre, barbaric and exotic from the colonial eyes of the photographer. These photographs have been sorted into the archival collection of an 'anthropological type' according to a classification of races and social categories. In addition, these photographs and documentation taken by the traveller were widely disseminated in the form of postcards, or photographic albums as an object to be gazed upon by the colonial consumer offering a constructed visual experience of different races from such imagery and literature. Photographs of indigenous people became a dominant mode of representation and popular cultural fantasy of the Victorian.

Photography of the women and the colonial fantasy.

My concern with the 19th century photographic representation of the indigenous extends to, of a nineteenth century depiction of women's bodies within a feminist discourse. The discussion will cover the relevant key points that are shared between western and indigenous women, in regards to the photographic agency of voyeurism and the gaze. However, the focus of this essay will discuss the representation of indigenous women within the colonial photographic regime and the specific impacts for indigenous women.

From my perspective, being a woman or born as women in western culture has already been categorized by the rule of patriarchy. Indigenous women now, they have to understand the dominating modes of image representation face to locate their position within the mainstream sense. What about me? I am an Asian – indigenous within a Thai nation trying to find my own position in the mainstream as an Immigrant being dislocated away from my motherland. Where do I belong in Thailand, in Aotearoa New Zealand and in the world? Where is my position? People like me have been depicted, represented, seen, and imagined from a male dominant perspective in all sort of ways. Where is my voice?

The Victorian era was obsessed with social status, depicted through the use of clothing and props to signify the class rank of a person. Photographs of western and indigenous women contained an explicit nudity offering an interpretation of the women's body as sensual or erotic and sexually available to the intended heterosexual male viewer (Wells, 2009). The photograph subjugated the women as an image for the pleasure of the male gaze, a process usually termed objectification (Solomon-Godeau as cited in Wells, 2009, p.178). Objectification, and voyeurism is entwined with the exercise of power, the means to exert control over who or how one is photographed. This is a struggle for women within the feminist discourse of power relationship between men and women in both Western and Indigenous visual culture.

Indigenous and the idea of objectification of women.

I have explained the photographic representation of a native people in relation to the constructed classifications of scientific study and the anthropological. Women also have contend further with the sexualized gaze from a dominant male view.

The representation of indigenous woman has more complex layers because they are seen as an 'erotic', a fascination with the native female body from the colonial eyes, as a further extension of subjugation beyond that of western women. "Photographs of indigenous woman are expressed as the figure of the beautiful, compliant woman posed and pictured in exotic surroundings with a view to erotic allure served overlapping categories of art, ethnography and pornography" (Ryan,1997,p.145). Portraiture of Indigenous women were depicted as primitive or naive but also sexually available. Feeding an obsession for the suggested and fantasized 'primitive genitalia' (Newhall as cited in Ryan,1997) as a specific gaze of voyeuristic pleasure. According to the Freudian approach, voyeurism occurs when a body becomes a spectacle for someone else's pleasure, the female subject or specific parts of a body become reduced or disconnected, reduced to an object. The unaware object is passive and unaware and available to be actively gazed at by the male viewer. (Wells, 2009, p.179). The colonial images of an Indigenous people have always been an objectification for scientific study. Moreover, the native female body becomes images of sexual and racial differences of 'other' in colonial desire and fantasy.

Key Artist

Within the post-colonial field of artistic practice, Shigeyuki Kihara, in her work *'Fa'a fafine: In a manner of a women'* (2005) has used a traditional nineteenth century photographic style to question and confront the western classification of the stereotype of an exotic female body through the colonial anthropological gaze. The work highlights the construction of Yuki's body to match her gender identity as a representative of her ancestors, and as a manifestation of both the male and female body, a fluid contemporary identity.

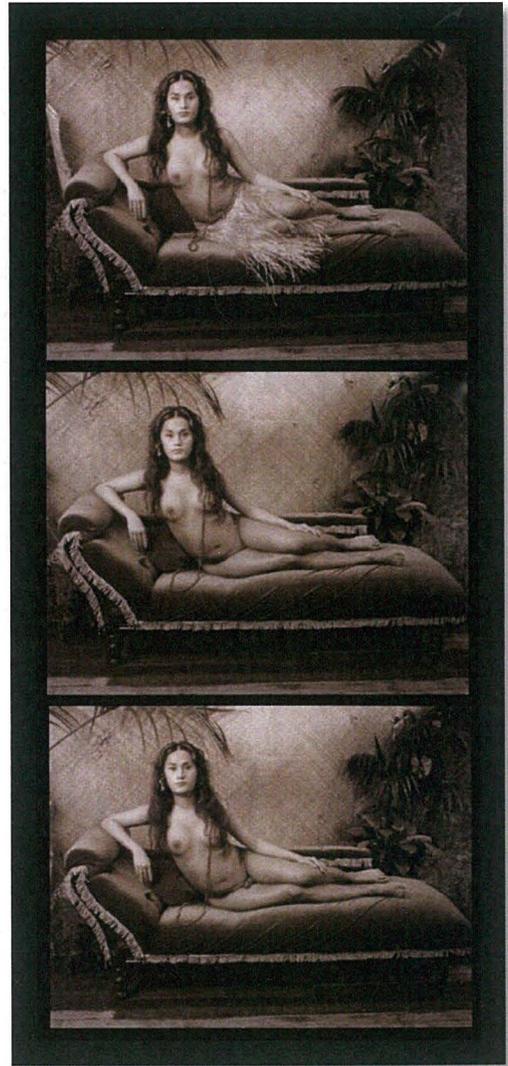


Figure3: *'Fa'a fafine: In a manner of a women'*

My Photographic practices from a post-colonial perspective.

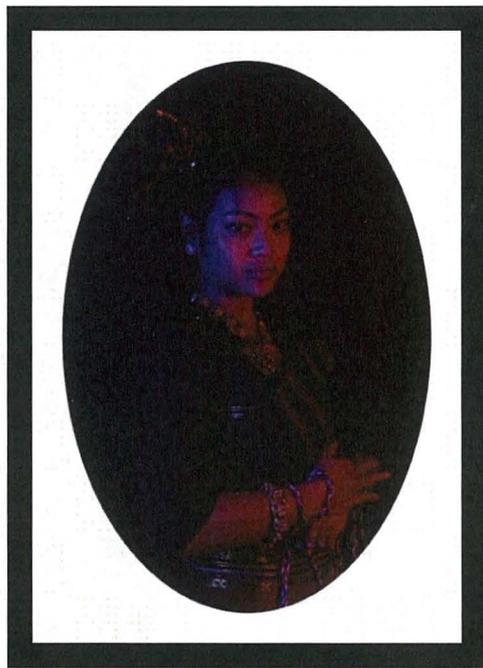


Figure 4: Self-portrait, 'Gazed'

'Gazed' is presented as my final image from the series. My aim is to challenge the colonial gaze and the representation of indigenous women through portraiture from the post-colonial context perspective. In this section I want to discuss the use of my image as a performative vehicle to disrupt the notions of 'object' and 'subject' in a photograph. The construction of visual signifiers including formal qualities, photographic style, and the key artists that influence my work located within the same post-colonial discourse.

I intention to use myself as a performative vehicle as this research is intertwined with my personal journey to discover my position within the mainstream society as an immigrant and indigenous from Thailand. Being an immigrant, poses language difficulties where English is not my mother tongue. From my personal experience living within the dominantly English-speaking society, I struggle to find a position for myself to fit into any group.

The genre of self-portraiture allows an active position outside the predominant colonial frame, but also allows me to interrogate my own colonized assumptions. Clothed in traditional Thai-Isarn attire and

facing the camera, I positioned myself as my ancestors were depicted in the nineteenth century portraits. By creating the same conditions, I came to understand the effect of being the 'gazed', a feeling that may only be shared among indigenous women who experience the same scenario.

I want to use my research to be able to speak for my own Thai-Isarn group, Thai-immigrant women living outside their homelands, and also to all other Indigenous minorities who can relate their experiences through my writing and visual work.

Photographs throughout my journey reveal, record, and articulate emerging dimensions of myself through my project. In 'Gazed' traditional Isarn attire were made to signify women as aesthetic, passive objects under the Victorian photographic trope. The passive pose of facing away from the lens, to invite the gaze, is now countered through my own direct gaze back to the viewer. By representing and positioning myself as both contemporary and traditional I can articulate both the exotic and the authentic through emulating the Victorian format of a controlled space, lighting and style used by the colonial photographer to depict an Indigenous person.

'Gazed' is housed within the Victorian trope of photographic portraiture of the oval frame challenges the viewer to question their own assumptions of the alluring and inviting female subject as a contemporary indigenous Isarn woman, within a global photographic arena.

'I am more than just being exotic, Indigenous, Asian.'

'I am more than whatever you can imagined about me'.

Chapter 2

Thailand, The King and his people

I come from Thailand that is my motherland. I am a Thai-Isarn of a Lao ethnic person from my mother descendent. I was born and raised in Bangkok by my grandmother. Now at the age of 24, no matter how long I have been away from my land, I still remember a beautiful globe yellow sunset before it dropped below the earths. I can still remember the smell of the grass and atmosphere of my grandmother's village, I can still hear the sounds of a motorcycle on a busy street. I still remember what it feels like to be living in Thailand.

The Golden Sunset of Siam

In contemporary Thai modern society, the notions of 'Thai-ness' are bound under the concept of 'nation –religion-monarchy'. This national proclamation influences Thai identity and unifies people in a sense of citizenship. However, these terms to describe the characteristic of ethnicity is more complex, as an array of tribal minorities in regional areas uphold unique customary knowledge, dialects and lifestyles. The formation of national identity submerges diverse identities into an imagined homogenous community of shared values and understandings. Beneath the nationalistic surface, there are many social issues and social discrimination attitudes from an urban Bangkok towards the rural people in the Northeastern, Isarn region. This is another reality that all ethnic minorities share in common. This chapter will unfold different layers of discussion such as 1) the historical context of nineteenth century colonial influences on Thai culture and Thai monarchy. 2) The representation of royal portraiture of the Thai king as a political apparatus to represent national power. 3) The political domination over identity and social impacts such as discrimination and stereotyping, that occurs. 4) The discussion of the concept of 'Other' within a post-colonial discourse 4.1) The layers of Thai being discriminate against each other as 'Other' and 4.2) The overall Thailand nation as being seen as 'Other' or the 'Orientalist' from Western perspective .

Photographic representation in a Non-Western context.

American anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris (2009) discussed the historical context and continuing utilization of visual images as a primary medium for portraying and asserting royal power and authority. King Mongkut had come to power in Siam at a time of Britain and France were both expressing a desire to acquire Siamese territorial and trade rights. Britain were ambitious to trade and invest in Siam where in 1855 Mongkut signed a trade agreement treaty providing British access into Siamese markets. Moreover, photography as a tool of western colonialism, was the medium employed by Mongkut the Thai king (1851 – 1868) who recognized the communicative, and accessible capacity of the photographs to extend and maintain his political domain. Photographs of the king and his successors have been circulated in the Siam to convey his power and aims to extend and asserts an equivalent level of an institutional authority to emulate or carry the authority of the former Siam monarchy. Siam as that asserted by western imperialism as a form of Siam protection and autonomy from the threat of western domination. "Photography, it seemed, afforded an opportunity for sartorial play and for resembling the forms of European power. Inhabiting his diversity permitted the diminutive Siamese monarch to effect a new form of comparability and to partake of that which was being compared, namely power as representation" (Morris,2009,p.126).

Photography as a medium to represents the 'Siwilai' for Siam elite

Mongkut optimized the vocabulary of photography in his self-portrait to assert an equivalent power aligned to the imaging of other western colonies to protect and assert Siam identity and sovereignty from colonisation. Mongkut's son Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) extended the use of photography as a medium for the royal elite to record the changes in Siamese political structure during his reign as a king. "The photography became one of several modes of royal self-representation that the Siamese utilized in their efforts to appear siwilai to both Europeans and Siamese" (Woodhouse, 2012, p.36). 'Siwilai' is a Thai term, a transliteration from the English term of civilization. The term is a key identifying term that is adopted and valued as a national Thai aspiration for their form of British imperialism. It is an exercise of exerting cultural hegemony from the stance of a British worldview that is then taken up by a non-western national power to then reinforce back onto their people. 'Siwilai' is a mode of power structure that Siam elite undertook from the Western Imperialism to modernize the country, to present their civilization as 'modern' to European standards (Woodhouse, 2012). By adopting strategies of a western power structure and its organizing imperial ideology of colonial nation, it is necessary for Siam to be able to create and maintain its own hierarchy articulated as Thai civilization. Effectively Siam slowly but systematically turned into a colonial nation, that it colonized itself. Herzfeld situated this power structure as within the 'Crypto-colonialism' discourse (Herzfeld, 2002) Crypto-colonialism' is the transformation of national culture fashioned on foreign models. Despite the construction of an alien cultural hierarchy, the term crypto-colonialism also relates to imposing civilization against their own minority tribal groups of people as 'other' and 'un-civilized'. "It is an anthropological product of the colonialist venture, being respectively a physical location and a discourse through which the moral segregation of the West from the rest of the world was effected" (Herzfeld as cited in Herzfeld, 2002, p.902).



Figure 5: King Chulalongkorn and Queen Saowapha surrounded by their sons.

The Siamese elite obsession for western civilization and its privilege became off-limits during this era, Siamese elite were avid consumers of European cultural signifiers such as clothing, arts and household items within the palace. The photographic images of Siam royalty fashionably dressed in Victorian attire were widely circulated in the form of mass-produced postcards, newspaper and magazine media, transmitting representations of the self-civilized and ideals of Western modernity. "The Siamese elite photographer's intently framed images in a crypto-colonial way: utilizing imagery in the same way as their Western counterparts, though with Siamese elites cast as the colonizers, and the lower social (and ethnic) orders as their subjects" (Woodhouse, 2012, p.13).

An example of crypto-colonialism in Siam culture is a photographic representation and a depiction of a Royal consort, Princess Dara Rasami, who originated from a neighboring kingdom of Lan Na (today's northern Thailand). She served as both a diplomat and hostage to a political alliance between The Lan Na and Siam kingdom (Woodhouse, 2012). As an 'outsider' native, Dara Rasami was known as the 'Chao Lao' (Lao Princess) within the palace. Her image was constructed with her distinctive regional hairstyle of a bun coiled at the base of her neck, she wore the identifying Lan Na textile robes and she spoke in the Lan Na dialect. The customary style of Dara Rasami from her kingdom, had a normalizing effect with the Siam palace that effectively bridged some notions or made connections that dismantled rigid conceptions of 'other'. Despite, Dara Rasami's (fg6) life style she maintained a distinct identity from other Siamese consort, as 'exotic' and 'other' within the dominant Siamese culture.



Figure 6: Princess Dara Rasami, her hair loose, looks back at the camera.

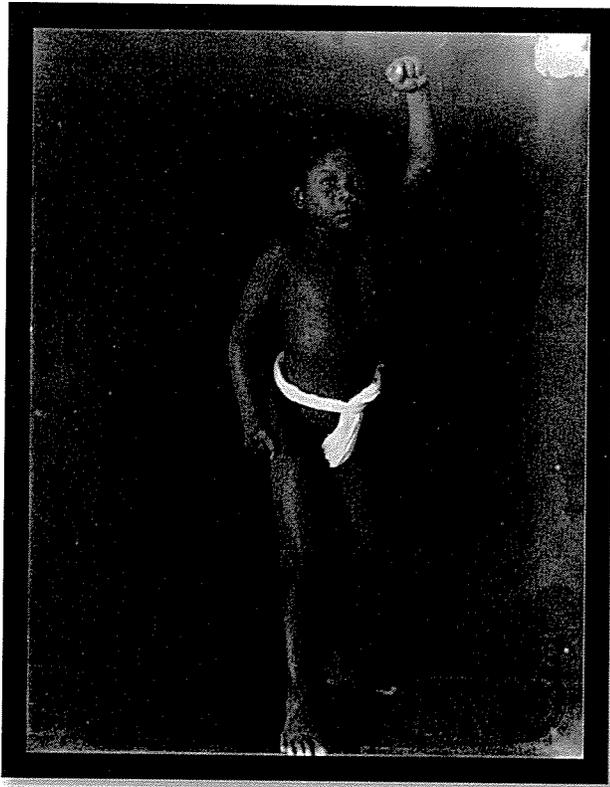


Figure 7: Semang boy 'Khanung'

I want to express another example of the constructed presentation of Siam Royalty as civilised gaze has and how they imposed notions of inferiority. An experiment of 'civilizing the savage' began when the reigning King Chulalongkorn adopted a 'Khanung' (fg7) child orphan raised in the jungle in the southern province, of the Semang tribe. Chulalongkorn trained him under 'civilized royal lifestyle', his aim is to transform an uncivilized jungle child into a Siamese aristocrat. Chulalongkorn himself composed a play about the boy's imagined tribal life, his physical appearance, eating habit, religious beliefs, dress, and hunting. Chulalongkorn's work reinforced the stereotype of the 'noble savage' as the European cultural counterpart, the colonial fantasy depiction of non-western races (Woodhouse, 2012). The child was photographed in a western studio context, posed, almost naked, in a scientific anthropological style. The effect of vulnerability and naiveté of a child in front of the camera reflected Siamese ideology of the civilized aristocracy and their power upon an inferior racial group as 'other'. The image of both Kahnung and Dara Rasami demonstrate the use of photography to assert Siamese dominance that is informed and mirrors the colonial perspective and asserts the Siamese dominance over their own citizens through their ownership of 'means of production'. "This justifying the crypto-colonial exercise of Siamese rule over the 'savages' at their peripheries" (Woodhouse,2012,p14).

Nationalism as the way to impose cultural view.

The arrival of the British and French colonial legacy in the nineteenth century have caused long lasting impacts on the South East Asia social structure, particularly in Thailand. The adoption of Western Imperialist notions of civilization is embedded in Thai modern society that links to the photographic representation of the current king. Images of the king is the central tool in influencing the social formation of nationalism and modern Thai national identity.

Nationalism is the key project in the construction of modern Thai identity. 'nation-religion-monarchy' is the hierarchy structure of power, which is embedded in contemporary notions of 'Thai-ness'. Apinan Poshyananda, a Thai curator, discussed the contemporary notion of Thai identity as being "Eroticized Nationalist" (Asia art society, 1996) where cultural heritage and identity are combined with nationalism as a way to maintain power. The success of this strategy is evident in the adoption of national holidays, royal birthdays, and religious days that assisted the development of a sense of collective unity and harmony for people as a combined citizenship within the country and as an international representation (Asia art society, 1996, p.35). The promotion of nationalism through cultural identity is associated with the sociopolitical context of Thailand.

The photographs of nineteenth century captured a portal of the domain of royal power and the cultural influence as a result of this medium. In 1932 the Siamese coup d'état, caused a transformational shift from a constitutional monarchy with absolute kingship to a democratic constitutional state. In 1939 - 1945, the Phibun government attempted to reform and consolidate the social structure through the concept of nationhood, imposing a model of western life style into Thai culture. Traditional Thai clothing, and customs such as Betel nut chewing were prohibited. Western style attire was introduced and practices such as kissing before leaving for work in the morning were prescribed (Winichakul, 1994).

Although the kingship had ended, the historical ramification of the use of royal portraiture still remains as a powerful contemporary political apparatus. Images of the current King Bhumibol continue to function as symbols of Thai nationalism. His portraits have been reproduced as commodities and appear in popular media, to disseminate and preserve his existence of royal power or prestige within the political framework(fig.8). It is within legislature that the display of the king's portrait is compulsory within all commercial buildings in modern Thai society. This has created not only a powerful presence of the royal elite but the king's image as an 'icon' to represent Thailand as a country, rather than the

country representing itself. "As a result, photographic consumption remains a significant site for politicization" (Morris, 2009, p.140).

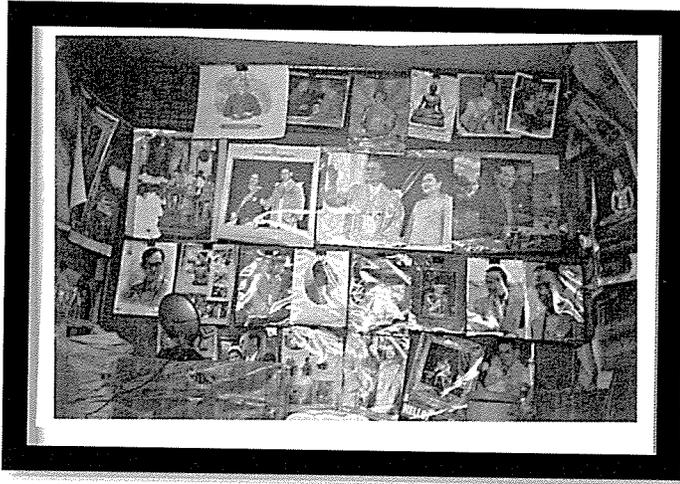


Figure 8: Photographs of the King image.

A generic nationalistic Thai identity within a monarchy is problematic. The diversity of ethnic groups of people with their own unique cultures and dialect, are subject to assimilation or more actively, integrated into the dominant culture. Benedict Anderson (1983) discusses nationalism as the concept of cultural artifacts from different peoples, eras, and understandings, reframed as symbols of religion and kingship. The nation is being imagined where diverse groups have been limited to a generic community where ethnicity is not favourably accepted. "Nationalism is not about the awakening of the nations but serves to invent nations where they do not exist" (Ernest Gellner as cited in Anderson, 1983 ,p.6).

The National identity cause the discrimination

In Thailand there are many ethnic minorities - groups organized within genealogical lineage. National construction of Thai identity has been defined by the idea of a national community of common ethnic lineage. "the term 'Thai' became the official name for the kingdom's inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity" (Peleggi as cited in Wubin,2012,p.6). Nationalism aims to homogenous every members in Thailand under a national identity this concept affects the people who belong to ethnically distinct groups. Nationalism also gives a predominance to Central Thai culture to distinguish themselves and directly impose a stereotypical view against the people from the rural, for instance, the people of Isarn (Northeast Thailand) depicted as, poor, uneducated, and rural. This shows a long term effect of 'Crypto-colonialism' - influences of civilization from the nineteenth century. This concept of nationalism have affected people from the central region to discriminate and marginalize people from the rural with different ethnic background. This is an ongoing issue beneath the reality of the king photographs and an imagining of a modern Thailand nation.

The idea of stereotyping and mimicry of ethnic group of people in the post-colonial context can be referred to in an essay by cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1994). Homi discussed how the tactic of stereotyping lies in the concept of 'fixity' as an ideological construction of otherness in the colonial discourse. The formation of stereotypes erases individuality and promotes marginalization. It is the domination of power, to differentiate, locate and identify the 'otherness' to inform a political practice of racial and cultural hierarchy. This power structure had also influenced Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, resulting in the construction of the nationalism in Thailand and ensuing societal issues in a modern context. "-That 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" (Homi Bahbah as cited in Easthope& McGowan,2004, p.63). The representation of otherness through the rendering of groups into a stereotyped form, encourages the accepted national identity. It is the form of structure of colonial power to establish a system of administration and instruction to organize its population, through ideology, distinct social formations, ethnicity and gender. As a result of this power play classification, people have a fixed' understanding of identity and citizenship.

'Otherness'

Words that flow through this text are 'Other' and 'Otherness', that originate from the West to differentiate and stratify a non-western race. This idea was appropriated by the Siamese elite to distance themselves from the non-ruling ethnic groups. The concept of 'otherness' was stated in Edward Said's study of 'Orientalism' that was adopted by cultural theorists and has been discussed widely within the colonial and post-colonial discourse. This is a theory of relevance to my work that aims to challenge the dominant mode of ideology within the field of post-colonial context.

Said described the concept of Orientalism as a construction from the ideology of Western experience of Asia and termed it the Orient. "The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. "Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (Said, 1978, p.2). This concept is rooted in ontological and epistemological beliefs of the West (distinguished from the orient as the Occident) to culturally distinguish themselves from non-western or the Orientals. Orientalism is an investment of Western fantasy into their theory and practice that centralizes the dominant power and cultural hegemony. This term however is limited to the imaginary of assumption, intentions, and an incorporate identity, of certain things, certain types determined by exotic, fantasy, and geographical societies of western perception towards the 'other'. Representational framework of the Orientals into western learning, western consciousness and western empire, the dominant power, and racism towards the existence of 'other' in non-western culture. "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the orient because the orient was weaker than the west, which elided the orient's difference with its weakness." (Edward Said as cited in Easthope & McGowan, 2004, p.57).

Thai artists



Figure 9. 'There is no voice'

Navin Rawanchaikul is a Thai artist who works with photographic archives to create installations to tackle concerns of social roles according to class, gender, heritage and age. Navin explored and documented the native villagers of Chiang Mai (Northern Thailand) marginalized by the rapid growth of industrialization, causing disruption to rural lifestyles and a rise of local unemployment. Due to dislocation and disillusion, they have no position in the social structure creating a diasporic condition. 'There is no voice' is an installation responding to this social issue. Rawanchaikul displayed hundreds of glass bottles each containing a photograph of Indigenous people. This demonstrated that each is contained or trapped, seen but no single voice can be heard.



Figure 10. Isarn boy dream.

Maitree Siriboon is a Thai artist who uses the medium of photography to record his personal journey as an Isarn boy, who in his artistic critique challenges the nationalizing discourse through the themes of migration and dislocation. In his work 'Isarn boy dream' Maitree explores the location of his hometown at Ubonrathchantani in the Northeast of Thailand. He returns to his home with his foreign friends so they may experience and understand his dream of preserving his childhood home for future generations, to counter and rejuvenate the rural return of Isarn people back from urban Bangkok. He uses his body as a vehicle to play the role of the stereotype of how Isarn people have been depicted in Thailand.

My photographs of the work in response to nationalism and fixed identity.

The notion of generic nationalistic identity of 'Thainess' has posed questions about my own identity and who I am. 21st century Thai contemporary society still holds ethnic specific cultural understandings but is intertwined with Western cultural capitalistic and material culture values. My sense of Thai identity is blurred within the mixed cultural space, which remains an uncomfortable pairing. This leads to an exploration and revisiting of my early photographic work, using myself again as a performative vehicle to express the nationalistic oppression of my identity as an individual.



Figure 11: self -portrait, #untitled

This work reinforced the royal 'imagining' of nationalistic power through the labels or slogans that influence my identity - I have no choice, no voices to speak about myself, who I am, and where I come from. *I have no individual uniqueness.* The photograph has limited the meaning and does not speak anything about my personal identity. The thing that signified me as a Thai person in the photograph is a visual image of the king, a national flag and also a text written that I am Thai.

'I want to challenge a nationalistic representation of 'Thainess'

'I want to speak about my background and how proud I am to be a Thai-Isarn person'

Nationalism has caused the identity of other ethnic minority groups to be marginalized, but in the 21st post-colonial era, “cultural identity might not be a priority”(Gaweewong as cited in Wubin,2011,p.9). In a postmodern context allows me to express the uniqueness of my identity through visual language. Through photography I have a freedom to assert what I see as my cultural identity as a Thai – Isarn person.

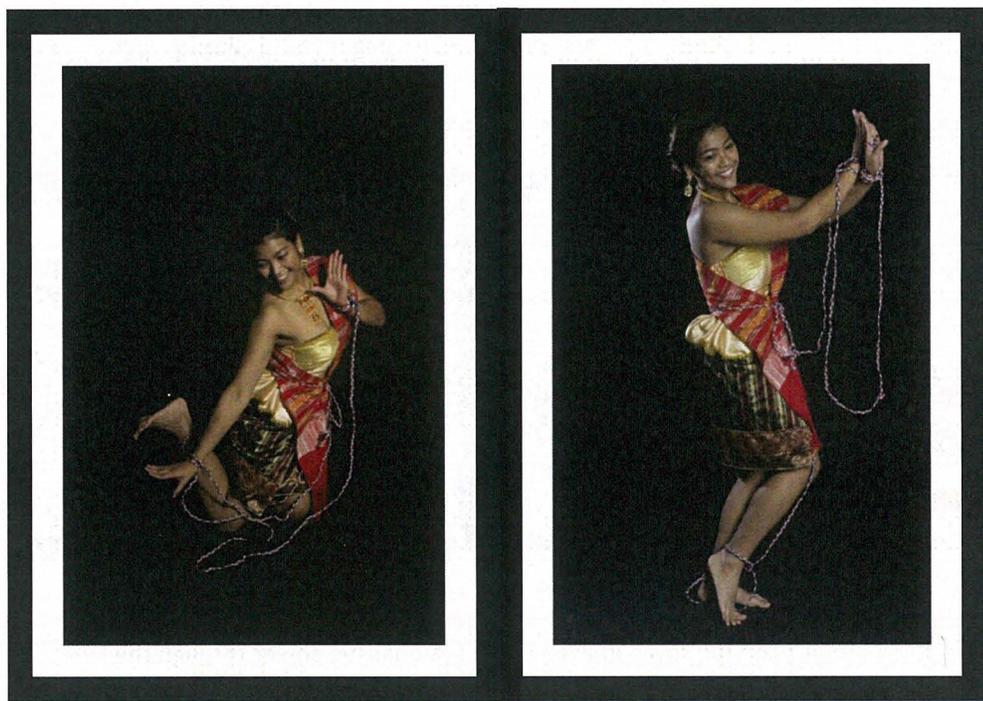


Figure 12: Studio dance series, #untitled.

Early this year, I produced a studio photographic style under the concept of being ‘tied into a national identity’ and ‘otherness’. This work is about that contradiction. I put myself in the position of being a subject and photographed within the studio context. My Thai-Isarn attire reveals my Isarn ethnicity, the clothes signify aspects of my identity but it is also ‘fixes’ me into a certain category as an ‘exotic female’ posing passively to be objectified by a male gaze.

In Thailand, traditional dance represents different ethnic groups. In front of the camera I perform a Thai-Isarn dance as is the protocol of visual identity. For me, ceremonial dancing is a physical representation of many cultures, as an authentic and meaningful body language and knowledge transmission.

'Thread' is a key influence in my photographic series that connects the photographs through different dimensions of my story. Red, blue and white coloured ropes represent how national identity is 'bound' and tightly tied into my identity. The rope both constricts and highlights movement of my body while I perform an Isarn dance in front of the camera. My movement allows smaller gestures but any further extension is governed according to the length of the rope, this signified the nationalistic ideal that constrains my identity.

Reflecting upon my project, I have recognized that studio photography is a controlled 'fixed' space, it does not reveal anything about the subject in front of the camera apart from an object that signified and constructed the meaning of the photograph or that person. It is clearly testified to me that a subject in front of the camera is being gazed upon, and the context has been displaced. Perhaps, to get more meaning from a photograph, I need to take my camera and myself back to an original context, to express reality of identity. This leads to the unfolding of the next project of my photographic journey exploring my identity in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Research is ceremony:

A cycle of dawning and dusking each day.

I am a spider, I create a web of connection. I am a firefly, I glow in darkness. These are two significant insects that appears during my journey. A spider is a symbol of power, growth and protection. As the spider weave a web it is a reminder for me to weave the path for my life, the people I establish my relationship with are connected through this thread. The web is getting bigger and stronger when positivity developed among each other. A firefly is another insect that occurs later on during my journey. It is symbol of creativity and awakening. Firefly glow, this is a message for me to reflect upon myself and illuminate the light from my heart and shine it from inside out. These insects are important along my journey to develop a relationship with other people.

The reality of Indigenous research.

Shawn Wilson's book "*Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*" (2008) is a foundation of my research. Wilson outlines a strategy of how the basis indigenous research incorporates cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs as a relevant paradigm that makes sense to the indigenous communities being researched. The indigenous paradigm takes into account post – colonial transformation of research, that indigenous culture has been oppressed through western research and that the indigenous scholar must be aware and guard against applying a western paradigm and continuing this practice resulting in mimicry and the stereotypical depiction of native people. "As proponents of a holistic view of our worlds, indigenous scholars may recognize the holistic approach to oppression that is evident in all of the ways that indigenous people are held down by research and the dominant view of knowledge and the world is upheld". (Wilson, 2008, p. 17).

The reality of relationship and relational experience

Wilson described an indigenous ontology as an equivalent of an indigenous epistemology. It is a set of multiples *realities* of the truth that discovered by one's relationship to it. (Wilson, 2008, p.73). For the indigenous the concept or ideas are only as important as relationships formed. This extends out from the researcher to the community but includes a spiritual connection of interconnected relationships between environment and people. Wilson describe this "web of relationship"(Wilson,2008) as likened to the single points of light or a star in the void, each individual point is distance from each other. The thin thread of the web is formed, when each individual star is starting to form a relationship from one point to another. As many points of light join together the web grows bigger, stronger, and brighter in the dark. Wilson's theory of relationship resonates with my own experience of meaningful research. Like Wilson mentions, each individual is a tiny point star and we are building connections to each other. Wilson states we are not 'in relationship' we must understand that we are the relationship.

I was unhappy, I was bored.

I want to break my own barrier, I want to experience.

I want the world to make more sense to me.

My journey is to build a web of relationship.

Connecting points of light to create belongingness and identity.

I am longing to connect to the land, the people, my family, and find a space for myself, these are motives that drives me to challenge myself. To connect to an outside world is to put myself in a position of vulnerability, but in this exploration I realize it is more vulnerable to remain constrained due to the imposition of a patriarchal, capitalist society. Taking the world from a childlike perspective the relationships I have developed a brighter more enriched experience. I feel a colourful spectrum of lightness shining in the darkness. It is in the interaction and exchange with other people and the potential within future experiences that my being is continually evolving "This is what surrounds us, and what forms us, our world, our cosmos and our reality. We could not be without being in a relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships" (Wilson, 2008,p.76).

Being around people the web of relationship is established.

*This the ceremonial that all of us create together,
share with each other to fill the light into the darkness
and to reduce the distance in between each other.*

My research Methodology is to be with my people

I am an Immigrant in New Zealand.

I have been displaced from my motherland.

I am searching for myself.

Having left the shore, my boat pushed out into the expanse, I became disorientated. Out in the sea there is only my waka, water, the sky and stars. I have no scientific instruments to guide my way in the ocean, but to use the knowledge I have within me and the glittering stars in the night sky to guide my way. This reflects the reality of my research that I have to begin from myself, my family and my community because they shaped who I am and my knowledge especially being disconnected from my homeland. As an immigrant I find myself physically and emotionally uncomfortable, being displaced in different cultures and of my own. I feel being caught up in 'between' multiple cultures but not belonging to one or another. It is an everyday internal struggle, the awkwardness feeling that is embedded in my identity and being.

Living in New Zealand give less chance to be with family in Thailand. Instead of distance communication back to the homeland, I decided to visit a Buddhist monastery for Thai people in Auckland. This is the closest place to home and the place where my family associated in New Zealand. Throughout my research journey I spend most of my time within the community in Auckland, while maintaining contact over phone call with family member in Thailand. This is to strengthening my Thai-Isarnness relationship with family members and people in the Buddhist community to reconnect myself back to Thai culture to find a missing part of my identity.

Most of my time spend inside the Buddhist community is to practice Thai - Isarn and Buddhist cultural knowledge by being involved to help in different activities, such as setting up table, learn how to make traditional paper folding, flowers garlands, fruit carving and Thai-Isarn traditional cooking. Participating in community activities helped me to reconnect to my culture, I am able to speak Isarn-dialect, share and build relationship with everyone inside the community. From this point, I recognized that knowledge and understanding of the world that reflected my 'reality' and my being comes from family

members and people within my own community. The reflection of reality as being a dislocated Thai immigrants are that all of us shared emotional and physical struggle of cultural barriers in different aspect of everyday life. The Buddhist monastery is the heart for Thai immigrants in Aotearoa. It is a place to gather and support all of different Thai ethnic people living in New Zealand, to practice, share and learn culture that each individuals bring over with them across the ocean to Aotearoa.

Apart from exploring within the Thai expatriate community in Aotearoa, I also encountered a Thai-international student in the university campus. This added different spectrum of perspectives into my research. I invited a Thai student to an individual interview session in the photography studio (fg13). The interview involved questions ranking from open discussion to personal struggle and cultural barrier that each individuals have highlighted from their own experience. During the session I have documented each individual's facial expression. From exploring both group of Thai people, I see the thread of struggle that runs through the entire research.



Figure 13: From an interview series. 'Ignorant'

Based on Shawn Wilson Indigenous research methods, the Indigenous research ontology and epistemology is about the reality through the set of relationships of being. He further describes the axiology and methodology. Wilson mentioned that axiology is the concept of accountability. (Wilson,2008,p.77). It is important role and obligation researcher needs to be accountable for the people involved in the research. Methodology is the respect that researcher needs to be taken into account within the community during the process of establishing the relationship and finding out information. The accountability of axiology and methodology methods will help researcher to become

aware of their responsibility towards their own community not to take advantage of a developed relationship. This is a research ceremony that will strengthen the relationship and results in reciprocal bond between the researcher and the community (Wilson,2008).

For my project, I followed Wilson's methodology research of approach into every relationship I had established with people during the research process. Before seeking for any interview or taking photographs I made sure to address a clear intention, purpose and out come with honesty. It is important that the relationship is reciprocal, and I am guarding over each individual's privacy and information I received during my interview. In relation to photography aspect of the research, I asked for a permission for the photograph to be used in my exegesis. Other photographic images that are used in my exhibition had been given a permission by each individuals, with a consent form attached, before the opening of public exhibition.

Chapter 4.**'Mana Wahine'****A transcending reality of cross-cultural identity to
connect with the new land.**

As a diasporic I had been disconnected from the motherland, family and being displaced from my own community. On a positive side, being a Thai immigrant in Aotearoa gives an opportunity for me to being exposed to a multicultural ethnic groups of people, from Asian to Pacific Islanders and Maori. Being inter-mixed into different cultures have change my perspectives and broadening my position to view the world from different angles. This added another dimension into my personal identity, to be fluid. I am no longer being restricted to one cultural values and beliefs, but my identity is multiples and adaptable.

Based on my personal –relational experience as a Thai –Isarn immigrant in a cross-cultural space. I have been exposed to Indigenous Maori culture worldview that can be reflected upon my own culture. In this chapter I want to discuss the cultural differences in the roles of gender between Indigenous worldview and western worldview. Rooted from the 19th century colonization, the patriarchal structure of white-male dominant cultural values, towards Asian and Indigenous women as a subject of being 'exotic' and 'orientalist' are continuing cultural struggle in current society. Non-western women have been culturally mis-represented and mis- interpreted, this chapter explores the cultural values of women from a non-western perspective to find their roles and position within the main stream society.

The difference between Western perception and Indigenous perception.

Western Ideologies are based on the colonial principals of patriarchy structure. Within the household males hold absolute control. Men are considered to be the head of the house, with a right of 'ownership' over everything, including the life and death of women and children. According to English common law women belong to her father until she gets married, her position changes from being a property of her father to her husband. Any properties bought over by a wife into marriage belongs to men, he could do whatever he like with it, including abusing his wife and his children as he chose. (Ibid as cited in Mikaere,1994). Men have right to retain their personality, but women have no personality, nor she has voice to speak, and have to be dependent on him. "She losing hers and being declared in 'service' to him" (Mikaere,1994).

On the other hand an Indigenous cultural worldview it is a different story. Based on Maori context, the traditional worldview is acknowledged in the natural order of the universe. The inter-connectedness of the relationship from the people through a whakapapa, to the whenua and to the universe are balanced. There is no hierarchy in gender, the role of men and women shared equal value as part of the collectives (Mikaere,1994). Dr. Rose Pare describes the concept of women as 'Whare Tangata'(The house of humanity) (Pare as cited in Mikaere,1994) their essential roles to nourish. Fulfillment and fertility are culturally and spiritually connected to 'Papatuanuku' the earth mother that provide the resources, support and well-being to every life force to maintain the balance and harmony. Maori women before colonization were not regarded as chattels or possessions. She has a right to retain her own name upon her marriage. Men and Women are working alongside to support each other within the society (Mikaere,1994). Dr. Pare also mentions that "assault on a women, be it sexual, was regarded as extremely serious and could results in death or almost as bad, in declared "dead" by the community and ignored from then on" (Ibid as cited in Mikaere,1994).This notion of gender equality is at the heart of an Indigenous worldview of interconnection and inextricable relationship to nature where fertility and wellbeing is a key value.

The struggle of Maori women in English law.

The shifting of Maori Indigenous knowledge and gender roles occurs in the 19th century after the arrival of missionary whom brings western civilization to Aotearoa. They imposed the patriarchal structure and western ideology that cause the dis-positioning for Maori women in early 20th century post-settler society cause a long-term cultural impact and perpetrate a struggle of women in the contemporary society. Women in Maori cosmology and myths have been 'noble savage' and objectified by the gazed of the colonizer for a sexual pleasure. This ignorant, misunderstanding of cultural worldviews has destroyed 'mana wahine'. Linda Smith notes that "Maori women were perceived either in family terms as wives and children, or in sexual terms as easy partners." (Linda Smith as cited in Mikaere, 1994). Maori women were regarded by the settler society as to only be considered attractive in the absence pool of white women. Despite their 'exoticism' Maori women are used as potential bedmates for white men and potential for resources of land and economic security for white settlers (Mikaere,1994).

Moreover, the collectivism of the Maori whanau system has been destroyed and replaced by the individualism of Western society. The spread of Christianity values slowly pushed away the traditional values and beliefs and replaced Maori women into their new role within the settler society. Women are forced to follow Pakeha model of family structure, they have no power, and are forced to move away from their whanua. The new structure based on Christianity values are for Maori women to be a dedicated mother, they have to be 'subservient', 'obedient', to be a good wife. The women have to rely on their husband to bring food back on the table at home (Mikaere, 1994).

Moreover, academic education was discouraged for Maori boys and girls. The aim of the education for Maoris in 1931 were for the boys to be good farmers and the girls to be good farmer's wives. (Strong as cited in Mikaere, 1994). The traditional context and balance in the roles of women and men had been shifted to assimilate into a patriarchal system of Pakeha model. Where men are becoming the head of the family and women are forced to fulfill both roles of a manual labour in the farm and a domestic roles in all aspect such as cooling, washing, ironing, and mending clothes. (Simon as cited in Mikaere, 1994). This demonstrates the distinction of class structure for Maori within the settler societies cause by colonization and the changed from traditional context to fit into the post-colonial settler society.

Position of Maori women today.

Colonization is not a past, for Indigenous people it is a present, and this struggle will never end. In the current society, Maori women position still remain invisible within the body of new cultural structure. Their health status and well-being have been acknowledge as being particularly poor. (Pomare as cited in Mikaere, 1994). The impacted from colonization have forced Maori women to physically and culturally being isolated from their whanau, dealing with a perpetual health issue, illness, domestic violence and being characterized under a distorting lens of racism from a mainstream society.

The struggle of Maori women is also represented in New Zealand cinema. 'Once were warrior' (1994) is a famous film, depicting an urbanized Maori nuclear family for whom unemployment, poor, crime, alcohol, poverty domestic violence and tragedy struggle in their daily life. The characteristic portray in the film perpetrate a stereotypical view of Maori men as a head of the family, being abusive to his wife and unable to cope with pressure to live in urbanization.

In contrast to a male character, the character of 'Beth Heke' also battled to lives in a new urbanization. From the external oppressive role as a wife in a Pakeha family structure, she had been forced to against her inner spirit and intuitive sense of mana wahine. She got caught up in the role of being subservient and admitting her position of being abused by her husband. However, at the end of the story, she choose to leave her husband, reject the nuclear family model and return back to her whanau. (Mikaere,1994). 'Once were warrior' reveal the stereotypical view of Maori from the mainstream society and reflecting on the oppressive family frameworks of cultures to the Indigenous women.

Re- evaluation a reflection.

As a Thai- Isarn immigrant woman of the 21st century being exposed to Maori knowledge. Based on my personal experience coming from a Matriarchal family background, where women are the centre of the house. I find that my beliefs and values are strongly aligning with an Indigenous Maori knowledge of women. Maori Knowledge helped me reflected on my own contemporary cultural perspective of Thai women. In Thai culture the concept of woman is connected through the Buddhist worldview, woman is being respected in their mother's role.

However, the religion view is not enough to change the reality of the issue occurs to Thai women as they are being mis-treated and categorized which leads to a misunderstanding conception in a wider social context. In this section will explore the struggle of Isarn woman within Thailand and their hope to migrate away from home. This will reveal another reality of Isarn women, and Isarn immigrant the intention behind their thought and smile, when they decided to leave their homeland and become an immigrant.

Isarn women in the contemporary society.

Isarn region is considered to be the poorest part in Thailand bordering between Laos and Cambodia, known as economically deprived with dry land, and poverty. Isarn people have been stereotyped into being uneducated and manual labour. They have been marginalized, suppressed and humiliated by the central region, for example, their Thai accent is not clearly pronounced, they also have been rank as a third citizen in Thai society.

Isarn women are forced to leave their village to search for jobs and find their way to support the family. They are known to have a reputation for marrying white men . 'Girl Friend for Sale'(YouTube) is an English documentary, documenting Isarn women in Thailand desperate to find western husbands from an online dating website and entering the red light district in Bangkok to search for their potential partners. This documentary reveal a fantasy and perception of Isarn women toward marrying a western men through their interview, as it was a promised that western man will transform her life away from poverty, for a better life in oversea.

Without knowing, Isarn women are putting themselves at risks, many have been exploited and abusive by their partner and some are fortunate. This documentary reinforced the grittiness of many Isarn women lives coping with poverty and being uneducated which forced them to enter a sex industry and leave home. Furthermore the documentary also reveal the foreign men perception and their fantasy towards East Asian Women as a 'perfect wife', and their intention to travel to Thailand to search for a wife from a red light district.

The film have reflect upon the fantasy of Thai women searching for a foreign husband. However, positioning myself from an outsider perspective, interviewed with a Thai women living in Aotearoa, I discover many disadvantages. Immigrant women living in another country have to faced many struggles, such as being isolated from their family and community, language barriers, and they are forced to fulfill a domestic roles inside the house while working outside to earn money to send back home. This demonstrate a similarity to Maori women, Indigenous women are forced to live in the patriarchal structure of dominant culture, without any support from their partner and families. For some immigrant women with language barrier problem, they may have less chance to return back home, some have been trapped even loses contact with their family.

This perspective came from a story from Isarn women within my community whom lives in Aotearoa for so many years. As an immigrated Asian woman myself, being mistreated, discriminated, humiliated was a direct experience. Although we are living in a multicultural society, but discrimination and a perpetual stereotypical view of Asian women as being passive, uneducated is still a reality and a true struggle that still existing in the current society.

Indigenous and Asian women shared the same struggle prospects. Women are forced to live under the patriarchal system. This essays is not disregarding the Western feminist discourse, I acknowledge that western women are forced to live in the same structure. The struggle lies within the dominant cultural context which is culturally dealing with problems in different ways. Linda Smith notes that "our rage as an oppressed group is directed at dominant white structures which sit over us, and so encompasses white women as much as white men"(Ibid as cited in Mikaere,1994). This essays focused on Indigenous worldview of women, Indigenous women have to find their way that logically and culturally served their own reality of being. "It seems to me that my struggle necessarily takes account of your struggle. I can't ignore patriarchy in my struggle. Yet you can and do ignore the "colour" of patriarchy, the culture-specificity of patriarchy. And in so doing you ignore me"(Ibid as cited in Mikaere,1994). I find my values

and beliefs are closely connected to Indigenous worldview, it is culturally appropriate context that suits my understanding of the world.

Reclaiming Mana Wahine through photographic practice.



Figure 14: A group photograph of 21st century Indigenous women. Titled 'Spiders'

During my journey to discover myself and my identity, being exposed to Tikanga Maori have given me different values, experiences, perspectives that shaped me as person and evaluated my position within the mainstream society as an Indigenous woman.

The work titled 'Spiders' reveal another dimension of my identity, I discovered for myself during the research. The photographic work arrived from my strong connection I have established within Maori community. My intention behind the work include three aims: 1) Is to challenge the depiction of Indigenous women from the dominant view as an objects of gazed. 2) To presents the reality view of Indigenous women within the contemporary society. 3) Is to represent the Isarn identity within a cross-cultural context.

This work is a heart of my research as my identity unfold. The intention behind the photograph is to express Indigenous being in the 21st century, that identity are no longer being 'fixed' into one racial type in a photographic archives. The set have been move away from a studio control setting, and replace by

outside environment to show a deeper connection to the land and environment. The photograph is a thread that portray a shared experience, struggle and understanding of an impact from colonization as being Indigenous people in the cross- cultural space. The concept behind a photograph is following the Indigenous worldview of natural, cosmology and the universe of being. This photograph reinforced the spiritual and cultural connection of women to the earth mother 'Papatuanuku' under the concept of Whare Tangata. *We are the women, we are the land.* The women in this photograph are presented from the reality of the 21st century Indigenous culture lens, which embracing the Indigenous cultural values while maintaining balance within a mainstream culture. The formal qualities of four women portrait is to confront their position as a mana wahine, and to challenge the dominant manifestation that Indigenous women are being depicted as exotic and passive objects.

The arrival of the photograph comes from a group discussion and consultation with friends, to bring the realistic representation of Indigenous people in a 21st century context. The choices of costume comes from a reflection of an everyday reality. Indigenous people lives normal life in paralleling with mainstream culture. Their fundamental foundation to remain the position in the mainstream society beyond the material culture is their interconnected to the whakapapa and whenua that attached to each individuals.

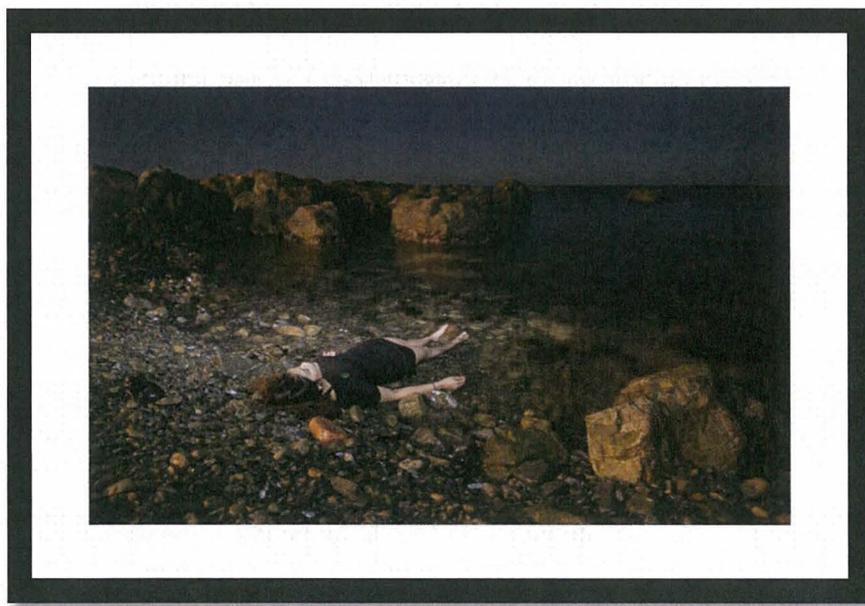


Figure 15: Self-portrait, Titled '*I am my own waka*'

Moreover, I also remove myself from a control studio space and take photograph of a self-portrait at foreshore to reflect on my inner connection I have to the cosmos and natural world (fg15). This is a personal sense of connection which is significant to in shaping my own identity and relevance to an Indigenous worldview and belief. Emerging myself with nature at the foreshore gives the sense of freedom, uncontrollable, alive and connection to the land. Lying on the foreshore has a significant visual metaphor as it is representing the space 'in between', the space of an unknown. The dramatic lighting style in the photograph could be portray as being surreal, yet it is the reality one person is discovering. This is an internal expression of my being through a lens of a camera to an external and physical world visual images. The physical world and the internal soul is always struggling against each other.

It is important to present the cultural 'turned' from an Indigenous-immigrant women perspective. The photograph become a visual language to speak the controversial and struggle of one's identity in the post-colonialism. Identity are no longer being fixed into one dimension, but rather hybrid, crossing-over from one to another culture. I am multi-cultural identity, unique on my own. I am an Indigenous, Thai, Isarn, and immigrant of the 21st century. The photograph speaks of my freedom and unfolding my connection I established with the land and different dimension of my identity I discovered during my time living in Aotearoa.

The last photograph of my work titled 'Alive' (fg16) it is a self-portrait wearing a Thai traditional attire performing Thai dance on Te Aro Pa in Wellington city, in my hands holding Maori Poi. This is an old Pa site in the Wellington Central district, enrich with historical context, and earth ground area. In the photograph, I stood still, my legs are grounded, strong, connecting myself to every layers and experience to the land.



Figure 16: Self-portrait, Titled 'alive'

This work reinforced a dislocation of belonging in the cross-cultural space. The representation of one's identity living in a contemporary alienated mainstream culture. This photograph represent the reality that reflect upon an everyday lives, living an alienated culture.

In this photograph, I performed a Thai dance on the street, which have given me a lot of courage. The visual connotation is to find a position and space within a society. A poi in both of my hands represents a cultural understanding of Maori tradition. This may raise controversial discussion around cultural appropriation. However, I see this as a cultural exchange that was kindly given to me from a Tangata Whenua to teach me Poi, as I was involved in a Kapa Haka group. Holding Poi in my hand is to acknowledge Maori cultural values and people that shaped who I am, and my connection to Aotearoa.

The relationship between each work is a thread that weave different story together to create balance. In comparison to my previous work that focused on the spirituality connection to the natural world through the land, which shaped my identity. This image of self-portrait represents the preparation of a person, ready to confront a reality of a mainstream social construction, with her legs, bear feet strong rooted to the ground.

Every images in my work have its own unique photographic technique and style. However it related back to the heart of discovering one's identity, the work is an attempt to record a personal growth during the journey in a different point in time. The work only represents a glimpse of my identity, and my understanding of the world will also change as I grow older. The learning process and the discovery of self will never stop.

The freedom in my soul.

This project is just a beginning of my journey, it is my first point of stop until I carry on my next journey. I am a Thai-Isarn Indigenous immigrant, I am no longer fixed into any concept of identity or stereotype. Within that cross-cultural space I have a freedom to express my identity to be who I am, I am unique on my own. I established my reality through a relationship with other Indigenous people. I don't understand other, and other don't understand me, but they can related to me and I can related to them.

I am complex with depth.

I connect myself to nature and every life force.

I am a land, a waterfall, a tress, a mist, a cloud.

I am a rock, a sand, a soil, I belong to earth.

I am a spider, a firefly, a glowworm.

I am the star, the moon, the night.

I am the dawn, the sunrise, a woman.

In that busy world, where everything is moving non-stop.

I watch everything moving slowly from afar.

I never was in the circle nor that I am outside.

I am an immigrant, I have no specific home.

I am in an awkward space, uncomfortable, unpleasant.

I suffered living and dying every day and night.

But I called myself home and hold my heart strong.

I am inclusive, expressive, I want to be part of the world.

My journey, never stop, because I only know some part of me.

My Past is my future, because I understand the pain of my people.

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