

# Closed Stranger Adoption, Māori and Race Relations in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1955-1985

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## Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that to the best of my knowledge it contains no material published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text, and contains no substantial amount of material previously accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signed .....

Date .....



## Acknowledgements

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Ehara taku toa i te toa takatahi, engari he toa takatini taku toa

Success is not through the work of one, but through the work of many

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## Abstract

This thesis is based on the oral histories of social workers, birth parents, and adopted people who have personal experience of ‘closed stranger adoption’ in relation to New Zealand Māori. Viewed collectively their histories, and my own analysis, demonstrate the legislative sleight of hand and societal illusions, which bound all parties involved in an uncomfortable and contrived silence.

Between 1955 and 1985, over 80,000 children in New Zealand were adopted. The majority of these adoptions were under the state-sanctioned practice of closed stranger adoption. While exact numbers remain unknown, it is widely accepted that a significant proportion of these adoptions involved children of Māori ancestry who were placed into white homes.

Although the era of closed stranger adoption, which is now widely viewed as an indefensible social experiment, has been well documented, there still remains very little scholarship and analysis of the adoption of Māori children and their birth parents, during this period. When Māori experience of adoption is discussed, it is usually assumed that the subject is whāngai adoptions. However, closed stranger adoption is almost the antithesis of whāngai, the only similarity being that a child is cared for by people other than their birth parents.

This thesis highlights the inextricable links between closed stranger adoption practices, the relevance of ‘race’, and ongoing colonial processes and structures in New Zealand, arguing that while the history of closed adoption begins formally with the passing of the *Adoption Act 1955*, the wider issues of degradation, disregard and the devaluing of Māori people and values that are manifest in this particular policy and practice can be understood as a continuation of the policies and practices of colonisation. The manipulation of identity, the silencing and erasure of self to fit roles described and prescribed by others, the forced assimilation, the infantilising, the expectation of gratitude, and the inter-generational trauma, are all practices of colonisation that are reproduced in the closed stranger adoption of Māori children into white families. Meanwhile, New Zealand publicly maintained the illusion of a progressive, egalitarian society, with an enviable record of race relations.

This thesis argues that the impact of closed stranger adoption was particularly onerous for Māori resulting in ruinous long-term, intergenerational consequences on Māori family values, kinship ties, and social organisation. The most debilitating effect for many Māori adoptees has been the inability to trace their Māori parent, and thereby access knowledge

of their whakapapa. Many Māori adoptees grieve their unknown whakapapa and feel ‘inauthentic’ and invisible as Māori as a result.

However, the silence surrounding the adoption, and more recently the out-of-home care, of Māori children is slowly starting to be addressed. Through the use of testimony, historically contextualised, this thesis provides a space where the burden of holding singular, personal stories of grief and dislocation can be shared. Making private testimonies public, provides a powerful, amplified voice, which requires a wider societal response.

This thesis is based on a Māori-centred research approach and incorporates poetic transcriptions in the (re)telling of the narratives.

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## Explanation of Terms and Language

The language of adoption is highly contested. For example, women separated from their children by adoption often reject terms such as ‘birth mother’, or ‘biological mother’, as they see this as denying the relationship to the child/ren they bore. They want to be simply known as mother. Conversely, women who adopted children often reject the term ‘adoptive mother’ as they feel this diminishes their role as the mother and their relationship with the child/ren they adopted. They too want to be known simply as mother. These same concerns can be applied to all members of the adoption triad.

Likewise, there is controversy over such terms as ‘relinquishment’, or ‘placing a child for adoption’, as without any other realistic options available such ‘placements’ could arguably be deemed ‘forced’.

While problematic, I use contested terms throughout this thesis — either for sake of clarity and/or because they were the terms in use during the period covered.

Other terms used throughout the thesis which require explanation include:

**Adoption Reform:** specifically refers to the movement of people who lobbied for the opening of closed records. In the current New Zealand context, there is a movement to reform the *Adoption Act 1955*, as many aspects of the Act are now outdated. What ‘adoption reform’ does not denote in this thesis is the movement of people advocating to change legislation to increase the accessibility and ease in the adoption of children (usually from other countries).

**Adoption Triad:** the adoption triad, or triangle, refers to the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the adopted person. The term *kinship circle*, or *adoption circle*, is an updated term which, while corresponding to the frequently used term ‘adoption triad/triangle’, extends past the birth parent, adoptee and adoptive parents to include others related either through birth or adoption. For example, the kinship circle can include an adopted person’s birth and adoptive siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

**Closed Stranger Adoption:** specifically relates to the practice where the adoptive parents were ‘strangers’ to the child and to the birth parents. Identifying details of the child’s birth parents remained confidential and all files remained ‘closed’. The child’s original birth certificate was unable to be accessed and a new birth certificate with the adoptive parents’ details was produced. There is no indication on the birth certificate that the child has been adopted.

**Whāngai:** while whāngai is listed in the glossary of Māori and iwi terms, a fuller explanation of the term is included here as it is important to comprehend that while the whāngai is often translated into English as ‘adoption’, it specifically refers to what has been described as ‘customary’ or ‘traditional’ Māori adoptions. There is very little in common between whāngai and closed stranger adoption, other than a child is raised by people other than the birth parents. There was/is no stigma, secrecy, or shame related to the practice of whāngai, and the arrangement was/is not necessarily permanent. Grandparents were/are often mātua whāngai to grandchildren. The practice of whāngai continues today.

I am also aware of the diversity of experiences and subject positions which may be glossed over by some of the terms that are used throughout the thesis. For example, I use both the terms American Indian and Native American, aware that such descriptions were prescribed by others, and do not reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of this group of people. Similarly, I acknowledge that terms such as Māori, Aboriginal Australian, First Nations, and Indigenous Peoples also represent a diverse group of peoples.

In keeping with contemporary orthographic conventions, I use macrons over vowels in Māori words where the vowel sound is long. However, where macrons are not included in the sources I cite, I defer to the original. I have also purposefully chosen not to italicise Māori language in this thesis, in recognition of te reo Māori as an official language in New Zealand. However, where Māori language is italicised in cited sources, I again defer to the original.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANU	Australian National University
ARENA	Adoption Resource Exchange of North America
CLAS	Confidential Listening and Assistance Service
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
IAP	Indian Adoption Project
ICWA	<i>Indian Child Welfare Act</i>
MP	Member of Parliament
MOMM	Motherhood of Man Movement
MSD	Ministry of Social Development
MWEO	Māori War Effort Organisation
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
USA	United States of America
WWII	World War Two

## Glossary of Māori and iwi Terms

Aotearoa	lit. Land of the Long White Cloud (Māori name for New Zealand)
Atawhai	adopted child
Haka	dance/war dance or chant
Hapū	group of extended families with a common ancestor (subtribe)
Hui	meeting, gathering
Iwi	tribe descended from our common ancestor
Kaikaranga	a woman (or women) who calls visitors onto a marae, and a woman (or women) who responds to the hosts, during the welcoming ceremony.
Karakia	incantation/prayer
Kaupapa	plan/principle/philosophy/proposal
Kaupapa Māori	a Māori philosophy
Koha	gift/offering/contribution/donation
Kōrero	talk/speak
Kūare	ignorant, of low social standing
Mamae	pain
Manaakitanga	to show hospitality/to help/care for
Māori	Indigenous New Zealander
Māoritanga	Māori culture/ Māori way of life
Marae	the open area in front of the Meeting House (often also used to include the buildings around the marae)
Mātauranga	knowledge
Mātauranga-a-iwi	specific tribal knowledge
Matua	father/uncle/parent
Mātua whāngai	adoptive parents
Mihi/Mihi whakatau	speech of greeting/official welcome speech
Mokopuna	grandchild/grandchildren



Ngāti Mahuta	a hapū within Waikato who reside in the Kāwhia and Huntly areas of the Waikato region
Ngāti Porou	East Coast (of New Zealand's North Island) tribe descended from a common ancestor Porourangi
Ngāti Whakaue	descendants from Te Arawa who reside in the Rotorua district
Ngāti Whanaunga	tribal group residing in the Coromandel Peninsula
Ngāti Whātua	tribal group of the area from Kaipara to Tāmaki-makau-rau
Pā	(fortified) Māori village
Pākehā	New Zealander of European/British decent
Papakāinga	original home/home base
Pipi	a type of shellfish
Rohe	tribal area or region
Tainui	descendants from the Tainui canoe whose territories include the Waikato, Hauraki, Tauranga, and King Country areas
Tangi/tangihanga	to cry/Māori funeral ceremony
Taonga	treasure, anything prized
Taurima	adopted child
Te Arawa waka	are a confederated group of tribes all descended from Te Arawa
Te ao Māori	the Māori world
Te reo Māori	the Māori language
Tikanga	customs/protocols
Tipuna/tīpuna	ancestor/ancestors
Toheroa	a large shellfish found buried in sand.
Tohunga	expert/traditional healer
Tupuna/tūpuna	ancestor/ancestors
Tūrangawaewae	standing/ place where one has the right to stand/place where one has the rights of residence and belonging through kinship and whakapapa
Waiata	song/sing
Waikato	collective name of the tribes living in the Waikato Basin. Also the river from which they take their name

Waka	canoe
Whaea	mother/aunt
Whakamā	shy/ashamed/embarrassed
Whakapapa	genealogy
Whakawhanaungatanga	to build relationships with others/making kinship ties
Whānau	family, birth
Whāngai	adopt/adopted child
Whare	house
Whare karakia	house of prayer/church
Whenua	land/country

## Prologue

Ko Hikurangi te maunga

Ko Waiapu te awa

Ko Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki me Ngāi Tahu ōku iwi

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This thesis was unwittingly conceived in 1964, when I was born to a Māori mother of Ngāti Porou, te Aitanga-a-Mahaki and Ngāi Tahu descent, and a Pākehā father proud of his Irish heritage. My parents were already married with one son, when my mother became pregnant with me. However, not long afterwards my father abandoned us. My mother, alone and relatively new to the ‘big smoke’, did her best to keep us together, but was too ashamed to return to her family who had advised her against marrying my father.

At nine-months-old I was placed into foster care and in 1969 I was legally adopted by my foster parents. I was loved and cared for, and remained with my Pākehā adoptive family when my birth parents reunited and had three more sons. At primary school, I received phone calls from my birth mother and my brothers. When I was eleven we began arranging secret visits.

All adoption stories are unique, yet all have similarities. Secrecy is a common point of shared experience. Wanting to know about the experiences of other Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families, as well as the experiences of birth parents and adoption social workers, was another way of wanting to know more about myself – it was a way of understanding and uncovering the secrets associated with adoption.

*Looking for you, looking for me, I guess I've been looking for us both all my life<sup>1</sup>*

This thesis is a product of all that looking.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (London: Random House, 2011), 160.



## Introduction

This thesis examines the history, experience, and ongoing impacts of the closed stranger adoption of Māori children in Aotearoa New Zealand through the narratives of eight people intimately associated with the practice. It is already known that most Māori adoptees had Pākehā mothers; there was immense stigma associated with illegitimacy; it was harder to find adoptive parents willing to adopt a Māori child; and that most Māori children were adopted into Pākehā families.<sup>1</sup> But this thesis provides new information and analysis by triangulating the experiences of Māori adoptees, birth parents of a Māori child, and social workers who worked in the field of adoption during the closed stranger period.

In this introductory chapter, an overview of the literature pertaining to adoption is presented. I will demonstrate that international experiences of adoption both resonate and contrast with those in New Zealand. While New Zealand was the first country in the British Empire to legislate for adoption in 1881, post-World War II adoption policy was influenced by international ‘experts’. Subsequently, Māori values were not recognised or incorporated into the *Adoption Act 1955* which heralded closed adoptions. Further, in 2008 both the Australian and Canadian governments made national apologies for the removal and adoption of Indigenous children. There has never been any comparable acknowledgement or apology in New Zealand. This may at first seem surprising, given the increased politicisation and political voice of Māori. Yet, throughout this thesis I argue that New Zealand is well adept at illusions of racial equality and the art of legislative sleight of hand. By legislative sleight of hand, I refer to Acts of Parliament which while appearing progressive, concealed an effective dismissal of Māori aspirations. While seemingly advancing equality between the races with a ‘one law for all’ rhetoric, many such policies were decisively Eurocentric and advantageous to Pākehā at the expense of Māori values and wellbeing. Put another way, this sleight of hand meant many New Zealanders were left with “a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape”.<sup>2</sup> This thesis clearly, and repeatedly, illustrates this point while discussing two highly emotive, and at times uncomfortable, topics which are inextricably linked –

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 187; Sheryn Gillard-Glass and Jan England, *Adoption New Zealand: The Never-Ending Story* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2002), 19; Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 73; Joan Metge, *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995), 253.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Haebich, “Between knowing and not knowing: Public knowledge of the Stolen Generations”, *Aboriginal History*, 25, (2001): 71.

adoption and race.

A critical aspect of this thesis are the methods and methodologies underpinning its design and presentation. In conducting the research and writing the chapters, I was inspired by Māori historian Aroha Harris' challenge to "give Māori voice a turn with the historical microphone, without reducing it to the role of back-up singer".<sup>3</sup> As such my thesis is, in many ways, a conscious oppositional response to the colonial practices and assimilationist policies central to adoption practices between 1955 and 1985. I will argue that in relation to Māori and closed stranger adoption, colonising practices and policies encouraged the silencing of experiences and the erasure of self. This introduction concludes with a chapter-by-chapter outline of the thesis as a whole.

## **The Historiography of Adoption**

A plethora of books and other resources about adoption exists. They are written from various perspectives and aimed at a variety of audiences. For instance, there are how-to books, parenting books, books for children who have been adopted, self-help books for adult adoptees, guide books for adoptive families, as well as memoirs, autobiographies, novels, and collections of poetry. There are books by psychiatrists, psychologists and historians, books by adoptees including transracial, Indigenous, and inter-country adoptees, books by birth mothers, and adoptive parents, and books which incorporate more than one of the above genres. There are numerous online sites, journal articles, and an increasing number of theses and dissertations on the topic of adoption.

With such a wealth of material available, my thesis expressly focuses on literature most influential to adoption practice in New Zealand between 1955 and 1985, and with other works published after this period, particularly authored by those within the adoption triad. This selection provides an important historiographical map of changing perspectives and practices over time. In addition, I briefly examine literature which addresses Māori cross-cultural adoption and the child removal and adoption policies of Indigenous children in Australia, Canada and the United States of America to highlight the similarities and differences between the policies and practices affecting Indigenous children, their families, and communities across these settler-coloniser nations. I make particular reference to publications by Indigenous adoptees, and comment briefly on adoption literature produced

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<sup>3</sup> Aroha Harris, "In your discipline, what is methodology and why is it important?," *RANGAHAU*, <http://www.rangahau.co.nz/methodology/58/> (accessed December 17, 2016).

as autobiographical narratives, especially in relationship to the politics of identity.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is important to note that there is currently limited research which specifically focuses on the subject of Māori and closed stranger adoption. Due to the paucity of Māori specific material on closed adoption, this thesis is extensively based on the eight extensive oral histories produced as part of this study, my own experiences, and on several key texts as discussed below.

## International Influences in New Zealand

From the early twentieth century adoption in New Zealand was, as elsewhere in the Western world, influenced by theories stemming from such disparate sources as Freud's 'family romance theory', the eugenics movement, and anthropology.<sup>5</sup> Scientific answers were increasingly being sought for issues around child development and family-making. Adoption was subjected to four major types of empirical research: field studies, outcome studies, nature-nurture studies, and psychopathology studies.<sup>6</sup> A number of important contributors, whose work was accessible to social workers and the wider public post WWII, were influential in the promotion of closed stranger adoption. They, and their work, will be briefly introduced. Dr Benjamin Spock, an American paediatrician whose book *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946), commonly known as *Baby and Child Care*, did not believe in pretending the adopted child was the birth child of the adoptive parents and promoted telling children of their adoption. As a prominent health professional, and widely recognised child-care expert, his commentary on how to best raise an adopted child added significant weight to normalising the practice in the minds of the public.<sup>7</sup> Dr John Bowlby, a British psychologist whose pioneering work on 'attachment theory' claimed that a disruption in a child's bonding with his mother was traumatic enough to cause depression, pathological grief and anxiety, delinquency, and the inability to form close

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<sup>4</sup> For discussion on the rise of autobiographical writings on adoption post 1970, see: Barbara Melosh, "Adoption Stories: Autobiographical Narratives and the Politics of Identity," in *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*, ed. E. Wayne Carp (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 218-246.

<sup>5</sup> For further reading on topics and theories which influenced adoption practice see: Ellen Herman, "Topics in Adoption History," *The Adoption History Project*, (February 2012): <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/index.html> (accessed November 22, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Herman, "Adoption Studies/Adoption Science," *The Adoption History Project*, (February 2012): <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/studies/> (accessed November 22, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Dr Benjamin Spock, *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946). This book had such a lasting impact that in 2011 it was in its 9<sup>th</sup> revised and updated edition, with overall sales of over 50 million and translations in 39 languages. Dr Benjamin Spock, *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care*, (New York: Pocket Books Simon and Schuster Inc., 2011). See: Louise Hidalgo, "Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care at 65," *BBC World Service*, (August 2011): <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-14534094> (accessed December 23, 2016). In 1946 Spock promoted telling children of their adoption (505-507), and by 2011 he was promoting open adoption (760).

inter-personal relationships.<sup>8</sup> As such, Bowlby's book *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) condemned institutions where children were deprived of consistent mothering or mother figures. Yet his work was often cited by those within the field of adoption as the rationalisation for closed adoption and the early removal of children from their birth mothers, so that they could attach and bond with their adoptive mother.<sup>9</sup> Social worker Margaret Kornitzer's book *Adoption* (1959) normalised the practice of closed adoption and provided a practical and legal guide for adoptive parents and other professionals involved in arranging adoptions.<sup>10</sup> Marshall Schechter, an American psychologist, reported in *Observations on Adopted Children* (1960) that adoptees were 100 times more likely than non-adoptees to present with a variety of mental health issues. Kirk (see below) called Schechter's claims "spurious" and Viola W. Bernard, a social psychiatrist prominent in adoption work in the USA from the early 1950s, also vigorously renounced Schechter's study. In fact, Schechter's view that adoption emotionally damaged a child's development was widely contested during the 1960s when adoption was being socially promoted. However, by 1990 it was widely accepted by both adoptive parents and professionals that attachment and loss are central issues which make adoption a difficult experience.<sup>11</sup> David Kirk was an adoptive father and the Director of the Adoption Research Project at McGill University 1951-1961. His influential book *Shared Fate; A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health* (1964) was the first to address adoption as a significant issue in sociological literature on family and mental health. Kirk viewed adoption as a social institution rather than as an individual response to personal problems and advocated for adoptive families to express their different way of family making.<sup>12</sup> Social worker Jane Rowe's publications *Yours by Choice* (1959) and *Parents, Children and Adoption: A Handbook for Adoption Workers* (1966) were widely distributed. The former aimed at providing guidelines and reassurance to adoptive parents while the latter targeted professionals working in the area of adoption. Her work provided advice consistent with popular practices of the time, for example, the

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<sup>8</sup> See: Saul McLeod, "Bowlby's Attachment Theory," *SimplyPsychology* (2007). [www.simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html) (accessed December 23, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> John Bowlby, John, Margery Fry, and Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953).

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Kornitzer's book *Adoption* was first published in 1959. However, throughout this thesis the 5<sup>th</sup> edition is referenced. Margaret Kornitzer, *Adoption*, 5th ed. (London: Putnam & Company, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> See: Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960," *The Adoption History Project* (February 2012): <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/studies/SchechterOAC.htm> (accessed December 23, 2016). Schechter co-edited the influential book *The Psychology of Adoption* (1990) with developmental psychologist David Brodzinsky, which examined such difficulties. David M. Brodzinsky and Marshall D. Schechter, *The Psychology of Adoption*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> See: "Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health, 1964," *The Adoption History Project* (February 2012): <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/sharedfate.htm> (accessed December 24, 2016). While first published in 1964, throughout this thesis the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition is cited. H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Port Angeles: Ben-Simon Publications, 1984).



geographical separation of birth and adoptive parents.<sup>13</sup>

Notably, these authors were all viewed as experts in the area of childcare and adoption, and despite their theories at times conflicting, or being used in ways perhaps not originally intended, remained as a group highly influential, helping to foster, and advance, closed adoption practices during the closed adoption boom years. In New Zealand, as in many other Western countries, adoption rates increased rapidly post WWII with a peak in New Zealand of 3,976 adoptions in 1971, after which adoption rates declined significantly. This was due to a combination of factors which included an increased accessibility to contraception as New Zealand Family Planning started prescribing the pill to unmarried mothers from the early 1970s; the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1972 which provided financial support to single mothers; and a change in public attitudes to illegitimacy exemplified in *The Status of Children Act 1969*, which removed illegitimacy as a legal status on birth certificates. Furthermore, by the mid-1970s adoption practices were not only being more openly discussed but challenged at both the professional and personal level. The number of unmarried mothers keeping their babies had risen significantly, and adoption literature written by those within the adoption triad had grown. Renowned American writer, psychologist, adoptee, and adoption-reform advocate, Betty Jean Lifton's nonfiction trilogy, *Twice Born: Memoirs from an Adopted Daughter* (1975); *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience* (1979); and *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness* (1994), resonated with many adopted people and emboldened other voices to come forward in print.<sup>14</sup> Through her work, Lifton eloquently relayed to her readers the trauma of closed adoption, imbued as it is, with secrecy, shame, and lies.

Within the next decade, 'experts' moved away from pathologising adopted people because of who they inherently were (the 'bad blood' of illegitimacy), to recognising the often traumatic effects of adoption itself. Silverstein and Kaplan's, *Seven Core Issues in Adoption* (1986), and Brodzinsky and Schechter's, *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self* (1993), reflect this wave of thinking.<sup>15</sup> However, perhaps the most read and critically acclaimed

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<sup>13</sup> Jane Rowe, *Yours by Choice* (London: Mills and Boon, 1959); Jane Rowe, *Parents, Children and Adoption: A Handbook for Adoption Workers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966).

<sup>14</sup> Betty Jean Lifton, *Twice Born: Memoirs from an Adopted Daughter* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975); Betty Jean Lifton, *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience* (New York: Dial Press, 1979); Betty Jean Lifton, *Journey of the Adopted Self: A Quest for Wholeness* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). For an example of other adoption voices in print see: Susan Wadia-Ells, ed., *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers and Adopted Daughters Tell Their Stories* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan, "Seven Core Issues in Adoption,"

<http://vanish.org.au/media/17324/seven-core-issues-in-adoption.pdf> (accessed December 24, 2016). See

book, by psychologist and adoptive mother Nancy Verrier, was *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (1993).<sup>16</sup> *The Primal Wound* became a handbook to many prospective adoptive parents seeking to understand and support their adopted child. Even today it is arguably one of the most well-read and accessible books on adoption, being both widely cited by scholars and widely circulated within adoption circles. It was reviewed as “[a] book which adoptees call their ‘bible’, it is a must read for anyone connected with adoption: adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, therapists, educators, and attorneys”.<sup>17</sup> Verrier followed up with *Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up* (2003) and *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound* (2010).<sup>18</sup> Verrier’s work informs much of the analysis in chapter five of this thesis, which focusses specifically on the experiences of adopted people. Like Lifton before her, Verrier confirms that the experience of adoption is a traumatic event with life-long consequences.

Internationally, Australia has been at the forefront in recognising past injustices in child welfare policies and practices, at least in terms of holding state, or other public inquiries, and making formal apologies.<sup>19</sup> I was privileged to attend the National Apology for Forced Adoptions on 21 March 2013, where then Prime Minister Julia Gillard apologised on behalf of the Australian people for “the policies and practices that forced the separation of mothers from their babies, which created a lifelong legacy of pain and suffering”.<sup>20</sup> Five years prior to the Forced Adoptions Apology, on 13 February 2008 there was a National Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples, particularly the Stolen Generations, for government policies of forced child removal and Indigenous assimilation. In the following year, on 16 November 2009 the Australian Government delivered a National Apology to the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants. The Australian Senate first used the term ‘Forgotten Australians’ in its inquiry into children in institutional care in 2003-2004. It was estimated that during the twentieth century at least 500,000 children were placed in

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also, Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan, “*Lifelong Issues in Adoption*,” <http://www.fairfamilies.org/2012/1999/99LifelongIssues.htm> (accessed December 24, 2016).

David M. Brodzinsky, Marshall D. Schechter and Robin Marantz Henig, *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See: Goodreads, [http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/501390.The\\_Primal\\_Wound](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/501390.The_Primal_Wound) (accessed December 09, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Newton Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: The Adopted Child Grows Up* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 2003);

Nancy Newton Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound* (London: British Association for Adoption & Fostering, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> The dissonance between the inquiries and subsequent apologies with actual change is critiqued elsewhere in this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Julia Gillard. National Apology for Forced Adoptions. The Great Hall Parliament House, Canberra. 21 March, 2013. Speech.

institutional, or ‘out-of-home’ care, in Australia.<sup>21</sup> The term ‘Former Child Migrants’ refers to the estimated 4,000 children who were sent to Australia from Britain and Malta following WWII and who were housed in privately-run institutions approved by the Commonwealth.<sup>22</sup>

These apologies provided a social and political space to discuss out-of-home child care, child removal and past adoption practices. Many inquiries and reports were prepared, and the material produced is both rich in personal accounts and rigorous in documentation. For instance, the *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997), which was released two years after the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was first instigated, illustrates the high level of investigation that went into its final assemblage.<sup>23</sup>

The National Apology for Forced Adoptions gave rise to extensive research and as such valuable material collected was accessible in one place. The inquiry produced two important reports, *Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian*

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<sup>21</sup> See: Australian Senate and Community Affairs References Committee, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or out-of-home Care as Children* (Canberra: Senate Printing Unit, 2004); Australian Senate and Community Affairs References Committee, *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* (Canberra; Senate Printing Unit, 2012); “About Forgotten Australians,” Alliance For Forgotten Australians (AFA). <http://www.forgottenaustralians.org.au/about/forgotten-australians> (accessed December 03, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> See: “About Find & Connect,” *Find & Connect*, Find & Connect Web Resource Project for the Commonwealth of Australia, 2011. <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/about/> (accessed December 03, 2016) and, Australian Government, “Child migration to Australia – Fact sheet 124,” *National Archives of Australia*, 2017. <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs124.aspx> (accessed December 05, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, 1997.

[https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social\\_justice/bringing\\_them\\_home\\_report.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf)

(accessed December 27, 2016).

Here, I should note, that while there has been literature produced because of these apologies, it is questionable if policies and practices relating to the out-of-home care for Indigenous children has changed in any meaningful way. For instance, there are currently more Aboriginal children in care in Australia today, than during the era of the Stolen Generations. See: Bonnie Malkin, “More Aboriginal children put into care now than during ‘Stolen Generations,’” *The Telegraph*, January 03, 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/4092776/More-Aboriginal-children-put-into-care-now-than-during-Stolen-Generations.html> (accessed December 04, 2016); Johnathan Green, “Wards of the state: the foster care crisis”, *Background Briefing*, ABC Radio National, (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), 17 November 2013.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2013-11-17/5086254> (accessed December 04, 2016).

There is also current political debate on implementing legislation for adoption of foster children to be made easier. See: Samantha Maiden, “Malcolm Turnbull’s push for adoption reform to help foster children find permanent homes,” *The Sunday Telegraph*, November 01, 2015.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/pm-malcolm-turnbulls-push-for-adoption-reform-to-help-foster-children-find-permanent-homes/news-story/7654daa94fa0b79ad8d9548168645d09> (accessed December 27, 2016).

*Research* (2010) and *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* (2012).<sup>24</sup> The Forced Adoptions History Project website provides a wealth of data and was useful in providing material for this thesis. Academics whose work has substantially contributed to adoption literature in Australia include Marian Quartly, Shurlee Swain and Denise Cuthbert.<sup>25</sup> All three collaborated in producing *The Market in Babies: Stories of Australian Adoption* (2013), which ultimately questioned whether adoption is ever in the best interest of the child, or is in fact an adult construct around the supply and demand of children.<sup>26</sup> This argument will also be addressed later in this thesis.

## New Zealand Literature

Joss Shawyer's *Death by Adoption* (1979) was, in some ways, a watershed moment in adoption literature in New Zealand. Shawyer, a feminist writer and single parent, active in establishing Jigsaw, was unapologetically anti-adoption and highly critical of women who "wait greedily with outstretched arms" to adopt another woman's child.<sup>27</sup> She was berated by one reviewer for her "angry and bitter" stance against adoption.<sup>28</sup> Yet, the release of *Death by Adoption* was during a period of politicisation of many formerly silenced and marginalised groups and language was often hard-hitting and strong. Shawyer's book shocked many into conversations and debates (some within Parliament) about the exploitative nature of adoption. Nine years later, Ann Howarth, an adopted person and journalist, published *Reunion: Adoption and the Search for Birth Origins – The New Zealand Story* which primarily told the stories of twelve adult adoptees, who had made contact with birth

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<sup>24</sup> Daryl Higgins, *Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian Research: Final Report*, (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2010); Australian Senate and Community Affairs References Committee, *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* (Canberra: Senate Printing Unit, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Denise Cuthbert, Marian Quartly, Kathy Lothian and Amy Pollard, "Forced adoption? in the Australian Story of National Regret and Apology," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 58, no. 1 (2012): 82-96; Denise Cuthbert and Marian Quartly, "Forced Child Removal and the Politics of National Apologies in Australia," *American Indian Quarterly*, 37, no. 1 (2013): 178-202; Marian Quartly, "We Find Families for Children, Not Children for Families; An Incident in the Long and Unhappy History of Relations Between Social Workers and Adoptive Parents," *Social Policy and Society*, 11, no. 3 (2012): 415-427; Shurlee Swain, "Homes are Sought for these Children: Locating Adoption within the Australian Stolen Generations Narrative," *American Indian Quarterly*, 37, no.1 (2013): 203-17; Shurlee Swain, "Adoption, Secrecy and the Spectre of the True Mother in Twentieth-Century Australia," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 26, no. 68 (2011): 193-205; Shurlee Swain, "Market Forces: Defining the Adoptable Child, 1860-1940," *Social Policy and Society*, 11, no. 4 (2012): 399-414.

<sup>26</sup> Marian Quartly, Shurlee Swain and Denise Cuthbert, *The Market in Babies* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Jigsaw Inc. was established in 1976 providing support, and a voluntary contact register, for adopted people and birth parents wanting to make contact with each other. Jigsaw was at the forefront in lobbying for more openness in adoption and legislative change which eventually culminated in the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*. Joss Shawyer, *Death by Adoption* (Auckland: Cicada, 1979), 3. The *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* allowed for identifying information to be made available between adopted people aged 20 years and over and birth parents if no veto was in place.

<sup>28</sup> See: Joss Shawyer, "Birth- Mothers Exploited By Adoption," *Voices From Exile Blog*, March 2004, [http://www.exiledmothers.com/voices\\_from\\_exile/](http://www.exiledmothers.com/voices_from_exile/) (accessed December 03, 2016).

parents.<sup>29</sup> This was the first time in New Zealand that a collection of reunion narratives, in the voices of adoptees and birth parents, were brought together and published. It provided a moving testament, in people's own words, to the deep-seated longing to know about their origins and kin.

However, the two most recognised and respected writers on the history of adoption in New Zealand are Keith Griffith and Anne Else. Both were adopted at birth and were part of the movement questioning closed adoption practice and its inherent secrecy. Griffith was a prolific writer whose contribution to New Zealand's adoption literature is unparalleled as he meticulously gathered the most detailed and reliable statistical and legal data on adoption up until the late 1990s.<sup>30</sup> His works include *Adoption: Procedure-Documentation-Statistics, New Zealand 1881-1981 100 Years. Also Adult Adoptee Access to Information* (1981); *Adoption Court Records: Adoption Act 1955 Section 23: Construction-Cases-Practice* (1982), and *The Right to Know Who You Are: Reform of Adoption With Honesty Openness and Integrity* (1991) which, published after the introduction of the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*, provides a critique of the legal, social, and moral underpinnings of open versus closed adoption records.<sup>31</sup> These works significantly contributed to Griffith's 750-page tome and labour of love, *New Zealand Adoption: History and Practice Social and Legal 1840-1996*.<sup>32</sup> Griffith's work diligently documents New Zealand's adoption history bringing together a rich source of information for scholars and researchers, including a section dedicated to issues of whāngai and closed adoption in relation to Māori. He concluded that closed adoption was a social experiment based on adult needs, resulting in trauma and a loss of identity for adoptees, with closed adoption being particularly distressing for Māori as it cut right across Māori tradition and culture. Griffith strongly advocated for the opening of sealed adoption records for adoptees and birth parents and was instrumental in research and lobbying to support the introduction of the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*. This is discussed in more detail in chapter one of this thesis.

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<sup>29</sup> Ann Howarth, *Reunion: Adoption and the Search for Birth Origins – The New Zealand Story* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> This view of Griffith's work was confirmed by Eileen Preston, Senior Advisor Adoptions, Child, Youth, and Family. Eileen Preston, conversation with author, 17 March, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Keith Griffith, *Adoption: Procedure-Documentation-Statistics, New Zealand 1881-1981 100 Years. Also Adult Adoptee Access to Information* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1981); Keith Griffith, *Adoption Court Records: Adoption Act 1955 Section 23: Construction-Cases-Practice* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1982); Keith Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are: Reform of Adoption Law with Honesty, Openness and Integrity* (Ottawa: Katherine W. Kimbell, 1991); Keith Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption: History and Practice, Social and Legal, 1840-1996* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Keith Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption: History and Practice, Social and Legal, 1840-1996* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1998).

Anne Else, a feminist historian, has published numerous articles on women and adoption and possibly the most accessible and comprehensive historical book to date on closed adoption in New Zealand: *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand 1944-1974* (1991).<sup>33</sup> While the adoption of Māori children under closed adoption is not well recorded within New Zealand's adoption literature, in *A Question of Adoption* Else devotes a chapter to this topic – 'Aureretanga: the outcry of the people'. Although brief, it nevertheless provides an informative account of how the Pākehā system impacted on Māori values and adoption practices. Else was fortunate to have interviewed the late Anne Delamare, an influential Māori leader and welfare worker at the nexus between Pākehā bureaucracy and Māori organisations and communities. The insights Delamare shares from her professional experiences relating to Māori and adoption are invaluable and historically significant. Like Griffith, Else argues that New Zealand's adoption legislation has consistently neglected to take into account Māori values and has aided in the breakdown of Māori kin relationships. In addition to her interview with Delamare, and a further reason Else's book remains foundational to any study of adoption in New Zealand, is that she was able to access adoption files through the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), which is now prohibited. Else concludes that closed adoption was "a social experiment with unknown and uninvestigated outcomes, conducted on a massive scale".<sup>34</sup> Given the significance of her research and analysis, I refer often to Else's work in this thesis.

Following the implementation of the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*, the subsequent reunions between adopted people and their birth families (mostly mothers), and the escalation of open adoptions, an increased interest around adoption policies, practices and outcomes occurred. Adoption conferences drew people from various professional backgrounds and in the 1990s two conferences published their proceedings providing valuable New Zealand specific material. Pauline Morris edited *Adoption: Past, Present and Future Conference Auckland 25-26 June 1994*, and the New Zealand Adoption and Healing Trust published *Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the international conference on adoption and healing, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 1997*.<sup>35</sup> Social worker Mary Iwanek and lawyer Robert Ludbrook, both proponents of adoption reform, contributed articles to the latter

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<sup>33</sup> Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 197.

<sup>35</sup> Pauline J Morris, ed., *Adoption: Past, Present and Future Conference Auckland 25-26 June 1994* (Auckland: The Centre, 1994); New Zealand Adoption and Healing Trust, *Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the International Conference on Adoption and Healing* (Wellington: Adoption and Healing Trust, 1997).

publication.<sup>36</sup> Iwanek gave an overview of adoption in New Zealand – past, present, and future concluding that the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* was successful, and that legislation needed to be put in place to ensure that adoptions remained ‘open’. Ludbrook, on the other hand, argued for the abolition of adoption altogether. Ludbrook also published a book in 1990, *Adoption: Guide to Law and Practice*, and is the editor of the *Adoption News and Views*.<sup>37</sup> In 2002, Sheryn Gillard-Glass and Jan England published *Adoption New Zealand: The Never-Ending Story* which incorporated the thirty-two personal stories of birth parents, adopted persons, adoptive parents and families.<sup>38</sup> There are two pages which specifically focus on “[a]doption law pertaining to Maori”, highlighting the two very different values between Māori whāngai adoptions and European adoptions.<sup>39</sup>

## **Adoption Experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Australia, Canada, and the United States of America**

Over the last two to three decades, there has been a sustained effort on the part of historians, Indigenous Peoples, and others to record, through documentation and testimonies, the widespread practice of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families in these settler-colonial nations. While differing in specific policies and practice, the long-term intergenerational trauma and socio-cultural marginalisation of those removed and relocated, their families, and their Indigenous communities, remain remarkably similar. As such, this international scholarship has been influential in framing aspects of this study. While I did not examine the removal of Māori children and their placement into state care and institutions, it became clear that the New Zealand practice of placing Māori children outside of their Māori families and communities via closed adoption, produced similar intergenerational trauma and socio-cultural outcomes. It also raises similar questions for the wider Māori community about the inclusion/exclusion of Māori adoptees who have been unable to trace their whakapapa, and adoptees rights to the succession of Māori land.

### **Australia**

Research in Australia by historian Peter Read and film maker Oomera (Coral) Edwards, who was herself removed from her family and placed in an institution run by the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board, revealed the widespread practice of removing “mixed-race” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. Their

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Iwanek is one of the social workers who participated in this research. For information about her participation, see page 32. For her narrative, see pages 65-72.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Ludbrook, *Adoption: Guide to Law and Practice*, (Wellington: GP Books, 1990); *Adoption News and Views* Adult Adoption Inc. See: <http://adoptionaction.co.nz/> (accessed December 03, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Sheryn Gillard-Glass and Jan England, *Adoption New Zealand: The Never-Ending Story* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 27-28.

findings resulted in Edward's film, *It's a Long Road Back* (1981), David MacDougall's film, *Link-Up Diary* (1987), and Edwards' and Read's edited book, *The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken From Their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggle to Find Their Natural Parents* (1989).<sup>40</sup> Both Read and Edwards were instrumental in the establishment of LinkUp, an organisation established to help members of the Stolen Generations to reconnect with their families (or their gravesites, country, or other kin), and set a precedent for the personal stories of this previously silenced population to be told.<sup>41</sup> Such work brought to national attention the forced removal and adoptions of the Stolen Generations and eventually led to the National Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, on 13 February 2008, for policies and laws which oftentimes negatively and irreversibly impacted on generations of Indigenous Australians. Two notable publications in 1997 were the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's report, *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* and Link Up and Tikka Jan Wilson's *In the Best Interests of the Child? Stolen Children: Aboriginal pain/White shame*. Many other publications followed including Read's *A Rape of the Soul So Profound: The Return of the Stolen Generations* (1999); Anna Haebich's *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800 - 2000* (2000); Robert Manne's *In Denial: The Stolen Generation and the Right* (2001); *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation* edited by Doreen Mellor and Anna Haebich (2002) and, *So Far From Home: Oral Histories of the Stolen Generations* compiled by Lana Quall (2002).<sup>42</sup> These works, like many others, are often told through, or extensively incorporate, first person narratives and oral histories.<sup>43</sup> However, there are some historians, for instance Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: The Stolen Generations, 1881-2008* (2002), who claim there was no policy for the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families, but rather children were removed due

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<sup>40</sup> *It's a Long Road Back*, dir. by Oomera (Coral) Edwards (1981; AIAS Film Unit); *Link-Up Diary*, dir. by David MacDougall (1987; AIAS Film Unit); Coral Edwards and Peter Read, *The Lost Children: Thirteen Australians Taken From Their Aboriginal Families Tell of the Struggle to Find Their Natural Parents* (NSW, Australia: Doubleday, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> For further information about LinkUp see: <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/finding-your-family/where-get-help/link-up-services> (accessed December 03, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's report, *Bringing Them Home: National inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*; Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation and Tikka Jan Wilson, *In the Best Interest of the Child?: Stolen Children: Aboriginal Pain/White Shame* (NSW, Australia: Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation, 1997); Peter Read, *A Rape of the Soul So Profound: The Return of the Stolen Generations* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999); Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000); Doreen Mellor and Anna Haebich, eds., *Many Voices: Reflections on Experiences of Indigenous Child Separation* (Canberra: National Library Australia, 2002); Lana Quall, *So Far From Home: Oral Histories of the Stolen Generations* (Katherine, NT: Diwurrurru-jaru Aboriginal Corp, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: The Stolen Generations, 1881-2008* (Paddington, NSW: Macleay Press, 2002). See: Robert Manne, *In Denial: The Stolen Generation and the Right* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2001).



to poor living conditions and neglect. Such a view is strongly refuted by the majority of historians and academics studying Aboriginal child welfare policies and, not least by, families who had children removed, and people who as children had been removed.

### Canada

In Canada, Patrick Johnston coined the term ‘sixties scoop’ in his 1983 report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* to refer to the removal (scooping up) of First Nations children from their families for placement in to foster homes or adoptive families.<sup>44</sup> This government policy began in the late 1950s, and was officially discontinued in the mid-1980s following a judicial inquiry headed by Justice Edwin Kimelman who released the *Report of the Review Committee on Indian and Metis Adoptions and Placements*.<sup>45</sup> The report harshly condemned the ‘sixties scoop’ and, like the early work on Aboriginal child removal in Australia, brought the practice and its appalling long-term effects to national attention.<sup>46</sup>

On 11 June 2008, four months after Australia’s Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the Canadian government formally apologised to First Nations Peoples for the forced child removals and abuses related to the Indian residential school system.<sup>47</sup> Residential Schools were first established in 1883 and were operated by various religious orders.<sup>48</sup> The conditions at the schools were horrific and by the late 1960s, the resultant poor academic achievement of resident children led to the closure of most of the schools.<sup>49</sup> However, as adoption had always been associated with the residential schools, after their closure adoptions of First Nations children into predominantly white families in Canada, the USA, and Europe, greatly increased.<sup>50</sup> Social worker and author, Andrew Armitage, while remaining scathing of the residential school system reports that the increase in adoption and the fostering of children into white families, following the closure of the residential schools, tragically led to even more cultural loss and isolation as children were

<sup>44</sup> Patrick Johnston, *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* (Toronto: Canadian Council on Social Development with Lorimer & Co., 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Edwin Kimelman, *Report of the Review Committee on Indian and Metis Adoptions and Placements* (Winnipeg: The Committee, 1984). Also known as the *Kimelman Report*.

<sup>46</sup> See also: David Fanshel, *Far from the Reservation: The Transracial Adoption of American Indian Children* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972); Deanna Reder, *Indian re ACT(ions). For Every ACTion – There’s a Reaction* (British Columbia: First Nations Studies Learning Object Model University of British Columbia, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> School District 27 Residential Schools and Reconciliation. “*Canadian Federal Government Apology to First Nations?*”. Filmed [June 2008]. YouTube video, 8:29. Posted [December 2014] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCpn1erz1y8> (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> See: Patrick J Morrisette, “The Holocaust of First Nation People: Residual Effects on Parenting and Treatment Implications,” *Contemporary Family Therapy* 16, no. 5 (1994): 381-392.

<sup>49</sup> Terri Libesman, “Child Welfare Approaches for Indigenous Communities: International Perspectives,” *Issues* no. 20 (2004) <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-welfare-approaches-indigenous-communities-international-perspectives> (accessed December 29, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Libesman, “Child Welfare Approaches”, 4.

separated from even their peers.<sup>51</sup>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established just weeks prior to the June 2008 apology and its report was not completed until December 2015. The TRC website provides extensive literature and invaluable research material relating to the removal of First Nations children from their families and communities.

First Nations Peoples have also published works based on their personal experiences. For example, Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey's *Stolen from our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* (1997); and Raven Sinclair's doctoral thesis *All My Relations – Native Transracial Adoption: A Critical Case Study of Cultural Identity* (2007), which was followed up with several journal and online articles.<sup>52</sup> In 2010, First Nations adoptee and adoptive mother, Jeannine Carrière, edited a collection of personal stories in *Aski Awasis/Children of the Earth: First Peoples Speaking on Adoption* (2010), and a 2013 'Stories of Aboriginal Transracial Adoption' was published in *The Qualitative Report*, all of which are a small sample illustrating both the academic and grass-roots literature available on this topic.<sup>53</sup>

## United States of America

American Indian transracial adoption is significantly tied to the Indian Adoption Project (IAP) administered by the Child Welfare League of America and funded by a federal contract from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the U.S. Children's Bureau.<sup>54</sup> The IAP operated from 1958 to 1967. Its successor organisation, the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA), was founded in 1966 and was tasked with finding homes for hard-to-place children (which non-white children were categorised) and continued the practice of placing American Indian children with white adoptive families up until the early 1970s. In fact, by 1974 it was estimated that over 30 per cent of American Indian children had been placed outside of their families and communities. A 1976 report by the

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Armitage, "Family and Child Welfare in First Nation Communities," in *Rethinking Child Welfare in Canada*, ed. Brian Wharf (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey, *Stolen From our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997); Raven Sinclair, "All My Relations – Native Transracial Adoption: A critical case study of cultural identity" (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2007); Raven Sinclair, "Identity lost and found: Lessons from The Sixties Scoop," *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 3, no. 1 (2007): 65-82.

<sup>53</sup> Jeannine Carriere, ed. *Aski Awasis/Children of the Earth: First Peoples Speaking on Adoption* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2010); Simon Nuttgens, "Stories of Aboriginal Transracial Adoption," *The Qualitative Report* 18, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>54</sup> Herman, *The Adoption History Project* <http://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/IAP.html> (accessed March 21, 2017).

Association of American Indian Affairs found that as many as one in three American Indian children were separated from their families between 1941 and 1967.<sup>55</sup> The Louise Wise Services in particular placed a large number of American Indian children into non-Native homes. Founder Louise Waterman Wise was at the forefront of arranging adoptions for non-white children into white homes. At the time such placements were viewed as ‘progressive’ and Wise believed the practice promoted racial tolerance by breaking down racial barriers. Arnold Lyslo, the Director of the Indian Adoption Project, published several reports and journal articles extolling the success of the programme, as did David Fanshel in his book *Far From the Reservation* (1972), although Fanshel admitted that “it may be that Indian leaders would rather see their children share the fate of their fellow Indians than lose them in the white world. It is for the Indian people to decide”.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, as the removed children entered adulthood their experiences framed the adoptions and removal practices in a different light as the devastating and negative inter-generational effects on both families and tribal cultures became increasingly apparent. For example, American Indian adoptee, Susan Harness, states that studies from the 1970s to the 1980s indicate that American Indian adoptees suffered increased psychological trauma as they were neither fully accepted in the communities they were adopted into, or fully accepted back as adults into the communities from which they were taken. Instead, they were caught between dual identities where “they were too Indian to be white and too white to be Indian”.<sup>57</sup> From the late 1960s, American Indian tribal groups and their allies challenged the notion that the adoption of American Indian children into white homes was a positive achievement for civil rights and equality. Rather, they argued it was yet another policy, in a long history of genocidal policies, aimed at Native communities and their cultures.<sup>58</sup> As a response to pressure from Tribal advocates alarmed by the high numbers of Indian children being removed from their families and communities, by both public and private agencies, Congress passed the *Indian Child Welfare Act* (ICWA) in 1978. The aim of the *Indian Child Welfare Act* was to keep Native American children within their families and communities of origin. In June 2001, Shay Bilchik, the Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of

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<sup>55</sup> William Byler, “The Destruction of American Indian Families”, in *The Destruction of American Indian Families*, ed. Steven Unger (New York, The Association on American Indian Affairs Inc., 1977), 1; Susan Harness, “*After the Indian Adoption Project: A Search for Identity*” (MA. diss., Colorado State University, 2006), 67,

<sup>56</sup> Arnold Lyslo, “Adoption for American-Indian Children,” *Child Welfare* 39, no. 6 (1960): 32-33; Arnold Lyslo, “Adoptive Placement of American-Indian Children with Non-Indian Families,” *Child Welfare* 40, no. 5 (1961): 4-6;

Arnold Lyslo, “Year End Summary of the Indian Adoption Project,” *Report to Social Agencies Participating in the Indian Adoption Project* (1965); Arnold Lyslo, “The Indian Adoption Project, 1958–1967,” *Report*, April 1 (1968); Fanshel, *Far From the Reservation: The Transracial Adoption of American Indian Children* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1972).

<sup>57</sup> Susan Harness, conversation with author, 30 June 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Herman, ‘*Indian Adoption Project*’ <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/IAP.html>

America, formally apologised for the Indian Adoption Project at a meeting of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, stating:

No matter how well intentioned and how squarely in the mainstream this was at the time, it was wrong; it was hurtful; and it reflected a kind of bias that surfaces feelings of shame.<sup>59</sup>

However, despite the ICWA making it difficult for American Indian children to be adopted into non-Native homes, American Indian children are still removed from their families at a rate two to three times higher than white children.<sup>60</sup>

From 2000 onwards, literature by American Indian adoptees includes a MA thesis by Susan Harness, *After the Indian Adoption Project: A search for identity* (2006); Trace D Meyer's, *One Small Sacrifice: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects* (2010), followed by three anthologies *Two Worlds: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects* (2012); *Called Home: Book Two: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects* (2014); and *Stolen Generations: Survivors of the Indian Adoption Projects and 60s Scoop* (2016).<sup>61</sup> In 2014, historian Margaret Jacobs published *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* which, while focussing on the experiences of removal of American Indian children, also includes references to similar policies in Canada and Australia.<sup>62</sup> Sandra White Hawk, the Executive Director at the First Nations Repatriation Institute, has been instrumental in providing support for American Indian adoptees searching to reconnect with their Native communities.<sup>63</sup> In 2015, White Hawk co-authored, 'Finding Their Way Home: The

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<sup>59</sup> Shay Bilchik, Keynote Speech at the NICWA Conference, Anchorage, Alaska on April 24, 2001. See speech at

<https://splitfeathers.blogspot.com.au/2010/03/apology-cwla-shay-bilchik.html> (accessed March 10, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> [http://www.nicwa.org/indian\\_child\\_welfare\\_act/documents/Top%2010%20ICWA%20Myths.pdf](http://www.nicwa.org/indian_child_welfare_act/documents/Top%2010%20ICWA%20Myths.pdf)

During the 1970s other non-white groups were becoming more vocal in their opposition to the cross-cultural adoption of their children. In 1972 the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) vehemently opposed the adoption of Black children into white families stating "the phenomenon of transracial adoption as an expedient for white folk, not as an altruistic humane concern for Black children ... [and] insulted by this further assignment of chattel status to Black people". National Association of Black Social Workers, *NABSW Position Statement on trans-Racial Adoptions*, September, 1972: 2

[http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/nabsw.org/resource/collection/E1582D77-E4CD-4104-996A-D42D08F9CA7D/NABSW\\_Trans-Racial\\_Adoption\\_1972\\_Position\\_\(b\).pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/nabsw.org/resource/collection/E1582D77-E4CD-4104-996A-D42D08F9CA7D/NABSW_Trans-Racial_Adoption_1972_Position_(b).pdf) (accessed February 14, 2017).

<sup>61</sup> Harness, "After the Indian Adoption Project". Trace D Myer is an award-winning journalist and has also published under the names Trace. L Hentz and Lara Trace Hentz. Trace A. DeMeyer, *One Small Sacrifice: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects* (Greenfield, MA: Blue Hand Books, 2010); Trace A. DeMeyer and Patricia Cotter-Busbee, *Two Worlds: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects* (Greenfield, MA: Blue Hand Books, 2012); Patricia Cotter-Busbee and Trace A. DeMeyer, *Called Home: Book Two: Lost Children of the Indian Adoption Projects* (Cork: BookBaby, 2014); Trace L. Hentz, ed., *Stolen Generations: Survivors of the Indian Adoption Projects and 60s Scoop* (Greenfield, MA: Blue Hand Books, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

<sup>63</sup> The First Nations Repatriation Institute operates to help Indigenous Peoples removed from their Native families to trace where they are from and to assist in reconnecting people with their families and/or tribes.

Reunification of First Nations Adoptees’ in *First Peoples Child and Family Review* and is active in postings on social media.<sup>64</sup>

The literature from these three countries, while tracking the particular histories of each, not only illustrates the similar policies underpinning the removal of Indigenous children from their families for placement in schools or missions (the terms vary according to location) but also draws attention to the ways Indigenous Peoples have networked, supported, and shared knowledge with each other. For instance, the term ‘Stolen Generation’ was first coined in Australia in the early 1980s by historian Peter Read and his wife Jay Arthur, but it has also been applied to the North American experience of Indigenous child removal, frequently re-appearing in the North American literature. Additionally, changes in attitudes to Indigenous adoptions, culminating in revisions in adoption policy and legislation, was brought about by grass-roots pressure, including powerful first person narratives and testimonies, in combination with academic scholarship and inquiries in the Australian and North American contexts. The testimonies gave opportunity for those not directly affected by adoption to hear, learn, and bear witness to the suffering, which at its best was brought about by well-intentioned, if not misguided, ideals of ‘saving’ children from their Indigenous communities, while at its worst, was genocidal in its motivation.

## Literature on Māori Adoption and Whāngai

While not specifically focussing on adoption, the increased politicisation of minority groups and public service attempts at implementing biculturalism in New Zealand during the 1980s saw a number of governmental reports specifically addressing racism and legislation which had negatively impacted on Māori. A ground-breaking report, *The Institutional Racism in the Department of Social Welfare Tamaki-Makau-Rau* (1984), published by a group of Pākehā women employed by the DSW, was in effect the precursor to the landmark 1988 ministerial report *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū (day break): The report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare*, which focussed on Māori experiences of the social welfare system.<sup>65</sup> *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū* was scathing of the department’s dealings with

<sup>64</sup> Ashley L. Landers, Sharon M. Danes, and Sandra White Hawk, “Finding their way home: The reunification of First Nations adoptees,” *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 10, no. 2 (2015): 18-30. See: Sandy White Hawk, “Generation After Generation We Are Coming Home,” *FIRST NATIONS REPATRIATION INSTITUTE*, [http://www.wearecominghome.com/Sandy\\_White\\_Hawk.html](http://www.wearecominghome.com/Sandy_White_Hawk.html) (accessed December 29, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Denise Berridge, Lainey Cowan, Tanya Cumberland, Allyson Davys, Heather McDowell, Judith Morgan, Lysette Riley, Anne Ruck and Paula Wallis, *The Institutional Racism in the Department of Social Welfare Tamaki-Makau-Rau* (Tamaki-Makau-Rau: Department of Social Welfare, revised edition 1984). The authors were concerned about the institutional racism within the department and its lack of bi-culturalism. John Rangihau, *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū (day break): The report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare* (Wellington: Government Print, 1988)

Māori and stated the laws and practices “causing particular anguish” involved the removal and adoption of Māori children away from their kin group and whānau structures.<sup>66</sup>

As placing children into the care of kin other than parents was “commonly practiced and well developed” prior to European arrival in New Zealand, literature with a focus on whāngai adoptions is of particular relevance to this thesis.<sup>67</sup> Such literature includes an early article ‘Whāngai Tamariki’ in *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* (1948) by Pākehā ethnographer George (Geo) Graham. Graham had worked as an accountant and native agent, helping Māori families with legal, health and housing problems, usually waiving any fee. Graham was, through marriage, in a particularly privileged position to draw on the knowledge of many Māori informants, mostly from Hauraki and Auckland. His marriage to Takurangi Kahupeka Hapi (Waikato, Ngāti Whānaunga) in 1899 produced seven children, and after their marriage ended, he entered into relationships with Te Wharetoroa Tiniraupeka (Ngāti Whakauae, Te Arawa) and Mare Potatau (Ngāti Mahuta). He compiled a large number of manuscripts, which are today recognised as a valuable contribution to the preservation of written Māori knowledge in the fields of Māori history, language, artefacts and culture. On the subject of adoption he wrote that Māori adoptions “are made to ensure the retention in the family group of such children, thus to preserve their tribal identity; and therefore the succession to land and tribal rights”.<sup>68</sup> Such a view is consistent with more recent literature namely, social anthropologist Joan Metge’s *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (1995); historian and Māori leader Hirini Moko Mead’s *Landmarks, Bridges and Visions: Aspects of Māori Culture* (1997); and barrister and solicitor Ani Mikaere’s *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Māori Women of the Colonisation of Tikanga Māori* (2003).<sup>69</sup> All three texts agree on the prevalence, and normalcy, of whāngai relationships in Māori society, and the importance in maintaining whakapapa links for the tamaiti whāngai. Metge, Mead, and Mikaere are extensively cited later in this study.

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<sup>66</sup> Rangihau, *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū*, 74

<sup>67</sup> Karyn Okeroa McRae and Linda Waimarie Nikora, “Whāngai: Remembering, Understanding and Experiencing,” *MAI Review* 1 (2006). 1-18.  
<http://www.review.mai.ac.nz/index.php/MR/article/viewFile/16/16> (accessed January 12, 2017).

<sup>68</sup> George (Geo) Graham, “Whāngai Tamariki,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 57, No. 3 (1948): 268-278. See: Edward Rahiri Graham and Jenifer Curnow, “Graham, George Samuel,” *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4g17/graham-george-samuel> (accessed December 29, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Joan Metge, *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995); Sidney M Mead, *Landmarks, Bridges and Visions: Aspects of Maori Culture: Essays* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997); Ani Mikaere, *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Māori Women of the Colonisation of Tikanga Māori* (Auckland: International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education and A. Mikaere, 2003).

Other significant works which touch on both whāngai and the closed adoptions of Māori children includes social worker John Bradley's 'Tōtara tree without roots' in *Social Work Review* (1995) and conference papers compiled in *Adoption and Healing* (1977) which include Bradley's 'Kei konei tonu matou (We are still here)'; Suzanne Pitama's, 'The effects of traditional and non-traditional adoption practices on Maori mental health'; and Harry Walker's, 'We are born of our people: The unseen ties that bind the forces of kinship'.<sup>70</sup> Pitama and Walker are also contributors to *Has Adoption a Future* (1994), where Walker critiques Pitama's paper.<sup>71</sup> All contributors note the importance of whakapapa for a Māori child placed either with family, or adopted via the *Adoption Act 1955*.

Similar to the Indigenous communities in Australia and North America, the most recent literature on Māori placed for adoption via closed adoption has come from Māori adoptees, or other Māori who are part of the adoption kinship circle. Māori adoptee Carol Beckett self-published a small booklet *Adoption Realities* in 2002.<sup>72</sup> In 2009, a Māori adoptive mother, Valerie Perkins, completed her MA thesis *He Aroha Whaea, He Potikiipiripoho: The Unique Experiences of Māori Adoptive Mothers in the 'Closed Stranger' Adoption System*. My Masters research in 2011, *Belonging and Whakapapa: The Closed Stranger Adoption of Māori Children into Pākehā Families*, and two other MA theses, Erica Newman's "*A Right To Be Māori?: Identity Formation of Māori Adoptees*" (2012), and Emma West's *Manu is my Homegirl: Navigating the Ethnic Identity of the Māori Adoptee* (2012), specifically focus on Māori who were adopted under closed adoption and their experiences of "walking between worlds".<sup>73</sup>

In New Zealand, when I have initiated discussion around the topic of Māori and adoption, most people without first-hand experience of closed adoption will refer to, and assume, the

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<sup>70</sup> John Bradley, "Tōtara tree without roots," *Social Work Review* 7, no. 1 (1995): 6-8; John Bradley, "Kei konei tonu matou (We are still here)," *Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the international conference on Adoption and Healing, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 1997* (Wellington: New Zealand Adoption Education and Healing trust, 1997): 37-44; Suzanne Meihana Pitama, "The effects of traditional and non-traditional adoption practices on Maori mental health," *Adoption and Healing*, 74-81; Harry Walker, "We are born of our people: The unseen ties that bind the forces of kinship," *Adoption and Healing*, 10-20.

<sup>71</sup> Suzanne Meihana, "Outcomes of traditional adoption: in application to what it means today," *Has Adoption a Future? The 1994 Australian Adoption Conference* (NSW: Post Adoption Resource Centre, 1994): 299-323; Harry Walker, "Discussion and response to "the outcomes of traditional Maori adoption practices"," *Has Adoption a Future?* 324-325.

<sup>72</sup> Carol Beckett, *Adoption Realities* (Levin: C. Beckett, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> Valerie Perkins, "*He Aroha Whaea, He Potikiipiripoho: The Unique Experiences of Māori Adoptive Mothers in the 'Closed Stranger' Adoption System*" (MA diss., Massey University, 2009); Maria Haenga-Collins, "*Belonging and Whakapapa: The Closed Stranger Adoption of Māori Children into Pākehā Families*" (MA diss., Massey University, 2011); Erica Newman, "*A Right To Be Māori? Identity Formation of Māori Adoptees*" (MA diss., University of Otago, 2012); Emma West "*Manu is my Homegirl: Navigating the Ethnic Identity of the Māori Adoptee*" (MA diss., University of Waikato, 2012). Maria Haenga-Collins and Anita Gibbs, "Walking between Worlds: The Experiences of New Zealand Māori Cross-Cultural Adoptees," *Adoption and Fostering* 39, no. 1 (2015): 62.

discussion is about Māori whāngai adoptions. It seems the histories of New Zealand Māori who were adopted via closed stranger adoption are generally not well known. Therefore, given the limited research previously available, the theses mentioned above were foundational and exploratory, and were based in the disciplines of psychology, social work, and Māori studies. The questions of how the processes and practices of closed adoption related to the wider Māori experience of adoption, within the context of New Zealand's coloniser history, were not examined.

## **My Contribution to this Discussion**

My current research begins to address this gap in knowledge by recording the oral histories of Māori birth parents and adoptees, while also collecting the oral histories of non-Māori who have, through personal or professional experience, some important insights into the practice of closed stranger adoption in relation to Māori. Such insights would have been missed without their inclusion. For example, an excerpt from an interview of a Pākehā mother of a Māori child demonstrates the uncompromising social and familial pressure put on a young Pākehā woman not to marry her Māori boyfriend and father of her baby. Likewise, both social workers interviewed, spoke about some practices which are not often discussed, such as intentionally depicting the ancestry of a Māori child as Italian or Greek, so that the child would be more acceptable to some prospective adoptive parents. These oral histories are important as the different perspectives from which they are drawn have not previously been brought together and analysed in light of each other. In the case of Māori 'relinquishing' parents, their stories, to the best of my knowledge, have not until now been collected and re-told. As previously stated, in the particular area of Māori and closed adoption, this thesis builds on the historical foundations Else laid in 'Aureretanga: the outcry of the people'.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, this study does not focus solely on questions of cultural identity. Rather, it aims to situate the Māori adoption experiences told through oral histories into specific historical contexts. By connecting the autobiographical testimonies to particular historical events and contexts, further meanings can be produced. It is a way of reading and making sense of the social, cultural, and political through personal experiences. This thesis critically explores aspects of social change, and the relationship between state practices and assimilationist postwar colonial relations in New Zealand. For Māori, closed stranger adoption undermined Māori family values, kinship ties and social organisation, and continues to do

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<sup>74</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 172-196.



so with debilitating effects. My thesis demonstrates that closed stranger adoption is intrinsically linked to acts of violence and Eurocentric beliefs and attitudes about sex, family, and race. As a consequence, I conclude that the adoption of Māori children into non-Māori homes was not only the *result* of colonisation, but *mirrors* or *reproduces* the processes of colonisation itself.

## Methodology

### Fragmentation

A common theme throughout the literature relating to both adoption and indigenous research is that of being misrepresented, of being silenced and made invisible, of being marginalised, of our stories and our lives being fragmented.<sup>75</sup> Such a view was a recurring theme in the oral histories produced for this thesis, and expressed either during the formal interviews or in conversations leading up to and after those interviews. Consequently, I have chosen to present my thesis in a way which reflects this theme: it is written in ‘fragments’ of voice and narrative, with various voices presenting different aspects on closed stranger adoption in relation to New Zealand Māori. In the writing of this thesis, my voice is clearly located within the research as a Māori woman, an adopted person, and a researcher. The participants’ voices hold both individual truth, and a collective remembering, of those with first-hand experiences of closed adoption. Moreover, the participants’ oral histories provide three distinct perspectives: those of statutory social workers who worked in the field of adoption; the birth parents of Māori children who were placed for adoption; and Māori adoptees. Read collectively, these different voices provide a way for the ‘fragments’ to be tied together. Māori historian Rachel Buchanan notes that “[o]ne of the jobs of the historian is to create a narrative that makes sense of disturbing events, either distant or more recent, and so bring order to chaos”.<sup>76</sup> The oral histories gathered as part of this research overwhelmingly recount events which, in some cases four decades later, are still profoundly disturbing in the telling. Bringing order to chaos is akin to tying the fragments together, and when tied together meaning can be created by examining the relationship between and across the different perspectives. That is not to say, however, that the narratives presented can be neatly compartmentalised or tidily boxed. People’s lives are complex, and the participants’ lives, and the meanings they ascribe to their lives, can also be complex and may at points appear contradictory. Rather, bringing together these

<sup>75</sup> See adoption literature: Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You*; Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006). See Indigenous literature: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: Zed Books University of Otago Press, 2005).

<sup>76</sup> Rachel Buchanan, “Orimupiko 22 and the Haze of History,” *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 16 (2013): 66.

narratives because of their complexities, allows for a richer understanding of the narratives produced to make sense of the internal complexities.

Highly acclaimed Māori academic, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, refers to fragmentation in her seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, arguing that “fragmentation is not an indigenous project, it is something we are recovering from”.<sup>77</sup> Hence, it was important to conduct and present this thesis in a way that aids in that recovery. A Māori-centred approach does this by placing Māori experiences and concerns at the centre of the research, and was therefore pivotal in the planning and delivery of this thesis.<sup>78</sup>

### **Māori-Centred Research**

Māori-centred research is cognisant of Māori cultural values and practices, recognising and incorporating Māori ontological and epistemological understandings of the world while accommodating the diverse realities of contemporary Māori lives.<sup>79</sup> Like kaupapa Māori research, a Māori-centred approach provides a space for tikanga Māori in the research paradigm. In fact, the distinction between a Māori-centred research approach and kaupapa Māori research is not easily located within the literature. Historian Rangimarie Mahuika acknowledges that it is difficult to find a clear definition of what kaupapa Māori theory actually is, noting that the term ‘kaupapa Māori’ is used in multi-faceted and multi-contextual ways.<sup>80</sup> However, some researchers contend that a differentiation of kaupapa Māori research is that it requires exclusive Māori research autonomy and is “inherently intertwined in Māori language and culture”.<sup>81</sup> For practical reasons, this research has not been conducted within such stringent confines. For example, while I was closely engaged with Rachael Selby, a Māori cultural advisor and oral historian in New Zealand, my formal supervisory panel within the Australian Centre for Indigenous History were all non-Māori academics. Moreover, the interviews were conducted almost entirely in English as I and

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 97.

<sup>78</sup> For further discussions on research which is ‘by Māori and for Māori’ see: Russell Bishop, *Freeing Ourselves* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011); Fiona Cram, “Rangahau Māori: Tona Tika, Tona Pono,” in *Research Ethics in Aotearoa*, ed. Martin Tolich (Auckland: Longman, 2001), 35-52; Leonie Pihama, “Kaupapa Māori theory: transforming theory in Aotearoa,” *He Pukenga Korero* 9, no. 2 (2012); Graham H. Smith, “Mai i te Maramatanga, ki te Putanga Mai o te Tahuritanga: From Conscientization to Transformation,” *Educational Perspectives Journal of the College of Education/ University of Hawai‘i at Manoa: Indigenous Education* 37, no. 1 (2004): 46-52; “Kaupapa Māori Research” *Katoa Ltd.* <http://www.katoa.net.nz/home> (accessed December 29, 2016); *RANGAHAU* <http://www.rangahau.co.nz/> (accessed December 29, 2016).

<sup>79</sup> Haenga-Collins and Gibbs, “Walking between Worlds”, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Rangimarie Mahuika, “Kaupapa Māori Theory Is Critical and Anti-Colonial,” *MAI Review* 3, no. 4 (2008): 5.

<sup>81</sup> Mahuika, “Kaupapa Māori Theory”, 25. See also: Felicity Ware, “Youth Development, Maui Styles: Kia tipu te rito o te pā harakeke: Tikanga and āhuatanga as a basis for a positive Māori youth development approach” (MA, Massey University, 2009); Rangimarie Mahuika, “The Value of Oral History in a Kaupapa Māori Framework,” *Te Pouhere Korero Journal* 3 (2009).

most of the research participants at this point in time are not fluent in te reo Māori.

Yet, Māori-centred and kaupapa Māori research approaches both provide frameworks to use as guidelines in engaging and valuing Māori cultural perspectives, although it would be erroneous to reduce these approaches to merely formulated procedures, or a “tick box of specific things that we have to do”.<sup>82</sup> Rather, Māori lawyer and educator Moana Jackson explains “that if kaupapa Māori theory means anything, it is about being brave”.<sup>83</sup> Bravery to know, and define for *ourselves*, who we are as Māori, as we battle “to justify the legitimacy of the way we see the world.”<sup>84</sup> Jackson assesses the broader picture at the heart of kaupapa Māori research stating:

It is part of a greater struggle against the whole colonising ethic which sees little, if any, value not just in our intellectual tradition, but in our very existence.<sup>85</sup>

This struggle is also central to Māori-centred research, however, similar to kaupapa Māori research, it does not necessarily reject, or exclude, the use of western research methods and methodologies.<sup>86</sup> What remains paramount is that the research is committed to advancing active Māori participation, and the methods and methodologies employed are relevant and beneficial to Māori.<sup>87</sup> Māori educationalist Graham Smith argues that a Māori approach is not “a rejection of Pākehā knowledge and/or culture [but] advocates excellence within Māori culture as well as Pākehā culture”.<sup>88</sup> Māori researcher Helen Moewaka Barnes, when speaking of kaupapa Māori research, insists “our methods need to reflect ... and embrace rather than deny diversity”.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, as adoption has severed links and knowledge of genealogy for many, this

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<sup>82</sup> For further discussion on this see: Taimania Rickard, “*He Iwi Moke, He Whanokē: Iwi Social Services, Policy and Practice*” (MA, Massey University, 2014), 43, and Moana Jackson, “Hui Reflections: Research and the Consolations of Bravery,” in *Kei Tua o te Pae Hui Proceedings: The Challenges of Kaupapa Māori Research in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Jessica Hutchings, Helen Potter and Katrina Taupo (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2011): 77.

<sup>83</sup> Jackson, “*Hui Reflections*”, 74.

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, “*Hui Reflections*”, 72.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson, “*Hui Reflections*”, 72.

<sup>86</sup> Mahuika, “The Value of Oral History”, 96; Nēpia Mahuika, “Closing the Gaps?: From Postcolonialism to Kaupapa Māori and Beyond,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 45, no. 1 (2011): 19.

<sup>87</sup> Fiona Cram, “Rangahau Māori: Tona Tika, Tona Pono,” in *Research Ethics in Aotearoa*, edited by Martin Tolich, 35-52. (Auckland: Longman, 2001), 37.

<sup>88</sup> Graham Hingangaroa Smith, “Kaupapa Maori: Educational Resistance and Intervention in Aotearoa(New Zealand),” in *Higher Education for Indigenous Peoples* (Auckland: Research Unit for Māori Education, University of Auckland, 1993), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Helen Moewaka Barnes, “Kaupapa Māori: Explaining the Ordinary,” *Pacific Health Dialog* 7, no. 1 (2000): 5.

research did not, as much current ‘Māori research’ does, focus within a specific iwi and/or hapū. Participants did not require knowledge of tribal connections and/or knowledge of whakapapa lines, nor did I, the researcher, interview specifically from within my own rohe. Ngāti Porou historian Nēpia Mahuika observes that as Māori scholars have increasingly turned to our own knowledge bases, this has invariably led to “personalised, tribal and familial locations, in which the mātauranga of our iwi and hapū reside”.<sup>90</sup> Mahuika states that this “mātauranga-a-iwi- approach ... provides a map home for those who suffered from the indignity of having their identities, language and history systematically taken away from them”.<sup>91</sup> While I fully support Mahuika’s position, I am mindful that many Māori adoptees, and their descendants, who have been unable to trace their whakapapa, still do not know where home is and do not have a map to follow. As such, this thesis is very much Māori-centred in the broadest of terms. It goes beyond tribal and specific community identities. The primary focus remains on the eight individual experiences of closed adoption in relation to Māori, while also presenting and analysing the broader themes drawn out from those experiences.

However, given that this research is Māori centred, whakawhanaungatanga did inevitably play a role in the way the research was conducted. While literature has often focused on guiding the researcher in appropriate cultural etiquette, and the academy’s ethics approval process focusses on eliminating or reducing the risk of harm to participants, in practice I witnessed the participants extending such considerations to me, the researcher. Principles of respect and manaakitanga were widely evidenced during my fieldwork. I was often picked up on arrival at a new town and destination, and on more than one occasion I was invited to sleep the night at a participant’s home. I was, at times, overwhelmed by how generous participants, and those supportive of the kaupapa of this research, both Māori and Pākehā, have been with their time and resources. For example, the following is an excerpt from my PhD journal illustrating the care and generosity afforded to me the researcher, and the importance of people and place:

I have travelled a whole day by car to come and interview her. She is living in a remote Māori settlement, in a small and cramped caravan with her husband on whānau land. My mother and she had shared a common secret that they had both adopted their daughters out in to Pākehā families. Perhaps this is why this aunty has always supported me. She has

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<sup>90</sup> Mahuika, “Closing the Gaps”, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Mahuika, “Closing the Gaps”, 27.

shared with me many things about te ao Māori, been our kaikaranga at family events, and was with us at my mother's tangi.

She has been waiting for me to arrive and apologises that she is unwell. Through fits of coughing and with difficulty in breathing she tells me my mother was a good woman and reassures me that my mother loved me. Sometimes she speaks Māori and translates into English. Sometimes she speaks English using a few Māori words and phrases which she knows I'll understand. She has had to think carefully about where we will conduct our interview, because the interview will discuss hard things, heavy things. She doesn't want to speak those things which are painful and leave them out in the world for others to pick up. She wants to be careful, to protect others from harm. There are children in the house to which the caravan is attached, and she doesn't want to leave behind the mamae of her story in case it falls on them and hurts them. The burdens of violence, incest, and abuse. We could go to where she works, but the place also has young children visiting and so again, those babies need to be protected from the power of the harmful words. In the end, she decides the best place to go and talk is in the whare karakia, right next to the wharenuui, where the words can be left and the healing spirit of that place can absorb and carry all the hurt and pain and everyone will remain safe.

When we sit down she begins with her mountain, her river, her marae, her ancestors, her place of belonging in the world. She shares with me, because of our common connection – to place, to people, to the secrets between her and my mother. She starts her story now ... “I think you and I both come from that same world of adoption ...” With our common connection, she allows me in.<sup>92</sup>

Here, as with the other interviews, the principles of responsibility and reciprocity need to be managed. Māori are well aware that a critique of Māori research approaches is that the researcher may be unduly influenced by the close and ongoing relationships between the participants and the researcher.<sup>93</sup> Such a critique suggests the research may undermine the rigors of objectivity and be overly subjective. However, Māori have responded by arguing that subjectivity is unapologetically “embedded in Māori research due to the obligations of *whakapapa* (genealogy, connections) ... [further] Māori scholarship embraces and even demands subjectivity”.<sup>94</sup> In relation to this thesis, two instances which illustrate this point occurred in the recruitment of the two Māori birth parents. As already alluded to in the

<sup>92</sup> Haenga-Collins, Maria. “Reflections on interview with Aroha: 22 March 2014” *PbD Journal 2013-2016*, (Unpublished Manuscript).

<sup>93</sup> Aroha Harris, “Biography as Balancing Act: Life According to Joe and the Rules of Historical Method,” in *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*, eds. Peter Read, Frances Peters-Little, and Anna Haebich (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), 93-98.

<sup>94</sup> Harris, “*Biography as Balancing Act*”, 94

extract from my PhD journal about my interview with Aroha, apart from iwi associations, she had been friends with my mother and a supportive aunty to me and my children. It was for this reason she agreed to be interviewed. Charles, who also shares iwi affiliations, had not responded to my numerous messages until another aunty of mine gave me his private number, thereby helping to confirm my connections.<sup>95</sup>

Another excerpt from my PhD journal reflects on my interview with Charles, and again illustrates the importance of connection and whanaungatanga:

I have been trying to make contact with him for what seems like weeks, but he has been moving between his home in the city and his home up the coast where he was born and raised. The place of his ancestors. We are somehow connected him and I. We are both connected to that place. Even so, it's been a job to track him down.

In the end it's two of my aunts who help me connect with him. One rings around and gets me his mobile number. I call him and we make a plan to meet. He impresses me with his sharp mind, wit, humour, good manners, warmth. He quickly makes me feel at ease. We leave our meeting place to conduct the interview in his home where it is quieter.

Whakapapa is important. He knew my mother and one of my brothers. He tells me he knows my mother and brothers had lived a hard life with my father. He hadn't known there was also a daughter. He's connecting the dots. We both are. Before I start the interview (and turn on the recorder) he casually asks if I have my aunty's phone number - he hasn't seen her in years. I give it to him. He decides to give her a call, announcing that he has a niece of hers with him. I don't know what my aunty says but it must be okay (I must be okay), because when he hangs up he tells me I can turn the recorder on and we can get started.

He's wise this man. He carries our language and holds on to tikanga. He tells me knowledge is not something to gain for one's self. To receive knowledge is a privilege. There comes with it a responsibility. There is so much I want to learn from him. It is easy to get lost in the kōrero. The interview takes some time. After the recorder is off again, we head to a local restaurant for food and more conversation. At some point he tells me, "Depending on who you were, determined what information I

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<sup>95</sup> Aroha and Charles are Māori parents who had a child placed for adoption. Their testimonies are in Chapter Three pages 95-125 of this thesis.

would share with you”. Today I’m glad of my connections, for my aunts, my mother, my whakapapa. Today I’m grateful for his sharing.<sup>96</sup>

Additionally, Māori research approaches provide participants with “an influential say about the projects to which they contribute”.<sup>97</sup> Having access to people’s personal stories carries with it a responsibility to tell those stories accurately and with respect. Therefore, having consent to use an individual’s oral history was not confined to a specific moment when the consent form was signed. Rather, consent was ongoing and participants were provided with drafts of their narratives for approval prior to submission. Some feedback was useful in that some details I had misunderstood and could change. In one instance, a participant, upon seeing in print her interview, requested that I remove from her narrative all reference to the sexual abuse she endured as a child at the hands of her adoptive parent. This I have done. It has been this working together – conducting the oral histories face-to-face, the sharing of food, and keeping in touch after the interviews – which at times were the most rewarding aspect of this research and, at other times, the most taxing. Being fully present both physically and emotionally, while remaining attentive to participants as they shared painful, emotional encounters, was often emotionally demanding and draining. My own experiences of adoption, while providing me with the benefits of an ‘insider’, was at times challenging. In best practice, the use of Māori research approaches acknowledges and takes into account the mana of each individual, including that of the researcher.

### **Representation**

In 1997, cultural anthropologist and qualitative researcher Corrine Glesne drew attention to what she described as a “crisis in representation”, where “claims to authority [of the researcher] are challenged and reflexivity is demanded”.<sup>98</sup> Just over two decades later, this ‘crisis’ was at the core of my own struggle with how to present in written form the oral histories of the participants. Oral historian Rebecca Jones seemed to understand my concerns as she wrote “we as authors have to balance responsibilities to the narrator, to the audience, and to the content of the stories”.<sup>99</sup> It was comforting to read Jones’ proposition that all historians and researchers who put into print oral history interviews encounter choices and dilemmas in navigating the power relationships and ethical responsibilities

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<sup>96</sup> Haenga-Collins, Maria. “Reflections on interview with Charles: 18 March 2014” *PhD Journal 2013-2016*, (Unpublished Manuscript).

<sup>97</sup> Harris, “*Biography as Balancing Act*”, 94

<sup>98</sup> Corrine Glesne, “That Rare Feeling: Re-Presenting Research through Poetic Transcription,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 3, no. 2 (1997): 204.

<sup>99</sup> Rebecca Jones, “Blended Voices: Crafting a Narrative from Oral History Interviews,” *The Oral History Review* 31, no. 1 (2004): 24.

between the narrator and writer.<sup>100</sup>

For my part, I was particularly concerned with notions of silencing, secrets, and shame, which are common issues raised when speaking with adopted people and others in the adoption triad.<sup>101</sup> While taking seriously the issue of confidentiality and protecting the identities of the participants, I did not want participants to feel their stories had been appropriated and they were being re-silenced, objectified or distanced from their own narratives.<sup>102</sup> I was also concerned with the criticism made by Māori and other Indigenous Peoples about research which has no benefit to the participants and their communities, and which does not handle with care and respect the information shared.<sup>103</sup> It was primarily for this reason that I decided to present in full the participants' narratives. The social workers' narratives are incorporated into a chapter which looks specifically at the nascent profession of social work in New Zealand and the social workers, who as part of that profession, contributed to implementing closed stranger adoption in practice. Although some parts of the social workers' oral histories are harrowing, they are less emotionally loaded than the narratives of the birth parents and adopted people, who carry within them the trauma of adoption. For this reason, both the birth parents and adopted people's narratives are brought together as testimonies and are presented in their own chapter. Some of the narratives are presented in poetic form.<sup>104</sup> This decision afforded me a balance with the inherent tensions between the participants' representation and my own process of reflexivity.<sup>105</sup> I wanted to write something which not only added value within an academic setting, but which was of value to the people whose stories I was (re)telling and to others who in reading could identify with those stories.<sup>106</sup>

## Oral Histories and Narrative

Story-telling and oral histories are viewed by many as an integral part of Indigenous

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<sup>100</sup> Jones, "Blended Voices", 23.

<sup>101</sup> See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*; Gillard-Glass & England, *Adoption New Zealand*; Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are*; Verrier, *The Primal Wound*.

<sup>102</sup> Linda Shopes, "Oral History," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), 460.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 139.

<sup>104</sup> Research poetry, poetic inquiry, poetic research, free verse poetry are different terms used for poetic transcription.

<sup>105</sup> For further discussion on representation and reflexivity see: Glesne, "That Rare Feeling"; Monica Prendergast, Carl Leggo, and Pauline Sameshima, eds. *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers), 2009.

<sup>106</sup> For discussion on personal experiences related to the ethics of 'doing' history see: Rachel Buchanan and Maria Tumarkin, "Bread and Breath: Two Reflections on the Ethics of (Doing) History," *Australian Humanities Review (AHR)* 52, (ANU E Press, 2012) <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2012/05/01/bread-and-breath-two-reflections-on-the-ethics-of-doing-history/> (accessed June 21, 2016).



research.<sup>107</sup> Historian Rangimarie Mahuika argues that oral history theories sit well with Indigenous methodologies because they are each concerned with ensuring the recovery of voices which have in the past been silenced. Mahuika states “oral history has great potential to assist Māori in our efforts to name the world for ourselves”.<sup>108</sup> The general absence of a Māori voice coupled with the silencing and shame, not uncommon themes in adoption literature, illustrates the silencing which has played a role in the marginalisation of this group of people.<sup>109</sup> The oral histories collected for this research therefore provide an opportunity for the voices and experiences of those connected with Māori and closed stranger adoption to be shared, for their stories to be told and for their voices to be heard – in short to name our experiences for ourselves. The oral history interviews undertaken for this research were a way for participants to reflect on their experiences and make sense of their pasts.<sup>110</sup> Given that “oral historical sources are *narrative* sources”, a narrative approach and analysis seemed a sensible fit in relation to this study.<sup>111</sup>

To this end, I initially looked at a participant’s whole story, analysing each interview within its own specific context. Following this, I noted how themes emerged across interviews. Attention to individual and collective narratives thereby assisted in making sense of complex and often competing data. The notion of data being complex, competing or highly subjective is common to both oral histories and narrative analysis.<sup>112</sup> Catherine Riessman, a leading figure in narrative research, argues that personal narratives are highly valued “precisely because of their subjectivity - their rootedness in time, place, and personal experience, in their perspective-ridden character”, and that narrative analysis is particularly “well suited to studies of subjectivity”.<sup>113</sup> Interviews may include inaccurate, imprecise, and contradictory information.<sup>114</sup> Narrators may at times confuse names and dates or merge

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<sup>107</sup> For examples see: *Kaupapa Rangahau: A Reader*, eds. Leonie Pihama and Kim Southey eds. *Kaupapa Rangahau: A Reader*, (Auckland: Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga, 2015).  
[http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/9531/KM%20reader%20final%2019\\_6\\_15%20for%20print\\_2.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/9531/KM%20reader%20final%2019_6_15%20for%20print_2.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y) (accessed December 29, 2016).

<sup>108</sup> Mahuika, “The Value of Oral History”, 96.

<sup>109</sup> See: Karen Svendsen, “Themes of Aotearoa “Birthmothers”,” *Adoption and Healing*, 324-25.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1990), 188. Oral historian Michael Frisch states that oral history is “a powerful tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating...how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes a part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.”

<sup>111</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 48.

<sup>112</sup> See: Linda Shopes, “Making Sense of Oral History,” *History Matters: The US Survey Course on the Web*, 2002: 6 <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf> (accessed January 02, 2017).

<sup>113</sup> Personal Narrative Group, *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 263-264 as quoted in: Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, Qualitative Research Methods Series (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), 5.

<sup>114</sup> Shopes, “*Making Sense of Oral History*”, 6.

unrelated events into a single event.<sup>115</sup> Oral historian Alessandro Portelli makes the point that oral histories therefore “tell us less about *events* than their *meaning*”, arguing that “[s]ubjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible ‘facts’. What informants believe is indeed a historical fact (that is, the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened.”<sup>116</sup> Likewise, Nēpia Mahuika discusses how oral histories between different iwi and hapū may vary in the telling, depending on the relationship of the storyteller to people and places within the narratives.<sup>117</sup> An inconsistency does not alter a narrative’s credibility. Tohunga and Māori academic, Ruka Broughton, explains that according to the elders any conflicting opinions or dissensions within Māori oral tradition does not “necessarily blur the truth, rather it isolates the truth”.<sup>118</sup> I would argue that such an understanding is the result of families and communities having agency over the way they (often through their genealogies) are represented and remembered, allowing for the retelling of events which are most significant, in ways which are most accessible, and which make the most sense.

Acknowledging the potential for what appears to be inconsistencies within personal narratives does not, however, mean that oral histories have no credibility, even within a western understanding.<sup>119</sup> As Portelli convincingly argues, oral sources have a “*different* credibility ... ‘wrong’ statements are still psychologically ‘true,’ and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts”.<sup>120</sup> Further, “[o]ral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did”.<sup>121</sup> In these respects, oral history provides a useful means to validate the subjective experiences of the participants in this research even as, or in some cases especially as, there are conflicting accounts. For example, it was common for adopted people to believe that they were abandoned by their birth mothers, as this was a prevalent social narrative which was at times directly relayed to adoptees by friends and family.<sup>122</sup> Language such as being “given away” and “unwanted” was used in all but one of the oral histories collected. This was the psychological truth for this group of people. Yet, most adoption literature, as well as interviews undertaken, especially with birth parents and social

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<sup>115</sup> Shopes, “*Making Sense of Oral History*”, 6.

<sup>116</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 50.

<sup>117</sup> Nēpia Mahuika, “*Kōrero Tūku Iho: Reconfiguring Oral History and Oral Tradition*” (PhD diss., University of Waikato, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> Ruka Broughton, “*Ko Ngaa Rauru Kūitabi/ the Origins of Ngaa Rauru Kūitabi*” (MA diss., University of Victoria, 1979), 6.

<sup>119</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 51.

<sup>120</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 51.

<sup>121</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 50.

<sup>122</sup> See: Chapters Three and Five of this thesis illustrating personal experiences of some participants.

workers for this research, describes situations of birth parents wanting to keep their children but feeling pressured, and ultimately having little option other than to have their child placed for adoption.<sup>123</sup> Add to this the conflicting accounts within social worker file notes which at times record, as factual evidence, erroneous assumptions. For example, evidence within my own adoption file exposes the deliberate with-holding of information from my birth mother, and a tacit compliance by social workers, in allowing her to falsely believe that I could not be “uplifted” from foster care until board owing for my care was first paid in full.

### **Emotion and Poetic Research**

As I listened to and engaged with the participants, and the different voices represented, I was aware of the very raw emotions which often surfaced. Ethnographer Andrew Beatty contends that “not only do emotions, in a quite obvious way, belong to stories; they also build on, allude to, and echo other emotions and events; they refer to interwoven lives”.<sup>124</sup> This interweaving of lives extends in this thesis to my own narrative contributions, as well as to the co-creation of dialogue between myself and the participants. Consequently, I chose poetic representation of the texts/narratives as a way to present in written form some of the oral histories.<sup>125</sup> In presenting transcripts as poetry, there is a transparency which visually makes clear the coproduction and re-representation of the original interview.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, poetry belongs to both oral and written traditions, with Nēpia Mahuika noting the poetic nature of Māori oral traditions.<sup>127</sup>

Lorina Barker, an Australian Aboriginal academic, reveals how she also sought alternative strategies to convert the oral histories of Aboriginal people into printed form which took into account “the layered richness, sounds, silences and interactions of the memories recorded”.<sup>128</sup> Barker decided to use “free verse poetry” for her transcriptions, as poetry recreated the “emotion and movement of words as they are spoken and received in conversation”, while preserving the Aboriginal traditional practice of oral history

<sup>123</sup> Sawyer, *Death by Adoption*, 13-14, Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Andrew Beatty, “How Did It Feel for You? Emotion, Narrative, and the Limits of Ethnography,” *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 3 (2010): 430.

<sup>125</sup> For an informative and inspiring argument for the use of poetry in transcribing the oral histories of Indigenous Australians see: Lorina Barker, “Using Poetry to Capture the Aboriginal Voice in Oral History Transcripts,” ed. Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys, and John Docker, *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia* (ANU E Press and Aboriginal History Incorporated, 2010): 185-202.

<sup>126</sup> Glesne, “That Rare Feeling”, 202-221

<sup>127</sup> Mahuika, “Closing the Gaps”, 86. Mahuika also discusses at length, and argues for the distinction between, Māori oral traditions and Māori oral histories.

<sup>128</sup> Barker, “Using Poetry”, 186.

storytelling.<sup>129</sup>

Interestingly, Glesne convincingly argues that poetic research provides more confidentiality to the narrator as specifics can be abandoned while paradoxically revealing more about the essence of what is being conveyed.<sup>130</sup> In this way, poetic transcription “involves word reduction while illuminating the wholeness and interconnections of thoughts”.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, with poetic transcriptions the reader is encouraged to interact at a more emotional level with the text. Glesne elaborates stating, “readers also enter into the *feeling*. A space opens and allows us all ... to be connected in our feelings and reflections, however similar or different they may be”.<sup>132</sup> She further asserts that the reader joins the participant and the researcher in constructing an interpretation that, instead of focussing on “some absolute meaning of the prose”, is far more interested in the multiple and possible meanings that can be co-created.<sup>133</sup> Given the emotional content in the interviews, I decided poetic transcription was the best way I could relay some of the more sensitive experiences to the reader.

However, I am not suggesting that this transparency of co-creation and interpretation, or the inherently emotive aspect of the poetic transcripts, negates the need for further analysis on the part of the researcher. Rather, it is one step in the process of making explicit how the narratives were produced, co-produced and eventually reproduced and analysed. In this thesis, further in-depth analysis of themes and contexts inspired by the narratives and testimonies gathered is undertaken in chapters four and five, and it is in these chapters where my voice as the historian and social commentator is most pronounced.

### **Insider Status**

Within a Māori worldview, whakapapa plays an intrinsic role in relation to any research undertaken. Yet, writing both self and others into research “goes against the grain of much academic discourse”.<sup>134</sup> This stand against convention is a way of challenging “accepted views about silent authorship”, echoing concerns which were discussed earlier.<sup>135</sup> Again, the concept of silencing is a fundamental theme in narratives of adoption and in subaltern and

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<sup>129</sup> Barker, “Using Poetry”, 186.

<sup>130</sup> Glesne, “That Rare Feeling”, 206.

<sup>131</sup> Glesne, “That Rare Feeling”, 206.

<sup>132</sup> Glesne, “That Rare Feeling”, 218.

<sup>133</sup> Glesne, “That Rare Feeling”, 218.

<sup>134</sup> Sally Denshire, “On Auto-Ethnography,” *Current Sociology* 62, no. 6 (2014): 832.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholas L Holt, “Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2, no. 1 (2008).

indigenous studies. To this end, choosing to write myself into this research, even if only in a small way, was a decision made purposefully to reduce the level of ‘silencing’. The secrecy surrounding adoption is also challenged. Further, incorporating auto-ethnographic writing into my research is a way for me to break through the boundaries between professional and personal identities, the researcher and the research participants, and the dichotomy between self and others.<sup>136</sup> In fact, auto-ethnography has been described as a vehicle “for talking to each other often, across the borders of discipline and identity locations”.<sup>137</sup>

As a Māori woman, adopted person, and trained social worker, I can identify with my research and the research participants as an ‘insider’ or ‘partial insider’. Nonetheless, as ethnographer and oral historian Kirin Narayan argues, identities, and here I would include a researcher’s ‘insider’ identity, are multiple and complex where “different aspects of identity became highlighted at different times”.<sup>138</sup> In interviewing New Zealand Māori, I have, on one hand, gained access to people’s oral histories as they wanted to have ‘one of their own’ tell their stories. Yet, on the other hand, I was aware of the differences which may have been between us, for example differences in age, gender, Māori language use, and position in the adoption triad. However, researchers in the social sciences increasingly position themselves within the research (either as ‘insiders’, or not), providing a transparency whereby the reader is more able to make sense of where the researcher has come from and how this may impact on their findings and how their work is presented. This positioning of the researcher also opens up a way for researchers to be more revealing in the ways they have engaged with the research material and data. For example, I deliberately began this thesis with a short prologue where I identify myself through whakapapa, and also identify both my position and interest in the topic of Māori and closed stranger adoption.

## Outline of the Study

Eight oral histories form the basis of this thesis. All the interviews were conducted either in October 2013 or from early February to the end of March 2014. From the planning stages I was committed to providing a place to have a participant’s full narrative told, for an in-depth focus that would not have been possible with a large number of participants. The oral histories, however, present a broad range of experiences, with participants recruited via

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<sup>136</sup> Denshire, “On Auto-Ethnography”, 832.

<sup>137</sup> Patricia Burdell and Beth Blue Swadener, “Critical Personal Narrative and Autoethnography in Education: Reflections on a Genre,” *Educational Researcher* (1999): 25.

<sup>138</sup> Kirin Narayan, “How Native Is a “Native” Anthropologist?,” *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (1993): 674.

a variety of methods.<sup>139</sup> Three participants had contacted me after hearing an interview on Radio New Zealand, where I talked about my research. I made contact with four others through personal networks, and one participant was known to me personally. Each of their oral histories are unique in that the interviews were unstructured and the participants were asked only to reflect and talk about their experiences of adoption. Consequently, each narrative has a different focus and highlights the different ways adoption was experienced. What each participant has in common is an experience of adoption in relation to New Zealand Māori, with common themes of violence, sex, and race a consistent thread. As such, there is a level of repetition throughout the thesis as the different groups represented share their experiences. However, such repetition accentuates, adds depth, and demonstrates beyond any doubt, the trauma and racism inherent in the closed stranger adoption of Māori children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

All the interviews took place, face-to-face, in various locations in New Zealand. Former nurse and social worker, Mary Iwanek, is the only participant who chose not to use a pseudonym. Given Mary's public visibility in the adoption reform movement in New Zealand, and her attendance at both national and international adoption conferences, even with a pseudonym she would have been easily identifiable to many people with an interest in New Zealand's adoption history.<sup>140</sup> Apart from Mary, participants' names and names of their family members, as well as some minor details, such as location, have been changed to protect the identities of the individuals concerned. Any likeness to other people is purely coincidental.

### **The Genealogy of this Thesis**

My academic family of origin hailed from the School of Social Work and Social Policy at Massey University in New Zealand. I received my Masters in Social Work after completing a thesis on the topic of Māori adoptees who were adopted into Pākehā families. However, as is often the case, my Masters thesis left me with more questions than answers. I had looked closely at the effects of closed adoption on Māori adoptees, but I had not looked in detail at the 'causes' behind the practice, or at the effects of closed adoption on other important figures in the adoption story. Several people also questioned me about the Māori experience of adoption in relation to Australia's Stolen Generations. I started thinking about the Māori experience of closed stranger adoption as perhaps less insulated and more

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<sup>139</sup> Although I do not have a Facebook account, Facebook posts by other people and/or organisations (including *Mana Magazine* and *Adopted Fostered Māori*) were singularly the most effective form of recruitment.

<sup>140</sup> Mary's narrative is presented in Chapter Two of this thesis.

global. As such, I pursued an opportunity to work with historian Professor Peter Read, who in the 1980s had brought to national attention the phenomena of Australia's Stolen Generations. I decided to leave New Zealand, and the familiar, and undertake my doctoral research at the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, within the School of History, at the Australian National University.

In Australia, historical perspectives were at the forefront of exposing the forced removal of children in Australia, and historians supported the burden placed on individual's testifying to their experiences by helping to bring testimonies together to form a powerful collective voice. Events which had been thought of as singular, personal stories of removal, grief, and dislocation, became part of a rising tide set to burst through a dam of national denial. This has also been the case in Canada and to a lesser extent the USA. Yet such public revelations have been much more muted in New Zealand, where less attention has been paid to the collective experiences of Māori affected by closed adoption's policies and practices.

In working with Peter Read, I was able to combine my knowledge from the discipline of social work with his expertise as a social historian, and bring together individual narratives into a more collective frame. The move to the School of History required a steep learning curve as I grappled with attention to context – the contexts of cause, in addition to that of effects. I clearly remember Professor Ann McGrath, a prominent Australian historian, who was at the time my primary supervisor, being both indignant and horrified when I called the historical context, “only background material!”<sup>141</sup> Armed with a fuller understanding of what historians seek to do, my thesis therefore works to weave the in-depth, micro-narratives of the oral histories, and my own adoption experiences and social work background, with a more expansive historical context.

## The Chapters

Careful consideration was given to the structure of the thesis, and particular attention was paid to the order and content of each chapter. I sought to structure the thesis in such a way as to invite the reader to travel through the processes, experiences, and contexts of closed

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<sup>141</sup> A small sample of Ann McGrath's work includes: Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987); Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, *Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration* (Monash University ePress, 2009); Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, *How to Write History That People Want To Read* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009); Ann McGrath, *Illicit Love: Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

stranger adoption. The thesis begins with the policy and practice of closed adoption, which incorporate the experiences of the social workers interviewed, before focusing on the testimonies of the birth parents and adopted people and the broader social contexts of their lives and experiences.

The first chapter, **Adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand** provides an overview of adoption in both Māori and European contexts. The *Adoption Act 1955* is generally regarded as when one law for all, in terms of legally recognised adoptions, was fully realised. It was also under this Act that closed stranger adoption was officially instigated. Legislation, policy, and social mores and expectations, sets the scene for understanding the sociocultural environment that both unmarried mothers and most Māori were forced to manoeuvre. Closed stranger adoption particularly illustrates the rigid legislative confines which ignored Māori values and arguably led to the breakdown in Māori kin relations. The chapter concludes by examining the lead-up to, and eventual enactment of, the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* which officially ended the closed stranger era. The chapter also sets up the following chapter on social workers, as it was social workers who were tasked with the practicalities of matching adoptive parents with a child ‘relinquished’ for adoption, and who a generation later were at the forefront in implementing open adoption policies, and assisting in reunions between adopted people and their birth parents.

The second chapter, **Social Workers Implementing and Challenging Closed Stranger Adoption**, examines the role of social work and social workers in transforming adoption policy into adoption practice between 1955 and 1985. Social workers played an integral role in implementing adoption practice and were the public face of the state institutions for which they worked. This chapter includes the narratives of Mary and Elizabeth, two Pākehā women, who from the 1960s onwards were employed as social workers. Between them they have a combined work experience of over fifty years in the field of adoption. As agents of the state, social workers held a position of power over the unmarried women they came into contact with. They were also responsible for matching children with their new adoptive families, and their white middle-class upbringing could not help but impact on their attitudes towards Māori. Māori children were not placed into Māori homes because Māori homes were considered sub-standard. Through the narratives of Mary and Elizabeth, we are able to see that over time there was a shift away from social workers, in effect, being representatives of the institutions they worked for, to a time when those within the social work profession were more focussed on the needs, rights, and aspirations of, in the case of



adoption, the unmarried mothers and children with whom they were working. In particular, this chapter illustrates the institutional racism inherent within the public service, and explores the attitudes and conventions which underpinned adoption practice. Years later, Mary and Elizabeth reflect on actions that they were either implicitly or explicitly a party to, hoping that by sharing their oral histories they, and the times in which they worked, will be better understood.

Chapter Three, **Testimonies: Birth Parents' and Adopted People's Narratives**, presents the narratives of three parents and three adopted people. The birth parents' narratives include two mothers and one father of children placed for adoption. Their accounts include the period of the 1960s and 1970s - a time of increased tension between entrenched and shifting attitudes about race relations, familial beliefs and morals, patriarchy and women's liberation – when they as young adults had children placed for adoption. Similarities in the birth parents' narratives emerged. For instance, both mothers lived with an ensuing grief, which significantly impacted on their mental health and all three parents searched for their child/ren who were placed for adoption following the enactment of the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that the narratives of Māori birth parents have been recorded. The narratives of three Māori adoptees born between 1962 and 1976 are also presented in this chapter. All three are women, and all three narratives poignantly illustrate how, as Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families, they experienced and dealt with issues of belonging, identity and trauma. The testimonies provide rich accounts of the ways in which they were forced to navigate an 'in-between space', a space where they are 'betwixt and between', 'neither, nor'.

As noted, personal testimony is a major source in the thesis, and the introduction to Chapter Three explains why the use of the term 'testimonies' has been used to describe these personal narratives. I argue that both the acts of sharing testimony and of listening and responding to it constitutes a form of 'bearing witness'. For this reason, this chapter is purposely positioned in the middle of the thesis, as the birth parents' and adopted people's testimonies are literally at the heart of this research.

The succeeding two chapters are critical discussions in response to the testimonies presented in this chapter. They seek to analyse what closed stranger adoption was like for birth parents and adopted people respectively, examining the social forces that shaped their experiences. Key issues, themes, and contexts implicit in the testimonies are raised,

zooming out from individual experiences to a view of the more expansive national landscape.

Chapter Four, **Birth Parents Revisited: Urbanisation, Race, and Morality in Post-War New Zealand**, begins by surveying the broader social contexts that contributed to the experiences of young people who had children placed for adoption under the closed stranger system. Inspired by the three testimonies of birth parents, it considers the experiences and implications of increased urbanisation, shifting social mores and entrenched racial attitudes. It then moves onto discuss how closed stranger adoption was fundamentally a practice embedded in secrecy and lies. I argue that the practice in New Zealand was beset with public illusions and legislative sleight of hand, for instance, by replacing and making unavailable the original birth certificate containing the birth mother's name (rarely was the father's name included) and issuing a 'new' birth certificate with only the adoptive parents names. In this chapter, I contend that New Zealand as a nation was founded and built on such illusions and was well adept in the art of sleight of hand. While New Zealand prided itself on its down-to-earth egalitarianism, and progressive social policies, especially in relation to Māori and women, it was also a master of state-sanctioned illusions, which at times resulted in self-deception on a national scale. Closed stranger adoption is a perfect example of that very public self-deception.

Chapter Five, **Adopted and In-Between** turns the focus to the experiences of adopted people, particular those born during the period of closed adoption from the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s. It begins by considering the ways in which the population of first-generation urban-born Māori significantly increased, and coincided with the Māori renaissance and the state's endorsement of biculturalism during the 1970s and 1980s, as a formative moment in many Māori adoptees' development. A major theme in this chapter is the ways in which adopted people often experience living 'between worlds'. For Māori adoptees who were adopted into Pākehā families, I argue that this in-between space is three-fold: they are positioned between their birth and adoptive families, between a Māori and Pākehā identity, and between having their behaviours and feelings overly pathologised, while at the same time being required to integrate the traumatic and arguably 'violent act' of closed stranger adoption without understanding and specialist support. In this chapter, I specifically explore the navigation, and intersections, of these in-between spaces through the lenses of identity politics, psychology, and adoption and racial microaggressions.

I contend that the *Adoption Act 1955* failed to recognise the enormous importance of whānau connection and whakapapa for Māori. While all adoptions were traumatic for both Māori and non-Māori, closed stranger adoption was additionally nefarious and disadvantageous to Māori. Māori adoptees faced accentuated complexities as they were both influenced and challenged by the changing socio-political milieu of the 1970s and 1980s with the very public resurgence in Māori nationalism and the state's ventures towards biculturalism.

The concluding chapter, **Legacies and Futures**, draws together the narratives and analysis of the preceding chapters, providing a point of partial cohesion for the complex and, at times, contradictory and contentious issues surrounding adoption in New Zealand between 1955 and 1985. Adoption was experienced by all the participants as a form of 'euphemised violence', illustrating the attitudinal, linguistic, physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual violence which encapsulated closed adoption practices. Further, race was, and still is, a hugely determining factor in adoption. Race determines not only who gets to adopt children, but which children are the most, and least, desirable. In the history of closed adoption in New Zealand, Māori children were amongst the least desirable in the hierarchy of babies. Moreover, adoption by Pākehā strangers was viewed as more desirable than adoption by Māori kin, resulting in some Māori children being placed in unsuitable homes. My ultimate conclusion is that the processes and practices employed in the closed stranger adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families was, in and of itself, a reproduction of the processes and practices of colonisation, where what appears to be 'even-handedness' is in fact that old 'sleight of hand', where Pākehā laws result in the further marginalisation and subjugation of Māori.

Recent events in New Zealand, which include calls for adoption reform, and inquiries into the abuse of children in state care, offer some hope that New Zealand may be preparing to investigate and acknowledge harmful practices of the past, which disproportionately affected and marginalised Māori children and their families and kin. Bringing the testimonies presented in this thesis to public attention is one small way of adding to a growing public awareness and discourse about child placements and race relations in New Zealand.



## Chapter One

### Adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand

There are two distinct histories of adoption in Aotearoa New Zealand: one is Māori, the other European. This chapter focusses on the how these two histories evolved and how over time they eventually converged, albeit with differing long-term outcomes. The chapter begins by exploring ‘Māori customary adoption’ practices and the principles which underpin Māori values associated with family, kinship and the care of children. It then examines European settler values associated with family, particularly the moral mores, which were foundational to adoption legislation in New Zealand. The chapter tracks adoption laws as they applied to Māori and non-Māori and introduces the *Adoption Act 1955*. The 1955 Act formally established the era of closed stranger adoption in New Zealand, with a 1962 amendment finally ending the remaining provision which took into account Māori values in adoption law.

Although the practice of closed adoptions was being challenged as early as the late 1970s, with ‘open’ adoptions becoming more commonplace during the early 1980s, it was not until the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* that adopted people and birth parents gained the legal right to obtain identifying information about the other, as long as no veto had been put in place. The chapter concludes with an account of the history of this Act and its implications.

Throughout this chapter I illustrate that while adoption legislation was driven by arguments of ‘in the best interests of the child’ and ‘one law for all’, in terms of equal treatment of both Māori and Pākehā, both assertions were misguided in practice. While all adoptions were onerous, the *1955 Adoption Act* was particularly burdensome for Māori leading to the further demise in Māori family and kinship structures and supports. In addition, while the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* made it possible for adoptees to apply for access to their original birth certificates, there was almost always no record of the father’s details. As most Māori adoptees had Pākehā mothers, this often resulted in Māori adopted people unable to trace their iwi affiliations.

## Māori Understandings of ‘Adoption’

Prior to European arrival to Aotearoa, Māori observed a common and well developed system of whāngai or ‘adoption’.<sup>1</sup> Yet the underlying beliefs guiding Māori customary adoption practices – views about family, children, and kinship – and the beliefs and practices associated with legalised adoption in New Zealand, particularly closed stranger adoption, have very few, if any, shared commonalities. In fact, it has been argued that the idea of Māori adoption is a misnomer as whāngai placements and European adoptions “have more irreconcilable differences than points in common”.<sup>2</sup> Social anthropologist, Joan Metge draws attention to the different words used in Māori and English for adoption, but also the different *way* the English word adoption is used and understood.<sup>3</sup> A European understanding of adoption usually equates with the transfer of a child’s legal status from the birth parents to adoptive parents. Adopting a child legally results in the child becoming ‘as if born to’ the adoptive parents.<sup>4</sup> In European terms this is quite different from fostering a child, where the child is not legally considered part of the foster family. The verb ‘to foster’ is used to describe “the rearing of a child by persons other than his natural or adoptive parents”.<sup>5</sup> However, the Māori term whāngai is “used *generically* to refer to *all* cases where children are brought up by people, other than their birth parents, without regard to the legal status of the relationship”.<sup>6</sup> As such, there is no distinction between fostering and adoption, with legal adoption viewed as a sub-category of adoption – the two are not separated. Metge states the terms ‘atawhai’, ‘taurima’, and ‘whāngai’ all have been translated into the English language as ‘adoption’ and the sentiments they express illustrate the positive view which surrounds a Māori understanding of raising children other than one’s own. Atawhai is to “show kindness to, be liberal, foster, be inclined to, desire”; taurima is to, “entertain, treat with care, tend”; and whāngai is to “feed, nourish, bring up”.<sup>7</sup>

Academic and daughter of a Māori adoptee, Erica Newman, states that in Māori tradition the first adoption was that of Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga. Māui was born prematurely and his

<sup>1</sup> McRae, Karyn Okeroa and Linda Waimarie Nikora. “Whangai: Remembering, Understanding and Experiencing.” *MAI Review* 1 (2006): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption: History and Practice, Social and Legal, 1840-1996* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1998), 454.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Metge, *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995), 210.

<sup>4</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 84. For the exact wording of the Act, see: The *Adoption Act 1955* Section 16 (2) (a), (b)

<sup>5</sup> Collins, *English Dictionary* (online) Harper Collins Publishers Limited [GB], s.v. “foster”. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/foster> (accessed December 06, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 211. italics in original.

<sup>7</sup> H W Williams, *A Dictionary of the Maori Language* (Wellington, New Zealand: Government Print, 1971): 19, 402, 488, as cited in Metge, *New Growth*, 211.

mother thought him dead. She wrapped him in her hair and cast him out to sea. He was plucked from the ocean by a seagull and taken to the home of his ancestor Tama-nui-ki-te-Rangi where he was loved, educated, and cared for. Importantly, part of his education included learning his whakapapa. When Māui decided to seek his birth parents, he did so with the blessing of Tama-nui-ki-te-Rangi. Māui was welcomed and accepted by his birth parents after he was able to prove his identity through the recital of his whakapapa. Māui subsequently developed relationships with his female elders who also took responsibility in further nurturing and educating him. Māui is renowned for accomplishing many great feats and is recognised by Māori as the fisher of islands, the man who made the days longer by slowing down the sun, and the one who provided fire for everyday use.

Māui clearly illustrates the values Māori associate with whāngai adoptions. Firstly, children are cared for by kin and it is the responsibility of the whāngai parents to love and educate an adopted child. Adopted children are told the circumstances of their birth and adoption and learn their genealogy. The adoptive parents support the child in developing a relationship with his or her birth parents. Whakapapa provides a child with a secure identity and, through knowledge of kin relationships, a place to belong. Further, the raising of a child is the responsibility of many relatives, and in turn, the child has a responsibility in adulthood to work to benefit the wider kin group.<sup>8</sup>

Māori concepts of family, kinship, and a collective responsibility for parenting and raising children remain the foundational principles for whāngai, or customary, adoptions. Yet it was these concepts which were systematically denigrated by adoption legislation in New Zealand. The 1988 Ministerial Report, Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū, retrospectively described the negative impact state-sanctioned child care placements (including adoption) had on Māori and how government policies aided in the breakdown of Māori social and familial links:

Those [laws] causing particular anguish relate to the placement of children ... The placement of children was once the means whereby kin group or whānau structures were strengthened. The child is not the child of the birth parents, but of the family, and the family was not a nuclear unit in space, but an integral part of a tribal whole, bound by reciprocal obligations to all whose future was prescribed by the past fact of common descent. Children were best placed with those in the hapū or community best able to provide, usually older persons relieved from the exigencies of daily demands, but related in blood so that contact was not denied. Whakapapa (recited genealogies) were maintained to affirm birth

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<sup>8</sup> Erica Newman, "History of Transracial Adoption: A New Zealand Perspective," *The American Indian Quarterly*, 37, no 1-2 (2013): 239-240.

lines, but placements were arranged to secure lasting bonds, commitments among relatives, the benefit of children for the childless, or those whose children had been weaned from home, and relief for those under stress. Placements were not permanent.<sup>9</sup>

Hirini Moko Mead and Joan Metge reiterate the reasons for whāngai adoptions as ensuring a 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 family and kinship ties (a common practice was for grandparents to whāngai grandchildren), and assisting childless couples within the kinship group.<sup>10</sup> Metge acknowledges, however, that customary adoptions should not be overly romanticised.<sup>11</sup> Rather the ideals illustrated in Māui's life-story provide guidelines for proper behaviour. They reveal the values underpinning whāngai adoptions, while recognising Māori, like other groups, do not always live up to these generally accepted ideals.<sup>12</sup> The important point to keep in mind is the very different values concerning kinship relations and child care between Māori and European. The values of the latter were the force which drove adoption legislation in New Zealand.

Unlike closed stranger adoptions, whāngai adoptions were not shrouded in secrecy and shame.<sup>13</sup> Whāngai children were born both within and outside of marriage, and it was not uncommon for children to be raised by family members other than their birth parents. As long as children were cared for by relatives, birth parents were "praised for their generosity".<sup>14</sup> A child "adopted in the customary Māori way did not lose their culture, links with their birth families or their rights of succession".<sup>15</sup> Importantly, there was also no expectation that whāngai adoptions were to be permanent. It was the quality and not the duration of the whāngai relationship which was important.<sup>16</sup> Children were regarded as an integral part of the extended family, with the extended family taking responsibility for those within their kinship group. Ultimately, while there were varying circumstances which may have instigated a whāngai adoption, it was the strengthening of family and kinship bonds

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<sup>9</sup> John Rangihau, *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū (day break): The Report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare* (Wellington: Government Print, 1988), 74-76.

<sup>10</sup> Sidney M. Mead, *Landmarks, Bridges and Visions: Aspects of Maori Culture: Essays* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997), 206-207.

<sup>11</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 256.

<sup>12</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 258.

<sup>13</sup> While the past tense is used, whāngai adoptions are still practiced today. Sheryn Gillard-Glass and Jan England, *Adoption New Zealand: The Never-Ending Story* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2002), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 213.

<sup>15</sup> Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 219.



which underpinned every circumstance.<sup>17</sup> What remained consistent was that children knew their whakapapa.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of whakapapa cannot be over-emphasised. Knowledge of one's whakapapa is "generally agreed to be the lynchpin of Māori identity".<sup>19</sup> Māori researcher and academic, Joseph Te Rito, argues that, "[w]hakapapa is firmly embedded in the Māori psyche".<sup>20</sup> To fully participate in the Māori world it is essential to have knowledge of one's whakapapa. It is the loss of knowledge of whakapapa which constitutes one of the most damaging aspects of closed stranger adoption for Māori adoptees and their descendants, and is central to the experiences presented later in this thesis.

## European Laws and Settlement

While the practice of whāngai adoption continues today, the advent of settler practices and laws meant that Māori customary rights, including land and kinship rights (which are inextricably linked), were often dismissed, held in disdain, or both. Colonial attitudes and values were incorporated into 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.<sup>21</sup> During early European settlement, family patterns were based on "British ideas of what a family should be like ... Māori customs and familial patterns provided an alternative but proved too different for most colonists to borrow from or even understand".<sup>22</sup> In this way British law, including matrimonial and family law, became the accepted norm.

Ani Mikaere argues that settler notions of family were based on "English common law, and reinforced in Christian teachings", where women and children were the property, or chattels, of men. Before marriage, a female child, regardless of age, was the property of her father and upon marriage she became the property of her husband.<sup>23</sup> In addressing matrimonial property, Mikaere is clear that the ownership of women and children was non-

<sup>17</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 219.

<sup>18</sup> Mead, *Landmarks*, 210.

<sup>19</sup> Tahu Kukutai, *The Dynamics of Ethnicity Reporting: Māori in New Zealand* (Wellington: Te Puni Kokiri, 2004), 21.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Selwyn Te Rito, "Whakapapa: A framework for understanding identity," *MAI Review* no. 2 (2007): 26

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Evans, "Law and the Economy - Setting the Framework," *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, March 11, 2010. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/law-and-the-economy/page-1> (accessed December 30, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Peggy Koopman-Boyden and Claudia Devita Scott, *The Family and Government Policy in New Zealand* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984): 95.

<sup>23</sup> Ani Mikaere, *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Māori Women of the Colonisation of Tikanga Māori* (Auckland: International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education and A. Mikaere, 2003), 68; 98-99; Koopman-Boyden and Scott, *The Family and Government Policy*, 103.

existent in Māori society prior to colonisation.<sup>24</sup> Instead, kinship bonds necessitated social responsibilities tied to the notion of reciprocity within the context of the extended family. Māori understanding and use of the English term ‘family’, much like the Māori use of the English term ‘adoption’, was completely different from the British settler understanding where settler families were ideally, if not always effectually, independent single units headed by a man.

While New Zealand settlement was based on English laws, it is also true that many new settlers saw an opportunity to create a more egalitarian society than the one they had left behind. New Zealand became a ‘social laboratory’ where, in an underpopulated country, social hierarchies were less rigid and opportunities to prosper were believed to abound for those willing to work the land. Yet two professors of social policy, Peggy Koopman-Boyden and Claudia Scott, state that for many, the early years of settlement were marred by economic and social distress which included disputes over Native land and starvation. Many early migrants found themselves with no work, no family support, and no government relief, with some families unable to provide for their children.<sup>25</sup> It was within this context of colonial impoverishment, coupled with the quest to forge an enlightened and egalitarian society that the premier, George Waterhouse, who was perhaps himself an adoptee, tried to encourage settler families to take in and care for orphaned or abandoned children.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The Adoption of Children Act 1881***

Forty-four years before Britain, New Zealand passed the *Adoption of Children Act 1881*, becoming the first country in the British Empire to formalise legal adoptions.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, the raising of children other than one’s own could be viewed as the new settlers’ desire for a more socially fluid society. It astonished English visitors that colonial households would take in “indigent relatives, let alone totally unrelated children”.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, more practical and less altruistic motives were that adoption exonerated the State from the responsibility of caring for orphaned or abandoned children, and that human labour was a precious resource on farms where “the extra hands more than paid for

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<sup>24</sup> Mikaere, *The Balance Destroyed*, 46-53.

<sup>25</sup> Koopman-Boyden and Scott, *The Family and Government Policy*, 97-98.

<sup>26</sup> Waterhouse was the son of a Wesleyan Minister who when introducing the *Adoption of Children Act 1881* stated he had personal experience of ‘the advantage of adoption’. See: Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), x.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Kathleen Benet, *The Politics of Adoption* (New York: Free Press New York, 1976), 67.

the extra mouths”.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, New Zealand historian, Margaret Tennant, found that late nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial adopters preferred children of ‘useful’ years over small babies who were ‘uneconomic’.<sup>30</sup>

The *Adoption of Children Act 1881* therefore helped with the economics of adoption by making it possible for adoptive parents to raise an adopted child without concern that at a later stage, the parent/s would return to claim the child. Apart from any emotional attachment, a family, having financially supported a child over a period of time, would not want to risk the loss of their investment. However, access to the original birth entry was not restricted and the child’s original surname was often kept or hyphenated with the surname of the adopting family.<sup>31</sup>

As stated, it was more difficult to find homes for babies and young children. As such ‘baby farming’ was a common practice whereby infants were taken in to private homes for a fee, with the understanding that the child would be cared for until a permanent placement with adoptive parents could be organised.<sup>32</sup> The need for this ‘service’ arose because it provided a quick and confidential way of disposing of illegitimate children.<sup>33</sup> As illegitimate infants were harder to place than older children, birth mothers sought out people who they believed may have the right connections to find a placement.<sup>34</sup> The sooner the baby was placed in a permanent home the greater the profit for the interim carers. However, the shortage of permanent homes lead to the neglect and death of some infants.

In 1893, *The Annual Report of the Commissioner of Police to both Houses of the General Assembly* stated:

attention is called to what appears to be a growing evil in this colony viz., ‘baby farming’. That this evil exists there can be no doubt; and it appears that children, either by advertisement or otherwise, are placed in the most unsuitable homes, where it is most perfectly well understood that the sooner the child dies the better pleased all concerned will be.<sup>35</sup>

This report resulted in the *Infant Life Protection Act 1893*, which required the registration of all homes taking in children under two years where any payment was made; annual

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<sup>29</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, x.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Tennant, “Maternity and Morality: Homes for Single Mothers 1890-1930,” *Women’s Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (1985): 28-49.

<sup>31</sup> Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Annual report on the Police Force of the Colony’ AJHR 1893, H-26, p.3

licensing and inspection by police; and mandatory reporting to police within 14 days of any child's death. Adoptions of any child under three years of age were also to be reported to the police.<sup>36</sup>

Following the 1895 trial of Minnie Dean for 'baby farming' and the murder of children in her care, New Zealand instigated its first major review of adoption laws.<sup>37</sup> The Minnie Dean case highlighted that even with the amendments to the *Infant Life Protection Act*, there were still difficulties in monitoring the care of children in private homes. The *Adoption of Children Amendment Act 1906* made it illegal for payment, known as adoption premiums, to be made to adopting parents in 'consideration for taking a child for adoption' without the consent of a Magistrate.<sup>38</sup> Further, by 1907 the control of the *Infant Life Protection Act 1893* was transferred from the police to the Department of Education.<sup>39</sup> The Office of the Education Minister would thereafter issue a conditional adoption order which, after a six month period, required a report, assessing the suitability of a couple as adoptive parents. If the report was favourable, a permanent order would be made. The Attorney General, Hon Dr Findlay, argued:

The Department can ascertain from time to time how that child is being taken care of, and whether the adoptive parent is really doing her duty or not, and at the end of that time you are in a position to say whether the lifelong interests of that child can be safely committed to that woman.<sup>40</sup>

Dr Findlay also argued that the dispensation of the birth mother's consent to adoption should be widened in certain situations. His primary concern appeared to be with the financial pressures destitute children put on the state, which:

in some cases, has had to pay for years and years for the child, whereas if the adoption order had been obtained the State would have been relieved of the burden. I say that where a woman has proved her unfitness to take care of a child the Magistrate should be instructed with a discretion to dispense with that consent.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 'Annual report on the Police Force of the Colony' AJHR 1893, H-26, p.3

<sup>37</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> See: NZPD (1907), Vol 140, ed. New Zealand Parliament (Wellington, New Zealand: Government Printers), 653 <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/historical-hansard/#1900> (accessed 11 October 2017).

<sup>40</sup> NZPD (1907), Vol 140, 653.

<sup>41</sup> NZPD (1907), Vol 140, 656.

Yet despite the financial hardships and social stigma, most unmarried mothers attempted to keep their babies, with adoption of newborns “mainly reserved for instances where a married woman had an extramarital child”.<sup>42</sup> Up until the 1940s, “many believed that keeping an illegitimate child was a fitting punishment for the [unmarried] mother’s sin – and a warning to other women who might be tempted to stray”.<sup>43</sup> Feminist sociologist Carol Smart further explains:

her parental obligations were seen as little more than part of her stigma and rejection ... having sole custody [of the child] ... was more a form of legal punishment than a concession.<sup>44</sup>

If a mother was incapable of caring for her child, then institutional or foster care were the most common alternatives. In such cases, it was mandatory for the mother to pay maintenance to the state.<sup>45</sup>

The second major review of adoption law in New Zealand was again in response to a murder trial. In 1951, a seventy-three-year-old man was found guilty of murdering his forty-three-year-old wife. Their four-year-old adopted daughter survived the tragedy.<sup>46</sup> Questions were once again raised as to the suitability of some adopting families and the need to be more rigorous in vetting prospective adoptive parents. This review culminated in the *Adoption Act 1955*, which is still the current adoption legislation in New Zealand, despite calls for its reform from as early as 1976.

### **The Adoption Act 1955**

The *Adoption Act 1955* heralded the period of closed stranger adoption in New Zealand. For the first time in New Zealand’s history of adoption, a birth parent could sign a consent to adoption without knowing the identity of the adoptive parents.<sup>47</sup> The adoptive parents were ‘strangers’ to the child and to the birth parents. Identifying details of the child’s birth parents remained confidential and all files remained ‘closed’. The child’s original birth certificate was unable to be accessed and a new birth certificate with the adoptive parents’

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<sup>42</sup> Law Commission, *Adoption and Its Alternatives: A Different Approach and a New Framework*, September 2000, Report 65, (Wellington: New Zealand Law Commission, 2000), 14.

<sup>43</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Carol Smart, “There Is of Course the Distinction Dictated by Nature: Law and the Problem of Paternity,” in *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine*, ed. Michelle Stanworth (Cambridge Polity Press, 1987), 109.

<sup>45</sup> Law Commission, “*Adoption and Its Alternatives*”, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Anne Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption in New Zealand 1985-2010: An Overview of Adult Adoption since the Implementation of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985,” *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* 26, no. 4 (2014): 78.

details was produced.<sup>48</sup> There was no indication on the birth certificate that the child had been adopted.<sup>49</sup> Once consent was signed, it was difficult to withdraw. A birth father's consent was only required if he was married to the mother, or a guardian to the child. His name was rarely on the birth certificate.<sup>50</sup> To understand how closed stranger adoption became common practice, it is important to consider precipitating events, shifting social attitudes, and the social pressures which were reshaping society and influencing adoption practice.

The mid-1940s saw a convergence of three changes affecting societal attitudes, with each supporting and mutually reinforcing the other. Firstly, the start of the post-war period saw an increase in marriages, and the emergence of what was to become known as 'the baby boom'. The expected life trajectory for young couples was to marry and produce children.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, while there was an overall increase in marriages and births, there was also an increase in the number of infertile married couples. The latter was attributed to poor nutrition and health care during the Great Depression, and the situation of returned servicemen who suffered the longer lasting effects of sexually transmitted infections.<sup>52</sup> Closed stranger adoption provided a way for childless married couples to become parents and complete the expectations of what was considered a 'real family'.<sup>53</sup> Post-war patriotism focussed on rebuilding the nation and forcefully promoted pro-natalist attitudes. By the late 1940s, newspaper articles began referring to the "shortage" of babies available for adoption, and throughout the 1950s the number of applicants wanting to adopt children remained higher than the number of children available for adoption.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, while the social stigma of illegitimacy remained, there was a move away from former punitive measures to shame publicly unmarried mothers and their children. Instead, adoption became the mechanism which provided a 'fresh start' for a young woman who had 'fallen from grace'. Closed stranger adoption was devised as a way of hiding, or legitimising, illegitimate births. Many birth mothers were put under intense pressure from their families and from social agencies to have their illegitimate child placed for adoption.<sup>55</sup> Young unmarried mothers were told by professionals and parents that the most loving

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<sup>48</sup> Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Law Commission, "*Adoption and Its Alternatives*", 28.

<sup>50</sup> Anne Else, "Adoption - Adoption in the early 2000s", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, May 5 2011. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/adoption/page-5> (accessed November 19, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> D. Ian Pool, Arunachalam Dharmalingam, and Janet Sceats, *The New Zealand Family from 1840: A Demographic History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), 171.

<sup>52</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Mikaere, *The Balance Destroyed*, 106.

<sup>54</sup> Law Commission, "*Adoption and Its Alternatives*", 15.

<sup>55</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 39-47; Joss Shawyer, *Death by Adoption* (Auckland: Cicada, 1979), 10-13.

thing they could do was to relinquish their illegitimate child for adoption so that the child would be raised in a stable two-parent family. If a woman resisted placing her child for adoption, she was often labelled as ‘selfish’.<sup>56</sup> Birth mothers were expected to put the adoption behind them and to get on with their lives, with the not so subtle implication that this would include finding a husband and having other children within wedlock.<sup>57</sup> As such, little if any effort was made to support an unmarried mother to keep her child. In 1953, the Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Social Welfare wrote:

I am assuming that all who read this ... think as I do that, in principle, adoptions are a good thing, and that I do not need to write about the emotional satisfaction for adoptive parents and child that can ensue from a good adoption. We will agree that adoptions should be encouraged rather than discouraged.<sup>58</sup>

Thirdly, by 1955, the ‘complete break’ theory was popular with professionals working within the field of child welfare.<sup>59</sup> The complete break, or clean break, theory was based on the popular idea of *tabula rasa* which held that children were born a ‘blank slate’, and that character development was a consequence of experience rather than any inherent predispositions. This concept aligned with adoption practice because it privileged ‘nurture’ over ‘nature’. Hence, some birth mothers would not see their child after the birth, or their access would be strictly controlled, as the baby was to go to adopters as a ‘blank slate’.

In drafting the *1955 Adoption Act*, dispute arose over the period of time to be given between the child’s birth and a birth mother signing the consent form which allowed the adoption to legally take place. The Child Welfare Division had initially wanted a six-week period before a mother could sign consent. This was in line with British law. However, lawyers and agencies, such as the Motherhood of Man, argued for the shortest period possible.<sup>60</sup> Ten days was finally allocated as the acceptable time between a child’s birth and the acquisition of a mother’s signature allowing her child to be adopted. Once the papers were signed, there was no recourse for the mother to change her mind. This allowed the adoptive parents to take the child home before it was a fortnight old. Anne Else draws attention to the practicality of this arrangement, particularly for the hospitals:

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<sup>56</sup> Nancy Collins, “Adoption,” *New Zealand Social Worker* 2, no. 2 (1966): 71.

<sup>57</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Law Commission, “*Adoption and Its Alternatives*”, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption”, 78.

<sup>60</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 113. The Motherhood of Man Movement was founded in 1943 by Mrs May Harvey with the objective of assisting unmarried expectant mothers. The objective was changed later to include the provision of welfare and protection to deserted wives, widows, and working mothers generally.

Ten days conveniently matched the standard 'lying-in' period: the child could remain in the hospital nursery that long without the need for any extra facilities or expense, and go home with its new parents at around the usual time [that babies would normally go home with their mothers].<sup>61</sup>

In practice, the complete break occurred between the birth mother and her child. Perkins rightly observes that this break was not confined to the adoptee's childhood, but for their "entire existence".<sup>62</sup> It was believed that by providing prospective adoptive parents with more anonymity, and the assurance that the birth mother would not be able to have future access to information about the child or vice versa, it would further encourage infertile couples to adopt. It seemed like a perfect solution as both infertility and illegitimacy carried immense social stigma, and were to be kept hidden. The new trend in adoption was to rescue the child and help the childless.<sup>63</sup>

To further promote the view that childless married couples were morally entitled to adopt, the idea that babies born to unmarried mothers were 'unwanted babies' was widely circulated and was really a euphemism for 'illegitimate'. However, many working within the field of adoption deplored the use of the term 'unwanted' for illegitimate children as they knew this was not generally the case. Nonetheless, the term remained in popular use.<sup>64</sup>

As can be seen, a hallmark of closed stranger adoption was the secrecy which it imposed. This secrecy has been linked with "lies and social engineering".<sup>65</sup> There was the widely held misbelief that it was illegal for the adoptive parents and child to have contact with the birth family. The propagation of this belief was in keeping with both the 'complete break' theory and the stigma associated with illegitimacy and the possible infertility of the adopting parents. However, such contact was never illegal. Rather, law changes which kept original birth certificates sealed, and departmental policies and practices of not passing on identifying information, assured that secrecy was maintained. While professionals working in the area of adoption knew contact was not illegal, this information was almost never passed on to the members of the adoption triad.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 114.

<sup>62</sup> Valerie Perkins, "He Aroha Whaea, He Potikiipiripobo: The Unique Experiences of Māori Adoptive Mothers in the 'Closed Stranger' Adoption System" (MA diss., Massey University, 2009), 9.

<sup>63</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Gillard-Glass and England, *Adoption New Zealand*, 24-25.



## Māori and Legal Adoptions

At first whāngai practices, being wrongly equated as adoption in the European sense, were recognised in law “by implication” of the *1852 New Zealand Constitution Act*.<sup>67</sup> The Act stated:

Whereas it may be expedient that the laws, customs and usages of the aboriginal or Maori inhabitants of New Zealand, so far as they are not repugnant to the general principles of humanity, should for the present be maintained for the government of themselves, in all their relations to any dealings with each other...<sup>68</sup>

However, due to the interconnected relationship between whāngai adoptions and rights of succession to Māori land, such adoptions were to become common cases brought before the Native Land Court and the Native Appellate Court, which were respectively established in 1865 and 1894 to “translate customary Māori land claims into legal titles recognisable under English law so as to introduce a rapid individualisation of ancestral Māori land in order to ensure the availability of most of that land for settlement by Pākehā settlers”.<sup>69</sup> As such, Native Land Courts were continually facing difficulties in making judgements in regard to whāngai adoptions and applications to land titles and estates.<sup>70</sup> In response to such difficulties, the Native Appellate Court at Hastings on June 19 1895 created ten principles for assessing the validity of a customary Māori adoption. While some of the principles recognised a distinctive Māori worldview (i.e. that the adoptee would almost invariably be related by blood to the adopting parents, and as such would be entitled to share iwi or hapū lands), other principles were more aligned to European adoption practices (i.e. the adopted person was to have been adopted in early infancy and continuously lived with the adoptive parents).<sup>71</sup>

By 1901, whāngai adoptions were required to be registered to have any legal status. Registration was necessary to secure benefit payments, allowances, housing opportunities and succession rights to Māori land.<sup>72</sup> *The Native Land Claims Adjustment Laws Amendment Act 1901* stipulated that:

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<sup>67</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 458.

<sup>68</sup> *New Zealand Constitution Act 1852*. Sec 7. The Native Land Court was a product of the *Native Lands Act 1865*, providing for the conversion of communal Māori landholdings into individual titles, thus making it easier for Pākehā to purchase or otherwise procure land.

<sup>69</sup> David Williams, *Te Kooti Tango Whenua: The Native Land Court 1864-1909* (Huia: Wellington, 1999), 82.

<sup>70</sup> The Native Land Court was renamed the Māori Land Court in 1954.

<sup>71</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 459.

<sup>72</sup> Rangihau, *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū*, 75.

no claim by adoption to the estate of any Maori who died after 31 March 1902 would be recognised or given effect, unless the adoption had been recognised in the Native Land Court.<sup>73</sup>

Else states that this Act “was the first in a long line of legal steps which had the effect of ‘outlawing’ customary adoption”.<sup>74</sup> Else quotes social worker, Moana Herewini, who explains the 1901 Act’s primary motivation was to find yet another way to disenfranchise Māori from their land:

this legislation was brought into being purely for the purposes of convenience for the Pakeha as they sought to acquire land. Under ‘customary adoption’ any number of Maori people could claim succession to land and much negotiating – if indeed that happened – would be necessary in order to buy land or even steal it. This legislation started to get things in order – the onus was on the ‘Native’ to do the work and if they didn’t the law was on the white man’s side.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to note, however, that at this time the actual status of the adopted person was conferred by the family members involved, not by the court, which merely registered an existing arrangement. The *Infants Act 1908* had required Māori children to take on the name of the adoptive parents while at the same time extinguishing any legal ties to the birth parents, but by 1909 further changes meant Māori adoptions not only required registration with, but the approval of, the Native Land Court.

However, proposed Māori adoptions in the Native Land Court were still publicly reported, allowing anyone of the community to make an objection. Adoptions registered with the Native Land Court were published in the *New Zealand Gazette* and *Kahiti* (Māori Gazette). Hence, kinship lines remained on public record.<sup>76</sup> The judges of the Native Land Court appreciated that “nothing should be done to conceal the relationship of an adopted Maori to his natural parents”.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, legally recognised adoptions of European and Māori children were becoming increasingly alike, with fewer variants approved in consideration of Māori values and practices. Interestingly, one variant which remained from the 1909 Act prohibited Māori from being able to legally adopt European children. It was expressed that some Māori “are

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<sup>73</sup> *The Native Land Claims Adjustment Laws Amendment Act 1901*.

<sup>74</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 178.

<sup>75</sup> Moana Herewini, “*Adoption and the Maori People*,” (Unpublished Paper, Wellington, 1984), cited in: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 178.

<sup>76</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 453-59.

<sup>77</sup> Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court to the deputy Registrar-General, 20 February, 1946, cited in Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 179.

not living in a way we should consider proper for European children”.<sup>78</sup> However, this was not the only concern. In 1906, Hone Heke, the MP for Northern Māori, had urged that a Bill be introduced “for the purpose of prohibiting the adoption [by Māori] of children of European parents or of European parents unknown to Maori persons”.<sup>79</sup> Heke was concerned about Pākehā who had been adopted by Māori, obtaining land by excluding “the next of kin to deceased Maori owners”.<sup>80</sup> Some Pākehā MPs added that the provision was to prevent “heartless European mothers” from imposing on the “goodness and generosity of the Maori” by abandoning their children with them.<sup>81</sup> The ban on Māori adopting Pākehā children remained in force until the *1955 Adoption Act*.

Keith Griffith observed that it was not entirely uncommon for Māori to have raised European children as a way of building lasting relationships with the Europeans who had settled amongst them.<sup>82</sup> What Māori found most perplexing was the adoption of Māori children by Europeans without the consent of the wider kinship group. Māori feared that the child would lose knowledge of their whakapapa and such adoptions did not create binding ties with the European family.<sup>83</sup> The European view was that parents adopted a child, they did not adopt an extended family, while the Māori view was quite the reverse.<sup>84</sup>

By the mid-1940s the Māori Land Court was noticing a substantial increase in applications for formal adoption orders. Officers from the Social Security Department were telling mātua whāngai that they could not get family benefit for children in their care who were not legally adopted, even though this was not official policy.<sup>85</sup> Assimilationist practices, if not official policy, meant:<sup>86</sup>

the maintenance of customary preference in law came to be regarded not as a constitutional right, but as something to be conceded to meet particular exigencies, and then done away with as soon as possible, to

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<sup>78</sup> NZPD (1909), Vol 148, 1275.

<sup>79</sup> NZPD (1906) Vol 137, 121-22.

<sup>80</sup> NZPD (1906) Vol 137, 121-22.

<sup>81</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 179.

<sup>82</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 453.

<sup>83</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 453.

<sup>84</sup> An example of a Māori child being ‘informally adopted’ by Pākehā can be found in Peter Walker, *The Fox Boy: The Story of an Abducted Child* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing UK, 2002). It is the story of Ngātau Omahuru, who at age six was abducted from his Māori settlement during the NZ Wars in 1868 and ‘adopted’ by the Premier William Fox and his wife Sarah. Ngātau Omahuru was renamed William Fox.

<sup>85</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 180.

<sup>86</sup> Social worker, Andrew Armitage, argues New Zealand’s policy towards Māori between 1847 and 1960 was that of amalgamation/ assimilation. After the Hunn report in 1960, policy focus was more integrationist. See: Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 136-159.

advance the assimilation of Maori people into Western society, and to have but one law for all people.<sup>87</sup>

In terms of adoption, this ‘one law for all’ was particularly burdensome for Māori and further eroded Māori extended family ties and kinship networks. Else argues that the passing of the *Adoption Act 1955* “enforced much greater change for Māori than for Europeans”, as it was framed on a completely mono-cultural basis, and made no sense in a Māori context.<sup>88</sup>

## **Māori and the Adoption Act 1955**

Keith Griffith found it telling that the 1952 inter-departmental committee drafting the new adoption legislation only added a member from the Department of Māori Affairs, Charles Bennet, as an afterthought, even though Māori Land Courts still presided over Māori adoptions.<sup>89</sup> However, I would argue that Māori concerns have always been neglected at the cost of popular political expediency. In its 1954 report, the review committee proposed that if a Māori child or Māori adopting parents were involved, a Māori welfare officer should make the report. It was also proposed that prior approval of the home, and an interim order, were not to apply and that the adoption application should continue to be heard in the Māori Land Court. These considerations were advised due “to the necessity for keeping records for succession to Maori lands” and “in order to prevent a probable large increase in irregular [extralegal] adoptions”.<sup>90</sup> It was thought Māori would be unwilling to use the Magistrates’ Court which were associated with crime and where costs were much higher than in the Land Court.<sup>91</sup> Eventually the review committee decided that the Māori Land Court would hear adoption cases if both the child and at least one of the applicants were Māori and the Court Report would be made by a Māori welfare officer only if the Court so directed.<sup>92</sup> In effect, it was a concession made for whāngai adoptions, while all other adoptions of Māori children would be under the closed adoption system.

The *Adoption Act 1955* was passed on 27 October 1955. While it repealed the prohibition on Māori adopting Pākehā children, the Act reinforced the 1909 stipulation that adoptions “in accordance with Maori custom” had no force or effect.<sup>93</sup> As such, informal adoptions left children at risk of being removed by Child Welfare. Anne Delamere, a Māori welfare

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<sup>87</sup> Rangihau, *Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū*, 72.

<sup>88</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 180.

<sup>89</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 460.

<sup>90</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 180.

<sup>91</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 461.

<sup>92</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 460.

<sup>93</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 180.

officer in the Bay of Plenty in the 1950s, remembers “that in some Maori communities, Child Welfare Officers were known as ‘those people who take your children away, and you never see them again.’”<sup>94</sup>

Māori vehemently opposed the 1955 Act. Iriaka Ratana, MP for Western Māori, raised concerns that Māori would not have the same confidence in the Magistrates’ Court fearing that Māori family values would not be understood. Firstly, Māori had always viewed adoption as a public undertaking but the 1955 Act meant the adoption hearings were undertaken in private, with no published reports, and adoption files remained inaccessible. Secondly, Māori Land Court judges were cognisant with Māori values and customs allowing related kin (including grandparents) to adopt a child. And thirdly, the cost to have legal affidavits drawn up by a solicitor increased the cost from £1 to up to £20-25 for each child.<sup>95</sup>

Ratana’s concerns proved well founded. Sir Eruera Tirikatene, MP for Southern Māori, took the opportunity while parliament discussed the *Adoption Amendment Act 1965*, to raise awareness of the disastrous effects on, and the concerns of, Māori since the 1962 Amendment.<sup>96</sup> The *Adoption Amendment Act 1962* had unequivocally ended the jurisdiction of the Māori Land Court in adoption altogether with its stated objective being “to do away with one more of the provisions that differentiate between Maori and other New Zealanders”.<sup>97</sup> Hence, legally recognised adoptions for Māori had fallen by six hundred in the two and a half years since the 1962 Act.<sup>98</sup> The most distressing issue for Māori was that in the Magistrates’ Court adoption applications were routinely rejected because the adopting parents were closely related to the child.<sup>99</sup> This cut “right across Maori custom and tradition”.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 181. While the scope of this thesis does not permit an in-depth study into state removal of Māori children, Elizabeth Stanley has published a book which looks at the state care and removal of New Zealand children in general. Elizabeth Stanley, *The Road to Hell: State Violence against Children in Postwar New Zealand*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2016). It is widely recognised that Māori children have historically, and continue, to make up a significantly higher proportion of New Zealand children in state care. For example, Libesman states that in 1981, 49.2 per cent of Māori children were in need of care, at a time when Māori were less than 11 per cent of the total population. See: Terri Libesman, “Child Welfare Approaches for Indigenous Communities: International Perspectives,” *Issues* no. 20 (2004): 9.

<sup>95</sup> *A Question of Adoption*, 182.

<sup>96</sup> As previously stated, the government finally ended the jurisdiction of the Māori Land Court in adoption altogether by way of the *Adoption Amendment Act 1962*. The Act’s stated objective was “to do away with one more of the provisions that differentiate between Māori and other New Zealanders”. Section 2 adoption order: amended, on 24 September 1965, by section 5(2) of the Adoption Amendment Act 1965 (1965 No 32).

<sup>97</sup> NZPD (1962), Vol 330, 117.

<sup>98</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 461.

<sup>99</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 182.

<sup>100</sup> NZPD (1965), Vol 343, 1333.

Some non-Māori Members of Parliament supported Māori concerns. Mr Edwards, the MP for Napier, brought to attention a case where grandparents were denied the right to adopt their unmarried daughter's child:

because of this quirk in the law that says that Maori customs must be ignored, the Maori habit of grandparents adopting grandchildren is illegal ... Maori people are concerned about this problem ...<sup>101</sup>

Mr Mason, the MP for New Lynn, added:

equality is one thing, and uniformity is something quite different. The surrender of one's accustomed ways of thought is very far from being the same thing as equality. Diversity is valuable, and moreover the very essence of equality.<sup>102</sup>

Not surprisingly, rulings against kin adopting children deterred Māori from legally applying for adoption orders through the courts. Informal whāngai adoptions continued. But Mr Hanan, the Attorney-General and Minister of Māori Affairs, failed to comprehend the situation. He concluded instead:

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.<sup>103</sup>

Contrary to Mr Hanan's assumptions, the Secretary for Māori Affairs, Mr Jock McEwen, estimated that in 1966 at least 10,000 Māori children were in informal whāngai placements. By law, this meant 10,000 Māori children were in homes where they had no legal status.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> NZPD (1965), Vol 343, 1336.

<sup>102</sup> NZPD (1965), Vol 343, 1336.

<sup>103</sup> NZPD (1965), Vol 343, 1337-39.

<sup>104</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 185.

Yet, from 1955 onwards there was also an increase in Māori children being placed for adoption through Child Welfare. Although exact numbers were not recorded, it is known that a substantial number of closed stranger adoptions involved children who could claim Māori ancestry through at least one of their birth parents.<sup>105</sup> These children came from three general backgrounds: they were State Wards; children of unmarried Māori women living away from their tribal area and kin networks; or most usually children of unmarried Pākehā women who were pregnant to Māori men. While Māori and Pākehā formed intimate sexual relationships and had intermarried since the time of early European settlement, the increased populations of both and the influx of Māori from rural to predominantly European urban areas resulted in many more opportunities for contact between Māori and Europeans.<sup>106</sup> Young Māori, who came to the cities to work, or train as apprentices, experienced a new freedom away from small communities and extended kin.<sup>107</sup> Pākehā women were entering into relationships with Māori men on a scale previously unknown.<sup>108</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

From interviews she undertook, Else reports that some unmarried Māori women were instructed by child welfare officers not to tell family members that they were pregnant, as in most instances the family would not have supported a closed stranger adoption, choosing instead to take the child and/or support the mother.<sup>109</sup> In the 1960s, the Māori Women's Welfare League was extremely disturbed about the approach taken by child welfare officers' handling of young Māori women.<sup>110</sup> This led to conflicts and misunderstandings between social workers from the Department of Child Welfare and those from the Department of Māori Affairs.<sup>111</sup> Māori social workers felt that adopting a child out was a whānau decision and there are documented cases where Māori welfare officers took it upon themselves to contact a woman's family.<sup>112</sup> Such conduct was in

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<sup>105</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 184.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Didham and Paul Callister, "Two Peoples? Demographic Changes from First Contact to the 21st Century," in *Reconciliation, Representation and Indigeneity: 'Biculturalism' in Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. Peter Addis, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Richard S. Hill and Graeme Whimp (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 188-89.

<sup>107</sup> For a personal account of the complexities and continuities of urban migration in New Zealand from a Māori perspective see: Melissa Matutina Williams, *Panguru and the City: Kainga Tabi, Kainga Rua: An Urban Migration History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2015).

<sup>108</sup> While Angela Wanhalla argues that inter-racial 'marriages' have been present in New Zealand since the first European arrivals, most of Wanhalla's examples prior to the rapid urbanisation of Māori post WWII are of Māori women married to Pākehā men. See: Angela Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart: A History of Interracial Marriage in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014).

<sup>109</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 188; Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 220.

<sup>110</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 188.

<sup>111</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

<sup>112</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 188-89.

breach of client confidentiality. Social workers from the Department of Child Welfare refused to breach the confidentiality of their clients and “not infrequently disregarded relatives willing to adopt in favour of strangers”.<sup>113</sup>

Further, social workers from the Department of Child Welfare were critical that when asked for assistance in finding Māori homes for Māori children, the Department of Māori Affairs was seemingly ineffective.<sup>114</sup> Yet, when Māori went through the process of legal adoption with the Department of Māori Affairs, the overwhelming majority of those adoptions were between people who were related or knew each other. The adoption had already been organised privately between the parties. It remained difficult for Māori welfare officers to find Māori homes for children who were not kin, as placing a child in an unknown family was culturally inappropriate to Māori.<sup>115</sup> Perhaps for this reason, as Else documents, a much smaller number of single Māori mothers, compared with single Pākehā mothers, agreed to closed stranger adoption.<sup>116</sup>

I have heard numerous oral accounts of Māori kin actively pursuing the right to adopt children being placed for adoption – most commonly by Pākehā birth mothers.<sup>117</sup> However, adoption law and practices meant adoption by Pākehā strangers was preferred over adoption by Māori kin.<sup>118</sup> While a third of all whāngai adoptions were by grandparents caring for their grandchildren, applications made by grandparents to legally adopt their grandchildren were turned down on the basis that they were “too old and too poor”.<sup>119</sup> Further, underlying racism and the derision of Māori culture meant that courts viewed a European upbringing as superior to that which a child would receive in a Māori home.<sup>120</sup> There were, however, too few prospective adoptive parents willing to adopt a Māori child. Else notes that by 1965, “Child Welfare was admitting that, ‘Adoption of Maori children is a big and constant headache’”.<sup>121</sup> Māori children were being placed in short term foster placements or were adopted into Pākehā families which social workers acknowledged “were at the dicey end of being approved”.<sup>122</sup> Issues of concern were overlooked as it

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<sup>113</sup> Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 525.

<sup>114</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187.

<sup>115</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187.

<sup>116</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187.

<sup>117</sup> See examples in: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 189-190.

<sup>118</sup> Maria Haenga-Collins and Anita Gibbs, “Walking between Worlds?: The Experiences of New Zealand Māori Cross-Cultural Adoptees,” *Adoption and Fostering* 39, no. 1 (2015): 65; Metge, *New Growth from Old*, 252-253.

<sup>119</sup> Donna Hall-Durie, interview with author, January 20, 2011.

<sup>120</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 190.

<sup>121</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 190.

<sup>122</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 190



became increasingly difficult to find homes for Māori babies, effectively resulting in some Māori children being placed in inadequate homes.

## Matching Māori Children with Pākehā Families

Despite the vast majority of Māori children placed for adoption being adopted into European families, a key aspect of closed stranger adoption was ‘matching children to families’.<sup>123</sup> This involved attempting to match adoptive parents and the child as closely as possible. For example, it included matching of hair, eye and skin colouring, perceived intellectual abilities (taken from the birth parent’s educational or social standing) and religious beliefs.<sup>124</sup> This matching of the adoptive parents and child was viewed as optimising the chances for a successful and happy placement. Matching for physical similarities also aided in the secrecy of the adoption.<sup>125</sup> In her research, Else found that some child welfare officers used a simple colour-coding system to help with preliminary matching: ‘blue for boys; pink for girls; red for handicapped; green for Jews; yellow for Chinese; black for mixed race’.<sup>126</sup>

However matching children to families became problematic when adopting cross-culturally and led to ‘matching for marginalisation’ and ‘the hierarchy of babies’. As already noted, matching for marginalisation resulted in white families, who may not have been ideally suited as adoptive parents, being accepted on the grounds that they would take a non-white child, as non-white children were marginalised or harder to place. This fed into the hierarchy of babies where children who looked more European were easier to place than children who were darker in complexion. As Else reports:

Though they [welfare workers] 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’.<sup>127</sup>

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”.<sup>128</sup> However, racial origins were frequently viewed as more important than

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<sup>123</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 70.

<sup>124</sup> Else dedicates a chapter entitled ‘Matching Them Up’ to detail the extent of matching children to adoptive parents and the difficulty in finding homes for ‘mixed-race’ babies. Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 70-81.

<sup>125</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 70.

<sup>126</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 79.

<sup>127</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

<sup>128</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

complexion, with many potential adopters not prepared to consider a child with ‘a little Māori blood’, no matter how light skinned.<sup>129</sup>

Some adoptive parents, aware that their adopted child had Māori ancestry, would themselves hide this fact. Psychotherapist and adoption counsellor with her own experiences of adoption, Ann Nation, recalled how “people talked about the [Māori] child as being of Greek descent or Spanish descent”.<sup>130</sup> Some Pākehā birth mothers would also attempt to hide the fact that the father of their baby was Māori, as they realised this would improve the chances of their child being placed with a ‘good family’.<sup>131</sup> Aware of this, social workers were known to check for Mongolian spots on new-born babies.<sup>132</sup> In the hierarchy of babies, Māori and Pacific children were the least desirable, with boys of ‘coloured blood’ the hardest to place.<sup>133</sup> Interestingly, it was not uncommon for Pākehā couples waiting to adopt to request non-white children born overseas, for example to adopt children from Hong Kong or Vietnam.<sup>134</sup>

## Questioning Closed Stranger Adoption

As adoptees from the closed adoption era were reaching adulthood in the 1970s, the campaign to have closed files made accessible intensified. Adoption support groups were organised and Jigsaw Inc. was established in 1976.<sup>135</sup> These groups provided support for members of the adoption triad, helped adopted people and birth parents trace each other, and were a base for political activism. Activists, perhaps most notably Keith Griffith, publicly expressed concern about the secrecy surrounding adoption and the rights of adopted people to trace their families of origin. Birth mothers also started speaking out, as did some adoptive parents and social workers who were also beginning to challenge the inherent secrets of closed adoptions. Some social workers started suggesting that birth parents and adoptive parents meet prior to the birth of the child and maintain contact after the adoption. Having witnessed some of the negative impacts associated with closed

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<sup>129</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Ann Nation, conversation with author, November 27, 2010. Ann is also a birth mother and adoptive parent.

<sup>131</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

<sup>132</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 75. A 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.

<sup>133</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 70, 74; Perkins, “*He Aroha Whaea, He Potiki Piripoho*”, 20.

<sup>134</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

<sup>135</sup> Sawyer, *Death by Adoption*, xi-xii.

adoptions, social workers were in a unique position to support the campaign from within the social welfare system.<sup>136</sup>

The *Adoption Act 1955* was criticised on a number of grounds including the lack of counselling and independent legal advice for birth parents, and the ‘legal fiction’ and secrecy where the adoptive parents are substituted for birth parents on the child’s birth certificate.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, while closed adoption is no longer ‘practised’, there is no legal provision requiring adoptions to remain ‘open’.

### ***The Adult Adoption Information Act 1985***

In November 1976, an initial move in Parliament towards adoption law reform came from questions directed to the Minister of Justice, David Thomson, by Labour MP, Martyn Finlay.<sup>138</sup> The questions were designed to draw attention to the growing movement supporting the rights of adopted people to have access to their birth records, while simultaneously asking the government for a plan of action while applying pressure for legislative change. In August of the following year, Jigsaw formally petitioned Parliament seeking to allow adopted people to gain access to their original birth records. The petition was referred to the Social Services Committee which, at the start of the 1978 Parliamentary session, referred the petition to the Government for consideration. It was decided that no change to section 23 of the Act, which restricted the inspection of adoption records, would take place, but that a full review of the *Adoption Act 1955* was in order. As the National government under the leadership of Robert Muldoon firmly opposed any reform, a proposed review, with no set date, was seen by adoption reform advocates as a stalling mechanism. Therefore, the supporters for adoption law reform decided that the most effective way to have the issue debated in Parliament was by introducing a Private Members Bill. On August 25 1978, Labour MP, Jonathan Hunt, lodged his private member’s *Adoption Amendment Bill*.

Following the 1978 Bill, the Minister of Justice commissioned a review on adoption law which was undertaken by Miss Patricia Webb, the former legal advisor to the Department of Social Welfare. Griffith states that “[t]o the shock and surprise of key Government

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<sup>136</sup> See: Chapter Two of this thesis.

<sup>137</sup> For recommendations and a critique of the *Adoption Act 1955* see: Law Commission, “*Adoption and Its Alternatives*”.

<sup>138</sup> NZPD (1976), Vol 408, 4108.

officials the report was supportive of the Hunt Bill”.<sup>139</sup> While the report was published, it was otherwise ignored as Muldoon and other key figures in the National Government remained adamant in their opposition to the Bill. Various iterations of the bill were subsequently tabled: in 1979 the *Births Deaths and Registration Amendment Bill*, and in 1980 the *Adult Adoption Information Bill*. The Bill remained highly controversial and emotions ran high.

In 1980 Parliament finally decided that the Bill would be referred to the Statute Revision Committee. Public submissions were called for, and widespread coverage followed in the media. However, some expressed concern that progress on drafting the Bill was being deliberately delayed.<sup>140</sup> In fact, it was two years before the Statutes Review Committee released its report. The Bill was to be voted on across political lines as a conscious vote. At its Second Reading in 1983, a majority voted in favour of the Bill suggesting that it would pass into law after its next, third and final, reading. Once again, the Prime Minister used every measure to obstruct the Bill passing into law by delaying a third reading. Muldoon stated that the Bill would never pass under his Prime Ministership, and he remained true to his word. The obvious obstruction incensed both supporters and opponents.<sup>141</sup>

It was not until the 1984 election of a Labour Government that the *Adult Adoption Information Bill*, which had lapsed due to the defeat of the National Government, was introduced again, and the procedure of three readings and the submission to the Statutes Revision Committee was repeated. As Hunt had become a Cabinet Minister, he was unable to promote the Private Members Bill, and so Fran Wilde, the Labour MP for Wellington Central and an adoptive parent, introduced it, for the sixth time.

Given the high adoption rate in New Zealand, it is not surprising that some Members of Parliament voting on the Bill had personal experience of adoption. Muldoon was an adoptive grandfather. National MP Ian McLean was an adoptive parent who opposed the Bill, while Allan Wallbank, Labour MP for Gisborne, also an adoptive parent, supported the Bill, as did Labour MP Noel Scott, who was an adoptee, and National MP George Gair, who had first-hand knowledge of adoption as a former Minister of Social Welfare.

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<sup>139</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 375.

<sup>140</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 366-67.

<sup>141</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 366-67.

At the time, there was considerable speculation that Muldoon ferociously opposed the Bill because he feared having his adopted child, or children, finding him.<sup>142</sup> Political historian, Barry Gustafson, notes that while Muldoon personally received 344 letters about the Bill, 276 were letters of support, yet “Muldoon found the 68 letters against the Bill more compelling”.<sup>143</sup> Further, of the 118 submissions to the Statutes Revision Committee, over three-quarters also supported the Bill.

Interestingly, during the parliamentary debates, Labour MP for Porirua, Dr Gerard Wall, who had a Māori wife, saw the Bill as a “forward step in multicultural relations”.<sup>144</sup> He argued that traditional open adoption by Māori and Pacific Island peoples were commonplace and something other New Zealanders could learn from. The Minister of Māori Affairs, Koro Wetere, strongly supported the Bill. At the final vote, three of the four Māori MPs representing Māori electorates voted for the Bill; only Labour MP for Southern Māori, Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan, voted against.

After a decade of social pressure, political debate, and intense lobbying, Parliament passed the *Adult Adoption Information Act* on September 13 1985. It allowed adopted people aged at least 20 to apply for their original birth certificates, and to seek help to find and contact the named birth parent(s). Birth parents could also apply to identify and contact their children. No other family members had any right to information. Almost a year later, on 1 September 1986, the Act came into effect, providing the Department time to set up teams to write regulations and guidelines, to train and organise specialised staff to work with adoptees and birth parents, and for those wanting to place vetoes to do so.<sup>145</sup>

## Vetoes on Information

Birth parents who consented to adoption before the *Adult Adoption Information Act* was passed were guaranteed the right to place a 10-year renewable veto on access to identifying information. Adopted people were guaranteed the same right. Between March 1986 and December 1996, 3,825 vetoes were placed by birth parents (61 by fathers) and 1,303 by adoptees. By the end of 1996, most had been cancelled or had expired. For example, only 1,737 of the original vetoes placed by birth parents, and 357 of the original vetoes placed by adoptees, were still in place in 1996. It appears that in the first ten years after the

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<sup>142</sup> Barry Gustafson, *His Way: A Biography of Robert Muldoon* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), 402.

<sup>143</sup> Gustafson, *His Way*, 402.

<sup>144</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 366.

<sup>145</sup> Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption”, 80.

enactment of the 1985 Act, people's initial cautions and fears generated by political debate proved unfounded and many vetoes were allowed to lapse.<sup>146</sup>

In contrast, in the first four months between September 1 and December 31 1986, 3,896 original birth certificates were issued.<sup>147</sup> This figure rose to 22,926 by 1996 and 34,022 by 2006. Many adoptees and birth parents met. Some formed ongoing relationships, although the adoptee's relationship with the adoptive family usually remained primary.<sup>148</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that Māori and Pākehā understanding of adoption, much like Māori and Pākehā understanding of family, were not one and the same. The *Adoption Act 1955* did not take into account differing values and cultural beliefs, pursuing instead a policy of “one law for all”. However, the rhetoric of one law for all is a sleight of hand, which advantaged Pākehā as they held legislative power. By 1966, it was estimated that at least 10,000 Māori children were in informal whāngai placements, relegating them to homes where they held no legal status.<sup>149</sup> Yet under closed stranger adoption, grandparents and Māori kin were overlooked as suitable adoptive parents, as adoption by Pākehā strangers was preferred. The unfortunate irony was that as Māori children were less ‘desirable’ and harder to place into ‘good’ homes, they were at greater risk of remaining in institutional or foster care, or otherwise, being adopted into less suitable families. The following chapter further explores the factor that ‘race’ played in post-war adoption practices, while simultaneously seeking to understand the role of social workers in the era of closed adoptions, and the forces which formed and ultimately motivated their actions.

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<sup>146</sup> Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption”, 83.

<sup>147</sup> Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption”, 82.

<sup>148</sup> Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption”, 86. See also: Jill Kennard, “*Adoption Information: The Repossession of Identity*” (MA. diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 1991).

<sup>149</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 185.

## Chapter Two

### **“It’s a Hazard Being Born”: Social Workers Implementing and Challenging Closed Stranger Adoption**

Social work and social workers have been at the forefront of both implementing and changing adoption practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. By presenting the narratives of Mary and Elizabeth, two social workers who oversaw and arranged closed adoptions, this chapter provides insights into the stresses and concerns, hopes and aspirations, of those working in this field. The chapter is particularly concerned with the ideas, practices, conventions, and attitudes which contributed to the implementation of the *Adoption Act 1955*. Further, as it discusses the growth of social work as a profession, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role of women who worked as statutory social workers, and the increasing disquiet that both Mary and Elizabeth, and other social workers like them, felt about closed stranger adoption, and some of the practices they witnessed.

As with the rest of this thesis, this chapter illustrates how closed stranger adoption was a legally imposed practice based on Eurocentric values, which was not only disparaging of Māori values, but also of Māori people in general. Further, while the rhetoric around adoption focussed on the ‘best interests of the child’, children placed for adoption were very much placed into hierarchical categories of desirability. For children and their unmarried mothers, social workers were usually responsible for making decisions based on those categories. Over four decades later, both Mary and Elizabeth re-evaluate the profession, and their actions, in the specific area of adoption. The chapter begins by introducing both women.

#### **Mary’s Narrative**

Mary was born in the Netherlands and came to New Zealand in 1959 when she was fifteen years old. She was orphaned as a child and although she makes the distinction that her parents had both died, she still understood “about the grief of losing parents from a child’s perspective”.<sup>1</sup> Mary’s first job on her arrival in New Zealand was in a hospital working as a nurse aide. While in the women’s ward, Mary encountered a fourteen-year-old girl who had

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<sup>1</sup> Mary, interview with author, 4 April 2014.

undergone “a botched up abortion”.<sup>2</sup> Mary remembers being shocked at how this girl was treated. She says:

She'd be crying in pain  
and they'd say:  
    “Let her suffer  
    she'll keep her legs crossed next time”  
This attitude just appalled me.<sup>3</sup>

While such treatment was appalling, it was not uncommon. In 1990, Gillian Palmer, a then doctoral student, interviewed an unmarried mother who had given birth to a daughter in 1968. The birth mother recalls her treatment in the hospital where she delivered her baby:

I was very damaged. Even after thirteen days ... I couldn't stand up straight. It's quite likely that some of the damage was deliberate ... because some doctors do punish women who have illegitimate – so to speak – children, so I was bruised and torn ... and I was isolated in hospital they asked me to wear a wedding ring but I refused because I wasn't married and they put me in a room by myself ... straight after Pam was born I was taken up to my room and the matron came up with me and she stood at the end of my bed and the next door girl was crying and crying and crying and she said to me, “the woman in that room has had a still born child you should have had that child”.<sup>4</sup>

Mary was shocked and dismayed at the similarly punishing attitudes and behaviours towards unmarried mothers which informed general practice in the maternity ward where she worked. All newborn babies on the ward were kept in the nursery and taken to their mothers for feeding unless the mother was unmarried in which case the baby remained in the nursery to be fed by nursing staff. Mary, unaware of this rule, mistakenly took babies who were to be placed for adoption to their mothers. She remembers being “really told off” and sternly informed:

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<sup>2</sup> Mary, interview. Abortion was not legalised in New Zealand until 1977 with the passing of the *Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977*. Prior to this Act, many women sought illegal abortions risking death, injury, and a criminal conviction. See: Megan Cook, “Abortion - Who and how”, *Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (October 2014): <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/abortion/page-2> (accessed December 28, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>4</sup> Gillian Palmer, “*Birth Mothers: Adoption in New Zealand and the Social Control of Women, 1881-1985*” (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 1991), 95-96.

For further examples of New Zealand birth mothers talking about their experiences in maternity wards see: Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 86-87; Keith Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption: History and Practice, Social and Legal, 1840-1996* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1998), 28.



It's against the rules, if you do that again you will get dismissed. This is hospital policy and practice and that's how it's supposed to be. These girls are not allowed to see their babies, they don't deserve to see their babies and they don't want them because they are going to be adopted out.<sup>5</sup>

Mary's experience illustrates common beliefs about unmarried mothers and their children prevalent at the time of closed adoptions. Firstly, women were fully responsible for having got pregnant; they should have resisted male advances.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, these women did not want or deserve their children.<sup>7</sup>

At sixteen-years-old, Mary went to holiday with a Dutch family in a rural, predominantly Māori community where she undertook training to become a community nurse. Mary stayed in this community for almost three years and "loved it".<sup>8</sup> She saw first-hand the difference in attitudes towards unmarried mothers and their ex-nuptial children within a Māori setting. She says:

Young [Māori] women went to Wellington or Auckland and got pregnant because they didn't use contraceptive and they were away from home and mixing with people. They'd come home and have their babies and the babies would always be placed with extended families and it sort of struck me the difference between the attitudes of the hospital which were all Pākehās, and then of this community which was all Māori, and the Māori attitude to family. It was quite different ... and seeing the difference about attitudes also to the children. They were loved, they didn't have to reject them or abandon them ... families would usually take them. It was more of an open attitude, it was not a judgmental, or nasty, horrible kind of thing ... It was very, very, markedly different.<sup>9</sup>

Upon completing her training in the early 1960s, Mary moved to a larger city and worked as a psychiatric nurse. It was here that she became aware of a number of adopted young people under psychiatric care. Some had tried to commit suicide as they struggled to make sense of their adoption and what that meant in terms of their identity. However, Mary also remembers that some adoptees were admitted simply because they were wanting to know about their birth origins. At the time, the only requirement for an informal admission to a psychiatric hospital was for a general practitioner and a parent to apply for access.<sup>10</sup> Mary

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<sup>5</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>6</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 51-52.

<sup>8</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>9</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>10</sup> *Mental Health Amendment 1961*, No. 40 Part 1, Sec. 9 (1) (2). Admission of minors.

states that, in some instances, admissions were granted due to underlying assumptions that “they might go like the mother, be unstable, get pregnant”.<sup>11</sup> For a person to want to know about their birth origins, when they had been given and raised in a ‘decent home’, seemed to some adoptive parents and those within the medical profession as otherwise inexplicable.<sup>12</sup> Mary also encountered birth mothers in psychiatric care who she says:

were really depressive ... chronic depressive at a young age and then the story comes out they’d had this child and they’d never come to terms with the grief and they’d just become very depressed and done a suicide attempt, or just very depressed; not working, they didn’t want to get out, stayed in bed, and in the end they were sent to hospital.<sup>13</sup>

Mary’s experiences as a psychiatric nurse in the 1960s exemplifies the belief that both birth mothers and adoptees who showed any signs of curiosity about the other were mentally unstable and unwell.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1970s, Mary had left nursing, trained as a social worker, and was on placement at a borstal run by the Justice Department.<sup>15</sup> Once again she came into contact with adoptees.

Mary says:

There were kids there who should never have been there ... quite a lot of them who had been either adopted or been fostered ... they were state wards so they had come into care because they were adopted and the adoption broke down.<sup>16</sup>

Even fifty years later, a curiosity about birth parents drew this response in a 2014 report by Dr Roger Morgan, the Children’s Rights Director for England, who cited “the adopted child pursuing information about their birth family” as one specific reason for adoption

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<sup>11</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>12</sup> Keith Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are: Reform of Adoption Law with Honesty, Openness and Integrity* (Ottawa: Katherine W. Kimbell, 1991), Sec. 11: 1.

<sup>13</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>14</sup> As late as 1979, during a Parliamentary debate re. the *Adult Adoption Information Act*, Dr Wall, speaking as a former medical practitioner stated “I have never known a balanced, serious woman who wanted to know what had happened to her child after it had been given in adoption. An emotionally stable woman who has given a child in adoption would have come to terms with her decision many years before”. *NZPD* (1979), Vol. 426, 3522.

<sup>15</sup> Borstals were correctional institutions for adolescents.

<sup>16</sup> Mary, interview.

breakdowns.<sup>17</sup> It seems that for some adopted children, a curiosity about their birth origins resulted in expulsion from their adoptive families.

In 1974, Mary's work focused more specifically on adoption placements, where she was "having to visit adoptive applicants in their home and approve placements".<sup>18</sup> Mary found herself working in a team of recently graduated social workers who questioned adoption practices and the inherent secrecy of closed adoptions. Mary remembers, in the 1970s, people coming into the Department saying:

"I was adopted. My adoptive parents weren't told anything about my birth parents. Is there anything I'm allowed to know? Is there anything you could tell me about it?" Of course the Department said, "Go away. Go away". And we, the more recently graduated social workers were saying, "Why aren't they supposed to know? Why aren't they? Why does it all have to be secret? We looked at the Act and it doesn't say anything about secrecy, nothing about secrecy in the Act at all".<sup>19</sup>

Mary and her team were correct in their understanding that the *Adoption Act 1955* never explicitly required secrecy per se, but the Act was not only interpreted in such a way that 'to become as if born to' meant that the child would be issued with a new birth certificate which had only the names of the adoptive parents. 'As if born to' was also taken to mean that the child should have no contact with the birth parents, and access to the original birth record was heavily restricted.<sup>20</sup> While it was not law, it was the social and institutional convention which influenced the practice. Mary recognised that the mother was from birth, until the adoption, the legal guardian of her child, and she would advocate for the rights of birth mothers at a time when medical staff were less sympathetic. Mary says:

I'd go and talk to the nurses:  
     "She would like to see her baby  
     Same as everybody else"  
 Nurses:  
     "Well she can't.  
     It's going for adoption.

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<sup>17</sup> Roger Morgan, *Adoption Breakdowns: The Views of Children Returned to Care Following Adoption Breakdown* (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2014): 4. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20504/> (accessed 28 December 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>20</sup> See: The *Adoption Act 1955* Section 23; DSW Manual, Circa 1979, C2.30-C2.32

What if the adoptive parents later walk on the road  
and she'll recognise the child".<sup>21</sup>

Although common sense would suggest this was a highly unlikely occurrence, such thinking was in keeping with the stigma, secrecy and fear associated with adoption at the time. Closed stranger adoption was particularly concerned with assuring adoptive parents that their role as 'parents' was secure and their relationship with their adopted child would not be compromised in any way, thus making "secrecy about the identity of birth parents a necessary safeguard".<sup>22</sup>

In terms of the adoption of Māori children, Mary confirms findings from my own research, and other anecdotal evidence: that Māori children placed for adoption were usually the children of "Pākehā girls who got pregnant to a Māori man and the girl's family would not be very happy about that".<sup>23</sup> From the 1950s to the early 1970s, for most Pākehā women who were pregnant outside of marriage, there were only two realistic options: the first was to marry the father prior to the birth, and the second was to have the child placed for adoption.<sup>24</sup>

However, if the mother was Māori, her family, which included extended kin, would usually take the child. Mary reiterates: "It was more the white women who had the part Māori child" who placed the child for adoption.<sup>25</sup> Mary further explained that, for Māori, a child of 'mixed blood' was accepted as Māori by their Māori extended family. She says:

As I said, if the mother was Māori then the child  
used to go to Māori whānau  
or extended whānau  
because it doesn't matter  
the part Māori child.  
One good thing about Māori  
Some of their ancestors are half or a quarter.  
With some cultures if you're half

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<sup>21</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>22</sup> Jenny Rockel and Murray Ryburn, *Adoption Today: Change and Choice in New Zealand* (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1988), 44. See also: Anne Aburn, "Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption in New Zealand 1985-2010: An Overview of Adult Adoption since the Implementation of the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985," *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* 26, no. 4 (2014): 78-89; Jane Rowe, *Parents, Children and Adoption: A Handbook for Adoption Workers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Submission from the AASW, cited in, Australian Senate and Community Affairs References Committee, *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* (Canberra: Senate Printing Unit, 2012), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Mary, interview.

you're not accepted by either.  
 At least with Māori that's not the issue.  
 I mean part Māori  
 Are accepted as Māori.<sup>26</sup>

This reflects a Māori understanding of kinship and genealogy. Māori people who were placed for adoption and disconnected from their whakapapa have a particularly difficult time when unable to trace their Māori genealogy. Mary is especially aware of the difficulties those adoptees face as adults, stating:

If you're adopted and you don't know your whakapapa.  
 You really suffer.  
 They say, "I can't give my whakapapa"  
 So for children placed in European families,  
 that's a problem.<sup>27</sup>

By 1975, Mary and some other social workers were becoming more vocal in their concerns about problems they believed were inherent in the closed stranger system. They found especially troublesome the treatment of unmarried mothers, and the increasing number of adopted people searching for information about their birth parents. Mary became interested in the work of Keith Griffith, one of the leading advocates for adoptees' rights in New Zealand. Griffith was an adopted person and Methodist Minister, who undertook extensive research on adoption which ultimately paved the way for identifying information to become available to adoptees and birth parents. Mary and Griffith forged a friendship, and Mary began to regularly attend an adoption search and support group which Griffith established. The group was a self-help group where adopted people met, often for the first time, other adoptees also trying to trace parents. The group provided support and advice on how to access identifying information. Mary says:

For twenty years I was involved with the Wellington group. I've literally seen thousands of people coming through this group. So I learned what I know by just listening to their stories ... everyone is still unique but there are lots of similarities. And so you get a pretty good overview of what are people's perceptions and fears and feelings about it. For them it was really very important to talk to another adopted person who wanted to search and who thought that was normal. And there's nothing wrong wanting to search.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>27</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>28</sup> Mary, interview.

In her role as facilitator, Mary stressed that the support group did nothing illegal, although there was considerable alarm from the Department of Social Welfare, afraid perhaps that Mary may have been breaking confidentiality. For instance, in a Department of Social Welfare Manual, circa 1979, there are three pages of guidelines regarding “Access to, and Supply of, Information from Records”, with one guideline clearly stating: “As a general rule social workers should not accede to requests by adoptive parents or adopted persons to trace natural parents”.<sup>29</sup> However, Mary argued that what she did outside of office hours was not in any way attached to the Department and that she was merely directing people to avenues, which while legal, were not generally made known.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in a somewhat ironic twist, given that as late as the mid-1970s adopted people curious about their birth origins were still being viewed as emotionally and/or mentally unwell, Mary argued that she was in fact addressing a mental health issue brought about by adoptees *not* knowing about their origins. Mary says:

We set up a group at Hillview which was community mental health. We were thinking this is a mental health issue. Identity is part of knowing who you are ... to be a healthy person, mentally and emotionally, you need to know this information.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1970s, other adoption support groups were established around the country. As previously discussed, Jigsaw was a support group which also pressed for political action, and established a contact register helping mothers and adopted people who wanted to make contact with each other. Griffith and Mary continued to advocate for access to identifying information for both adoptees and birth parents. In 1978, MP Jonathan Hunt first introduced the *Adult Adoption Information Act* as a Private Members Bill to Parliament. The Act was finally passed in 1985.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> DSW Manual, Circa 1979, C2.30-C2.32

<sup>30</sup> For example, Mary would advise that if the adoptive parents were supportive they could go and ask for the adoption file held at the lawyer’s office, so that they could view the consent form with the birth mother’s name on it. This was not illegal. In fact, as they had paid for the lawyer’s services it was something they were entitled to. Most people were unaware of this and, Mary notes, many lawyers did not want to make this fact known.

<sup>31</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>32</sup> As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, there were some restrictions in the release of information under the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*. For instance, information was not available if either party had placed a veto on the release of information. The minimum age for adopted people before they can apply for information is 20 years of age. See: New Zealand Government., “Finding your birth parents.” *Adoption and Fostering*. Govt.nz, 2017. <https://www.govt.nz/browse/family-and-whanau/adoption-and-fostering/finding-your-birth-parents/> (accessed December 30, 2016); Aburn, “Twenty-Five Years of Adult Adoption”.

It was also during the 1970s that Mary's work within the Department saw her, and the team she managed, pioneer the introduction of open adoptions. Again, this was something the Department of Social Welfare did not generally endorse. Mary states that while many adoptive parents still did not want to meet the birth mothers, some did. She says:

There were the odd adoptive parents who wanted a meeting between birth parents and adoptive parents. Wow! So that's the ones we started with. It was all very anonymous then. We started off very carefully.<sup>33</sup>

From such precarious beginnings, it was a decade before open adoptions became the norm in New Zealand. While it could be argued the change in practice was slow and long-overdue, it took time to educate people and thus provide an alternative option to the secrecy and fear embedded in closed adoption.<sup>34</sup>

Although retired, Mary remains active in her work advocating for adoptees' rights and adoption reform. She attends adoption meetings and conferences and is a current member of Adoption Action Inc., a group currently lobbying for Adoption reform in New Zealand.<sup>35</sup>

## Elizabeth's Narrative

**Elizabeth** is a Pākehā woman who was born and raised in the South Island of New Zealand and spent time in her twenties travelling overseas. On her return to New Zealand, she applied for a job with the Department of Social Welfare. In 1961, Elizabeth was 33 years old, and without realising it she was embarking on a career which would span twenty-five years. Elizabeth says:

I saw an advertisement in the paper and I thought that sounds interesting. I went in for an interview and I said to the man "I'd be interested in field work". Whatever that meant. Anyway I was asked if I could start next week. I don't know what qualifications I brought to it because I had no qualifications at all. I guess it was on personality. I

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<sup>33</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>34</sup> However, despite the change in practice, from closed to open adoptions, the *Adoption Act 1955* is still in force. Many adoption reform advocates view the 1955 legislation as out-dated and there is frustration that despite over fifty reviews and other moves to reform adoption laws in New Zealand (from January 1979 to March 2016), no reform has yet taken place. See: Adoption Action Inc., "Chronology of moves to reform adoption laws over the last 36 years." *Adoption Action Inc.* <http://adoptionaction.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Chronology.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> For information about Adoption Action Inc., "Adoption Action." *Adoption Action Inc.* <http://adoptionaction.co.nz/> (accessed December 30, 2016).

didn't really know what I was getting into. We used to joke about it, about how you experienced your entry. It was literally "Welcome. You will be doing such and such a district. Here is your visiting book, which was a list of names and addresses. Here is your caseload and you can have a car on Tuesdays and Thursdays". I really hadn't the faintest notion what I was doing.<sup>36</sup>

When Elizabeth first began at the Department of Social Welfare, the work was divided by gender. Men worked with boys from age ten upwards, and women worked with babies, girls, and boys up until ten. Most of the women were single women, who had a church or religious connection, and had come from a teaching or nursing background. Elizabeth says they were viewed as "very worthy ladies".<sup>37</sup> Adoption was the work of female welfare officers. In her first week of starting the job, Elizabeth clearly remembers that one of her first tasks was to take a new mother to a solicitor to sign consent for her baby to be placed for adoption. Elizabeth says:

I never met the youngster before and I took her to the solicitor and she had to sign this thing. I don't think I really understood the implication of it for her at that time, but I did say, "Would you like to just go and sit by the lake for a while before I take you back?" [to the hostess where she was staying].<sup>38</sup> I didn't talk to her about it at all but just gave her a bit of time to collect herself. It was very much learning on the job, learning as you went along at that time.<sup>39</sup>

Elizabeth says of adoption during the early 1960s:

Usually young women would come in, sometimes referred by a doctor or possibly by a family member, and they would come in knowing that they had to come to talk about putting their baby for adoption because there was no option. Usually they were away from their home district, they'd been sent away 'up north' as they say to remove them from the gossip and shame of becoming pregnant when you were not married which was a terrible thing to happen, not only because you were [considered] a shameful hussy for having had sex, but having got caught for another thing.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth, interview with author, 23 October 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>38</sup> A hostess was a married woman, with a husband and children, where expectant single women were sent prior to giving birth. The unmarried expectant mother would usually help with household duties such as cooking, cleaning, child-minding and receive free lodging, and perhaps a small allowance, in return. For personal experiences of the hostess system see: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 29-33.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth, interview.



To be sent ‘up north’ was the common euphemism for unmarried expectant mothers who travelled outside of their home regions to either a home for unmarried mothers, or to the home of a ‘hostess’, where she would board and undertake household duties, until the delivery of her child.

Like Mary, Elizabeth consistently illustrates in her narrative the public shame and stigma associated with illegitimacy, but she also draws attention to the practicalities of providing for a child as an unmarried mother. Elizabeth says:

But the practical thing about it, there was no means of supporting a baby if you didn’t have a husband and a family and a home, and so an expected baby had to be looked after by someone. Some families were able to absorb a baby into their family – usually bigger families and the baby would be passed off as the mother’s baby or the married sister’s baby. Sometimes a person would find out quite late in life that their mother wasn’t their mother, that their sister was their mother. So, there was a lot of secrecy and shame around it.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1960s, Elizabeth was sent to work in a predominantly Māori area. She, like Mary, noticed the different attitudes between Māori and Pākehā towards unmarried mothers and their children. Elizabeth does not remember ever being involved with Māori women who had children placed for adoption under the closed stranger system. She says, “I don’t think I had anything particularly to do with Māori girls, Māori babies, because mainly they were kept within the family. There was no problem”.<sup>42</sup>

However, there was a problem finding enough families willing to adopt a Māori child under the closed stranger system, as Elizabeth attests:

If there was a placement coming where there was some Māori in the background, we really had to scramble around to find people who would accept a baby that was part Māori. The hospital would be ringing and saying, “Get this baby out of here, we can’t keep it any longer”. It was a problem for us because we thought, “Where the hell are we going to put this baby!”<sup>43</sup>

Elizabeth draws attention to the negative attitudes often expressed about Māori, often from people who had no personal contact with Māori. For example, she says:

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<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

People say, “He’s a Māori but he’s quite a nice one”. Or my parent’s generation would say “Oh there’s a bit of a tar brush”. Bit of a tar brush! My parents were prejudiced. Ignorant prejudice. They didn’t know what they were talking about. They’d never met any Māori people.<sup>44</sup>

During her interview, Elizabeth, like Mary, reiterates that most Māori children relinquished under the practice of closed adoption had white mothers. Yet, unlike Mary, Elizabeth did not think the fact that the father was Māori would have influenced the relinquishment of the child. Rather, Elizabeth believes familial pressure on the unmarried mother to move out of the district, and have her baby placed for adoption, was almost entirely due to the stigma associated with an ex-nuptial pregnancy. In fact, stigma and secrecy bound all parties involved in an uncomfortable and contrived silence. For example, Elizabeth says:

I don’t remember it in my time but I think the generation before me, if people were adopting, or hoping to adopt, they would go around with pillows stuffed under them and pretend they were pregnant. It was shameful to admit that children were adopted. It was shameful not to have a baby too ... So a baby suddenly appearing was subject for some gossip ... people who were adopted were ashamed of it too. I remember a girlfriend of mine when we were in our teens and she wanted to get engaged to somebody and her boyfriend’s parents weren’t very keen and I said, “Why?” And she said, “It’s because I’m adopted and nobody knows who I am”.<sup>45</sup>

In this light, one can see that the secrecy surrounding adoption was intended to protect people’s privacy and dignity in the face of social censure. The “terrible secrecy” surrounding adoption, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, had permeated both social and institutional conventions, with secrecy and discretion becoming inextricably intertwined.<sup>46</sup> In part, this possibly explains why the father’s name was generally not placed on the original birth certificate.<sup>47</sup> Ann Howarth in *Reunion* provides an example of the hurt when a birth mother writes to her son about his original birth certificate:

I was disappointed to note on your birth certificate that your father’s name was missing. I specifically asked at the time that his name be

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<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>46</sup> For example, the issuing of a new birth certificate with only the adoptive parents’ names. As such, unless disclosed by adoptive parents (or others), the adopted person would have no evidence of their adopted status. Stories abound of adopted people finding out they were adopted when told by others. See: Sheryn Gillard-Glass and Jan England, *Adoption New Zealand: The Never-Ending Story* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2002), 186-192.

<sup>47</sup> It should also be noted that some men resisted having their names on the birth certificate as it would require them to pay maintenance for the child. Some adoptions may not have taken place if fathers had acknowledged children and helped to financially support their child. See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 15-18.

included ... I wanted to leave you something of both of us for you to carry into the future.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps those dealing with the adoption decided that the less known the better, as Elizabeth states:

There was a great deal of discretion. You didn't ask too many questions ... generally speaking, looking back at notes that were written at the time, people wrote very scanty things and people didn't even have to give their real names, although I suppose a mother's real name had to go on the birth certificate.<sup>49</sup>

The high cost of secrecy and silence became only too obvious as birth parents and adopted people became more vocal about their experiences during the 1970s.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, for adoptees whose fathers were Māori, the missing information regarding paternity has led to an inability for some to trace their Māori origins, leaving them with no knowledge of their genealogy, which is the basis for claiming specific iwi inclusion. Social workers may not have viewed such information necessary during the 1950s and 1960s as for the most part they were working within their own mono-cultural and Eurocentric paradigm. However, tribal identities have consistently remained important to Māori. Even in 1961, during the height of closed adoptions, the Māori Synod of the Presbyterian Church in response to the Hunn Report stated:

that the fundamental basis of Maori life is the tribe, not the family [and] ... tribal rights should be respected and should not be replaced by the conception of 'the Maori people as a whole'.<sup>51</sup>

Without knowledge of whakapapa, tribal links cannot be made, and many Māori adoptees have been made culturally invisible or re-silenced both as adoptees and as Māori. Additionally, as social workers were often under intense pressure to find homes for children, especially hard to place children, the truth about 'racial' origins was not always told. For instance, Māori children were sometimes portrayed to be of Italian or Greek ancestry, as this was seen as less objectionable to some adoptive parents.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ann Howarth, *Reunion: Adoption and the Search for Birth Origins – The New Zealand Story*. (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1988), 39.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Melosh, "Adoption Stories: Autobiographical Narratives and the Politics of Identity," in *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*, ed. E. Wayne Carp (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 218.

<sup>51</sup> Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, Māori Synod. *A Maori View of the "Hunn Report"* (Christchurch: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1961), 4.

<sup>52</sup> I personally know of two adoptees who as adults found out that they were Māori. Their adoptive parents had been told by social workers at the time of their adoption that they were of Greek descent. Not only was

Over her twenty-five years as a social worker, Elizabeth witnessed changes in family making due to greater control over reproduction, and an increase in the desirability of marginalised children. Elizabeth explains:

In the 60s the pill came in and things changed a bit. Before that getting pregnant was a real hazard. And during the 70s everybody got concerned about the world population, and so all these nice young people who were going to university and becoming more aware, they wanted to save the world from over-population, so they wouldn't have their own babies. They'd come and get one from somewhere else. And so it was a bit fashionable to take a less desirable baby.<sup>53</sup>

As Else and others have argued, adoption has fundamentally been about adult concerns and desires.<sup>54</sup> I would suggest that such concerns and desires, at some level, involved notions of authenticity, legitimisation, and validation. As Elizabeth illustrates, some social changes during her years as a social worker took place as different concerns took primacy. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, authenticating a marriage with the production of a child, while legitimising an illegitimate birth, was paramount. Perhaps from the latter part of the 1970s, with an increased awareness of Māori nationalism, white adoptive parents attempting to validate their white privilege and settler history, sought to adopt a Māori child to authenticate their place in a social climate which was becoming increasingly bi-cultural.

Yet Elizabeth states: "...for people to be adopted inter-racially is always hazardous, there's no doubt. Whether you're Chinese or Māori or Russian, or whatever".<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth admitted that she witnessed some questionable practices in the cross-cultural adoption of children. In one specific case, she felt a family had been pressured into adopting a child from a specific race out of fear that they might not be offered another child. Over four decades later, this case still fills her with "great shame" and wondering "whether to get in touch with these people to apologise".<sup>56</sup> Even when asked about her best memories of working in adoptions, Elizabeth's response is laced with caution:

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this information false, but the social workers involved must have known this at the time as their Māori ancestry was recorded on file.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>54</sup> For example, see: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, xiii; Marian Quartly, Shurlee Swain and Denise Cuthbert, *The Market in Babies* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013), 2-3.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

The joy of seeing people receiving a baby was always tempered with the tearful little person on the other side. The best thing was seeing, sometimes later on, a happy family – integrated and getting on alright. You tended not to see that so much though, you tended to see the breakdowns. The longer I was in adoptions the more I shuddered.<sup>57</sup>

Adoption literature has paid little attention to the narratives of social workers working with unmarried mothers and their children during the period of closed adoption in New Zealand. As Mary and Elizabeth have demonstrated in their narratives, adoption work was both gendered, racially-inflected and challenging. Mary and Elizabeth’s narratives allow a deeper understanding of both the private and public thoughts and values which shaped their social work practice.

By both drawing inspiration from their oral histories, and returning to themes within them, the next section in this chapter focuses on the circumstances from which social workers entered the profession, the conditions under which they worked and, ultimately, the contexts in which they made decisions which directly impacted on birth mothers and Māori adoptees, their Māori families of origin, and their descendants. In order to better understand the experience of Mary and Elizabeth, and other social workers like them, I consider the nascent professionalism of social work in New Zealand, focussing on the training available (or unavailable), the types of people who became social workers, and social workers’ views on adoption. The expansion of social work as a profession occurred in unison with other rapidly unfolding post-Second World War phenomena, which subsequently helped to shape New Zealand’s history of the practice of closed adoption, and some of those broader changes and their implications are considered. The chapter then turns to consider the importance of race, and the ideals of what constituted ‘good parents’, especially in relation to how they influenced the placement of Māori children into Pākehā adoptive families.

## **The Rise of Social Work**

As early as 1930, the National Council of Women, and the Federation of University Women to the Victoria College of the University of New Zealand, called for a specific course to educate and train New Zealand social workers.<sup>58</sup> It was not until 1950, however,

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<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>58</sup> The University was originally known as Victoria College of the University of New Zealand and was founded in 1897. In 1961, the University of New Zealand system was dissolved, and on 1 January 1962, Victoria College became Victoria University of Wellington. See: “*Victoria’s History*,” Victoria University of

that the first students enrolled at Victoria in the then newly created Diploma of Social Science.<sup>59</sup> This course was the first of its kind in New Zealand and would remain the only tertiary course available until the establishment of social work programmes at Massey and Canterbury universities in 1976.<sup>60</sup> The lecturers for the 1950 Postgraduate Diploma in Social Science included the Foundation Professor, David Marsh, ‘an ebullient Welshman’ from the University of Nottingham, Jean Robertson ‘a straight-backed Scot’ from the University of Glasgow, and Brenda Stubbs, a psychoanalytically-trained caseworker from England.<sup>61</sup> Professor Earnest Beaglehole and Dr John McCreary were New Zealand staff from the Psychology Department. Of the first fourteen students, eight of them were government bursars.<sup>62</sup>

Given that New Zealand had lagged behind other western countries in establishing a formal education-based training programme for social workers, it is not surprising that three of the foundation lecturers were from Great Britain.<sup>63</sup> New Zealanders with overseas experience (as in the case of Merv Hancock) or social workers who had immigrated to New Zealand (for example Ruth Manchester) often took on prominent social work positions and/or roles as educators within institutions.<sup>64</sup> Whichever way one looks at it, social work

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Wellington. <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/about/victorias-story/history> (accessed December 30, 2016). Mary I. Lambie, *My Story: Memoirs of a New Zealand Nurse* (Christchurch: Peryer Ltd, 1956), 168.

<sup>59</sup> Rachel Barrowman, *Victoria University of Wellington, 1899-1999: A History* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999), 65.

<sup>60</sup> Barbara Staniforth, “Tiromoana and Taranaki House: A Tale of Their Times,” *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work* 27, no. 1/2 (2015): 6.

<sup>61</sup> Barrowman, *Victoria University of Wellington*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> As government bursars, they were from statutory agencies. Barrowman, *Victoria University of Wellington*, 65. See also: Elizabeth Gillian Mary Amaryllis Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice: Social Work Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand from 1949-1995*” (PhD diss., Massey University, 1998), for an interview with Merv Hancock (one of the first fourteen students enrolled in the foundational PGDip in Social Science), 103-110.

<sup>63</sup> Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 209. The USA and Australia had social work educational training programmes some twenty-one years before New Zealand. For instance, by 1929 there were ten university programmes in social work across the USA. See: “Social Work Degree Guide” <http://www.socialworkdegreeguide.com/faq/what-is-the-history-of-the-social-work-profession/> (accessed January 03, 2017). In 1929 the NSW Board of Social Study and Training was established in Australia. In 1940 this training course became the University of Sydney Social Work course. See: Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). “*Early Australian Social Work Milestones*.” Australian Association of Social Workers, 2017 <https://www.aasw.asn.au/about-aasw/aasw-milestones> (accessed January 03, 2017); Lambie, *My Story*, 168.

<sup>64</sup> Merv Hancock was an historian and child welfare officer, academic and counsellor, who was amongst the first group of students who graduated from the PGDip in Social Science (the forerunner to the Bachelor of Social Work degree at Massey University, of which he was the founding director. He was also the first President of the NZASW, and a Palmerston North city councillor). He is widely acknowledged as “the father of modern social work in New Zealand”. Janine Rankin, “Palmerston North has farewelled a social worker and dear friend” *Stuff*, May 15, 2016.

<http://i.stuff.co.nz/manawatu-standard/news/79912477/palmerston-north-has-farewelled-a-social-worker-and-dear-friend> (accessed January 14, 2017). See also: <http://anzasw.nz/wp-content/uploads/Merv-Hancock-honorary-Doctor.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2017). Ruth Manchester (nee Halsall) came to New Zealand in 1965 with a degree in social administration from Manchester University and training as a social worker in hospital settings. She undertook a one year post-graduate course in psychiatric social work. In New

training in New Zealand remained heavily influenced by Anglo-Celtic practice. One overseas ‘expert’ was social worker Jane Rowe, who “combined the fruits of her English experience with the insights and knowledge gained in American adoption work and service to unmarried mothers”.<sup>65</sup> In the 1970s, a Department of Social Welfare manual states:

Miss Jane Rowe, an English authority on adoption, has stressed that the real key to a successful adoption appears to lie in the degree to which the couple feel what has been called ‘entitlement’ to be parents of the child, and to the extent the child later feels a right to regard them as parents.<sup>66</sup>

Such advice could well be interpreted as supporting a closed adoption approach, and social workers “yearning for opportunities for further education” relied on such material to inform their practice.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, some of Rowe’s expert advice was in line with much of the pseudo-scientific thinking of the time. For example, it was the same Jane Rowe who wrote in 1966 that: “White girls who have illegitimate babies by coloured men are often emotionally ill as well as socially defiant”.<sup>68</sup> It is likely that many adoption social workers, eager to learn from those with comprehensive and professionally-sanctioned experience, would have embraced the postulations of an ‘English authority’ on adoption and incorporated such views and attitudes into their own social work practice.

Due to the demand for training, the State Services Commission in July 1963 opened a training centre at Tiromoana in Porirua for statutory workers.<sup>69</sup> The New Zealand Association of Social Workers, founded in 1964, was joined in the same year by the International Federation of Social Workers.<sup>70</sup> While professional training and recognition

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Zealand, Ruth Manchester worked at the Department of Health and at Tiromoana, where she was a tutor and part-time social worker. (She was the director of Tiromoana 1970-1975). At Otago University, she was a lecturer in psychiatric social work and was involved in clinical practice and research. In 1975, she became a senior lecturer in social work at Victoria University in Wellington. She was married to social worker Brian Manchester (in 1972 Brian Manchester was the Assistant Director Social Work in the Department of Social Welfare), and they worked together establishing and expanding social work training centres. See: Barbara Staniforth, “Ruth and Brian Manchester: Social work’s dynamic duo,” *Social Work Review* (2007): 55-65; Staniforth, “Tiromoana and Taranaki House”, 5-23.

<sup>65</sup> Rowe, *Parents, Children and Adoption*, x.

<sup>66</sup> DSW Manual, Circa 1979, C3.20-C3.22.

<sup>67</sup> Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 111.

<sup>68</sup> Rowe, *Parents, Children and Adoption*, 16.

<sup>69</sup> For a detailed account of the establishment and training at Tiromoana, see: Staniforth, “Tiromoana and Taranaki House”, 5-22.

<sup>70</sup> For a historical overview of the New Zealand Association of Social Workers, see: Liz Beddoe and Howard Randal, “The New Zealand Association of Social Workers: The Professional Response to a Decade of Change,” in *Social Work in Action*, eds. Robyn Munford and Mary Nash (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994), 21-36. For a discussion on social work in New Zealand, see: Marie Connolly, ed. *New Zealand Social Work: Contexts and Practice* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2001).

was developing, there was still an enormous gulf between the educational needs of the growing social work sector and the training available.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, many people who were ‘doing’ social work did not necessarily identify primarily as social workers, opting instead to identify more strongly with their specific area of work, for example, as child welfare officers, probation officers, or visiting teachers.<sup>72</sup> Further, social work was highly gendered. Social worker and social work educator, Mary Nash, states that men:

tended towards authoritarian and controlling aspects of social work like probation and administration ... [while historically] ... women have been practitioners in fields which society considered would give appropriate expression to their nurturing roles within the family.<sup>73</sup>

As such, it was female social workers who worked exclusively with unmarried mothers and their children, and female social workers who faced the “[s]exist attitudes, both in hiring practices and men’s attitudes to women”.<sup>74</sup> In this way, women (social workers) were essentially pitted against other women (unmarried mothers), and they were required to implement practices which were directives set by men at more senior levels.

As the narratives of Mary and Elizabeth illustrate, most social workers in the field of adoption during the 1950s to 1970s had little, if any, formal training.<sup>75</sup> Training was usually what happened on the job, or came with the skills, attitudes and experiences social workers brought with them. Many women came from a nursing or teaching background, and were often unmarried or childless. In 1975, Eileen Younghusband, a British social work educator, described such women as “reliable spinsters ... who remained in their posts year after year giving service to clients”.<sup>76</sup> Mary says they were mostly single women “who wanted to do good”.<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth agrees stating:

Well the women, we were mostly single women, most had come from teaching or nursing and very many of them had come from a church and religious background. And so the general ethos, would be very worthy

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<sup>71</sup> Staniforth, “Tiromoana and Taranaki House”, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Staniforth, “Tiromoana and Taranaki House”, 6

<sup>73</sup> Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 48.

<sup>74</sup> Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 253.

<sup>75</sup> In 1969, only 5.8 per cent of statutory social workers in the field held the Dip. Soc. Sci. or equivalent. Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 154.

<sup>76</sup> Eileen Younghusband, *Social Work in Britain, 1950-75, Vol. I* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 290.

<sup>77</sup> Mary, interview.



ladies. The men, I suppose they had come from teaching largely. We were fairly separate, we didn't work together particularly much in the early stages because the work was so much divided between the little children, and the big girls, and the big boys. Even if we had whole families under our care the boys would be divided off. I think adoption was just part of the general run of the work. But the men didn't deal with it. Silly now when you think of it because there's always boys involved [fathers of children placed for adoption] but they were totally discounted. No one really enquired about them.<sup>78</sup>

During the earlier years of social work training, 'no one really enquired' about Māori views or perspectives either. While Nash notes the Tiromoana course was well attended by Māori welfare officers in the 1960s, it was however "very much a Pakeha course".<sup>79</sup> Canadian social worker and academic, Andrew Armitage, describes social policy in New Zealand in the period between 1847 and 1960 as assimilationist, aimed at a "complete absorption of the Maori into white culture".<sup>80</sup> However, following the Hunn Report in 1960, which recognised that an assimilationist policy had not achieved its desired outcome, the government under Prime Minister Keith Holyoake, opted instead for a policy of integration.<sup>81</sup> Armitage writes that "[i]ntegration implied a tolerance, albeit unenthusiastic, for a distinct Maori presence in New Zealand".<sup>82</sup> Hunn seemed to relegate a distinct Māori presence to the innocuous activities of language, arts, and crafts which, if desired, could be overlooked by Pākehā New Zealand, while at the same time be conveniently used to flaunt, both at home and overseas, New Zealand's distinct culture and supposed racial tolerance.<sup>83</sup> I draw attention to this point because it is important to remember that social workers did not operate in a political or social vacuum. American social worker, Bertha Reynolds, argued that "social work is an integral part of the society in which it grows".<sup>84</sup> Therefore, if we are to understand the underpinnings of social work, we need to first understand society, its social goals and policies.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>79</sup> Tom Austin, Director of Tiromoana (1967), in personal communication with Mary Nash, June 19 1995, cited in Nash, "People, Policies and Practice", 223.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 145.

<sup>81</sup> Jack Kent Hunn, "Report on Department of Maori Affairs," (Wellington: Government Printer, 1961). The report was released to the public in 1961.

<sup>82</sup> Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation*, 145-46.

<sup>83</sup> Keith Sinclair, "Why Are Race Relations in New Zealand Better Than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota?" *New Zealand Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (Auckland, University of Auckland, 1971): 121-124. For further discussion on race relations during this period in New Zealand, see: James E Ritchie, *Race Relations: Six New Zealand Studies* (Wellington: Department of Psychology, Victoria University, 1964), 75-98.

<sup>84</sup> Bertha Capen Reynolds, *Learning and Teaching in the Practice of Social Work* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart Inc, 1942), 31.

<sup>85</sup> Nash, "People, Policies and Practice", 46.

## Assimilation, Integration and Paternalistic Attitudes

During the years when policies devoted to assimilationist and integrationist ideals were promoted, general attitudes towards Māori remained paternalistic and superior. For example, the Department of Statistics 1975 Yearbook outlined the function of Māori welfare organisations as:

to educate the mothers of the race to an appreciation of the higher standards of attainment on the home front ... [and] to assist in the maintenance of order and to stamp out mischief before it becomes a crime.<sup>86</sup>

Nash highlights that in the early years of social work in New Zealand, monocultural, British values were considered the norm, with such norms enacted in everyday life.<sup>87</sup> It was within this social and political, personal and professional, context that social workers were simultaneously drawn from and incorporated into. In guidelines for prospective social workers, published in 1966, the State Services Commission stated:

Modern New Zealand is a fast-changing society. Established attitudes and relationships are constantly being subjected to the pressure of progress. For some, adaptations to the increased tempo and the greater stresses of modern life is not easy. Inadequacy, mental instability, physical disability and poor environment are some of the factors which make this difficult. In times of stress, the number of “social casualties” – people who have succumbed to personal problems or weaknesses – can be expected to increase.<sup>88</sup>

Such a view clearly focused on the individual, whose “failure to adjust” to socially prescribed norms was viewed as negatively impacting on society.<sup>89</sup> Unmarried mothers, who undoubtedly fell into this category, were to be helped with their “fall from grace” by having their baby placed for adoption. Social workers, who were typically deemed “genuinely concerned”, with a “balanced personality” and a “good knowledge of psychology and community resources”, were tasked with both finding homes for babies and matching children as closely as possible to the physical and perceived intellectual

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<sup>86</sup> Department of Statistics, *New Zealand Official Yearbook* (Wellington: Government Print, 1975), 179.

<sup>87</sup> Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 184. A small, yet enlightening, example of New Zealand adopting British norms in everyday life was for movie-goers in New Zealand theatres to stand for ‘God Save the Queen’. This continued from the start of Queen Elizabeth’s reign until the early 1970s. See: Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “Standing for the Queen at the movies”, *New Zealand History*, July 15, 2014. <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/standing-queen-movies> (accessed December 30, 2016).

<sup>88</sup> The State Services Commission, *Training for Social Workers in the Public Service* (Wellington: Government Print, 1966), 1.

<sup>89</sup> The State Services Commission, *Training for Social Workers*, 1

capabilities of their adoptive parents.<sup>90</sup> White, middle-class homes were preferred when identifying and assessing prospective applicants. Elizabeth explains:

In our terms  
 We were looking for the best  
 possible opportunity  
 for the child.  
 Young, healthy, wealthy people  
 who could give this child  
 what it needed.  
 We always thought that a nice white  
 Middle-class family  
 was the best option for most children.<sup>91</sup>

Yet, by the same token, Elizabeth acknowledged that often the ‘best’ families had high expectations of themselves and of the child they adopted. She says:

All of these middle-class values  
 and expectations come in.  
 People see it as a failure if they can’t produce  
 their own children.  
 And if their adopted children  
 don’t turn out alright  
 it’s a double failure.  
 So that if you  
 adopt a child  
 you have to  
 produce  
 a perfect  
 something.<sup>92</sup>

Matching adoptive parents and children was a fundamental part of working in adoption placements. Elizabeth reflects on the difficulties she experienced in trying to match children to families. Yet, perhaps more importantly, Elizabeth powerfully illustrates the commanding role social workers had over which children were placed into which families, and the inherently subjective nature of the decisions made, even as social workers tried to be as objective as possible. She explains:

It was looking at what you had,  
 what she [the birth mother] was able to tell you

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<sup>90</sup> The State Services Commission, *Training for Social Workers*, 1

<sup>91</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

of her background and potential  
and if she knew  
what she could tell you of the baby's father's background  
What did he do.  
What was his family like.

We didn't know anything about genetics  
but we'd have a look at what  
this child might possibly be  
or need  
to develop  
in its ilk

And the influx of babies  
came from a wider sort of base  
and it was hard for me  
(I don't know whether it was hard for anyone else)  
to sort of locate them  
in terms of the social strata  
or social milieu.

It wasn't always easy  
It was jolly hard  
It's a wonder that there weren't  
more failures.<sup>93</sup>

Likewise, Mary shared her experiences of finding homes for Māori children, and the social workers' own values that affected their judgement. She says:

The general attitude was if you had two parents  
and you had to compare a home study.  
Obviously because of the white  
culture values of the worker themselves  
the Māori families would always be inferior  
because their lifestyle was being judged  
by Pākehā.  
The same with foster families,  
if you're looking for foster parents  
a lot of kids went to Pākehā homes.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth, interview.

<sup>94</sup> Mary, interview.

In terms of placing Māori children into homes, two things stand out from the literature and from Mary and Elizabeth's own narratives. Firstly, families who agreed to adopt Māori children may have themselves been in some way marginalised. Secondly, some families were not told the child they were adopting was of Māori heritage.<sup>95</sup> As discussed, Māori children, "no matter how light", were often hard to place.<sup>96</sup> This led to Māori children being placed with Pākehā adoptive parents, which a social worker interviewed by Else states:

were at the lower rather than the upper end of the spectrum of applicants. They were at the dicey end of being approved, so they would bend over backwards and agree to take *any* child.<sup>97</sup>

Applicants deemed as less suitable to adopt included those who rented rather than owned their own home, had a lower standard of living and/or on-going debt, were older than average (i.e. were in their forties), had health concerns (physical or emotional), and were of lower education and 'intelligence'.<sup>98</sup> However, in placing children into their "social strata", mixed race children faced not only the prejudice of their colour or racial background, but also the preconception that their mothers (if white) were emotionally unwell.<sup>99</sup> Some Pākehā mothers were aware that their child would have better prospects of being placed into a good home if their Māori heritage was hidden, denied their child's Māori ancestry.<sup>100</sup> However, social workers would at times also hide a child's Māori identity, if it meant finding a placement for an otherwise unplaceable child. This led to some Māori adoptees, and their adoptive parents, not knowing of their Māori descent until they met their birth mothers, or accessed their adoption files as adults.<sup>101</sup> Mary explains:

Finding a European home for Māori babies  
that's a problem  
so it would be denied that  
they were quarter Māori

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<sup>95</sup> 'Matching for marginality' was a term used by Diane Zwimpfer describing the practice whereby 'marginalised' children were placed into 'marginalised' adoptive families. Diane Zwimpfer, "Early Indications of Adoption Breakdown" (MA diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 1978); Diane M Zwimpfer, "Indicators of Adoption Breakdown," *Social Casework-Journal Of Contemporary Social Work* 64, no. 3 (1983).

<sup>96</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

<sup>97</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 190. Italics in original.

<sup>98</sup> Such information was gathered in the "Social Worker's Summary Report on Adoptive Applicants" (Form S.W.5).

<sup>99</sup> As previously stated Jane Rowe, a British authority on adoption, advanced this theory. See: Rowe, *Parents, Children and Adoption*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 74.

<sup>101</sup> Neither Mere (her testimony is in Chapter Three of this thesis) nor her adoptive parents were told of her Māori heritage at the time of her adoption. After my own discussions with Māori adoptees, I conclude that such instances were not isolated.

and it didn't show much.  
That's right, they wouldn't tell the parents  
So a fair child  
with a dash of colour  
often it was denied

The parents read the files later on  
They would come in  
    "We were never told it was part Māori  
    We were told it was Italian or Spanish or Greek"

Because we had Greek and Italian girls coming as immigrants  
And because of the dash of colour  
if you told them it was Italian  
then they thought they were a bit exotic  
so we'll adopt this child  
but if they'd said they were quarter Māori  
they wouldn't have.

And they were enraged that they would have been deceived

Maybe there's no excuse for it  
but I can see  
at the time  
when we had so many children  
we couldn't place for adoption  
you know...<sup>102</sup>

What we do, in fact, know is that when closed adoption was the state-sanctioned practice in New Zealand, neither social workers or members of the adoption triad, ever thought that adoption files would one day be opened and their 'secrets' revealed. While arguably all people adopted under the closed adoption system had their identities manipulated through name changes and the inaccessibility of information about their birth parents, some Māori adoptees also had their cultural identities manipulated as they were prescribed cultural backgrounds not their own. In such instances, a child's Māori heritage was undisclosed and they were deliberately placed into families which would have found their Māori identities unacceptable.

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<sup>102</sup> Mary, interview.

Yet, a number of factors contributed to the placement of Māori children into Pākehā homes. Firstly, Māori did not usually adopt unrelated kin. Therefore, while there were some couples, in which at least one spouse was Māori, willing to adopt through the closed stranger system, this was a relatively small minority.<sup>103</sup> The legal adoption of children by Māori was more usually the legalisation of a whāngai placement so that the whāngai child had legal right to inheritance. Secondly, Pākehā values drove the practice of closed adoptions whereby notions of family, morals, and class all played a factor which privileged Pākehā homes over Māori ones. For instance, Māori grandparents who may have wanted to legally adopt a grandchild were generally considered ‘too old and too poor’. Further, adoption by kin was *not* encouraged under closed stranger adoption, and the customary Māori practice of paralegal, or common-law, marriage was also a barrier to adopting a child by way of the closed stranger system as only legally married couples were permitted to adopt.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike the Stolen Generations in Australia, the Boarding School System in North America, and the Indian Adoption Project in the USA, Māori children were not forcibly removed from their Māori families for adoption as part of a systematic, state-sanctioned, assimilationist removal policy, aimed at ‘breeding out’ Indigenous blood.<sup>105</sup> Rather, a Māori child’s extended family were not given the opportunity to legally adopt a related child, or their attempts to do so were rejected. Māori welfare officer Anne Delamere described a case in the 1960s when a Māori family, whose son fathered a child with a Pākehā woman, tried to adopt the baby who was being placed for adoption. Delamere said:

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<sup>103</sup> While exact numbers remain unknown, both Else and Perkins support this view. See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187; Valerie Perkins, “*He Aroha Whaea, He Potikiipiripobo: The Unique Experiences of Māori Adoptive Mothers in the ‘Closed Stranger’ Adoption System*” (MA diss., Massey University, 2009), 33.

<sup>104</sup> Marriage according to Māori custom (marriage without recognised civil or Christian ceremony often referred to as common-law marriage) was recognised as valid by the colonial legal system until 1888. After a Supreme Court decision in that year, New Zealand’s legal system became contradictory. Statutes passed by Parliament continued to recognise ‘customary’ marriage, while the courts sometimes didn’t. Court decisions on inheritance and the legitimacy of family relationships could deem invalid marriages that were regarded as legitimate by Māori communities.

<sup>105</sup> This is not to say that Māori children were not removed from their families and placed in state care if their families/living conditions were deemed unfit. Given the social disparities of the time (and arguably up until, and including, the present) this did lead to the removal of Māori children from their families and communities. In fact, it has been argued that the justice system placed a disproportionately large numbers of Māori children in state care for minor misdemeanours. See: Gabrielle Maxwell, “Youth offenders - Treatment of young offenders, 1840 to 1980s”, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, May 05, 2011 <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/youth-offenders/page-2> (accessed 3 September 2016). My point is, however, Māori children were not removed solely for the purpose of adoption. The issue of the removal of Māori children from their families and placement in state care is raised in the concluding chapter.

His parents said that this child was their blood and if her parents didn't want the child *they* wanted the child, because it was important to them that a child of their son's should remain within their family group, and this was in fact their first mokopuna. They pleaded, then they went to Child Welfare and pleaded there, but to no avail.<sup>106</sup>

As previously stated, adoption by Pākehā strangers was almost always viewed as superior than adoption by Māori kin.

Mary's narrative illustrates the point that Pākehā values determined where children were placed, and she acknowledges that placements of children and the selection of adoptive parents was often arbitrary and based on the social workers' own biases. Mary says:

When you look in the Adoption Act  
It doesn't say anything about people's suitability  
Just generally fit and proper people.  
Race didn't come into it  
But if you think who was judging a fit and proper person  
They were English based values  
It was very white orientated  
Pākehās measured up much better in those things  
I mean it was racist really.<sup>107</sup>

The relatively small number of Māori women that Mary encountered intending to place their children for adoption via the closed adoption system, did so because they did not want their child to be placed within their own family. Perhaps like Aroha, whose narrative features in the following chapter, they were trying to protect their child from a dysfunctional family environment. Perhaps they were ashamed of their predicament, or perhaps they also thought a Pākehā home offered better opportunities for their child.<sup>108</sup> Mary speculates that these women had wanted to keep their pregnancy secret from their families aware that, if their families had known of the planned adoption, they would have probably intervened and taken the child. Mary's speculation is confirmed by Metge who writes:

Because of whakamā, reinforced by the advice of social workers, unmarried Māori mothers sometimes concealed the birth of a child from their whānau, spending their pregnancy in a city well away from home and placing their babies for adoption with strangers ... [however] as

<sup>106</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 189. Italics in original.

<sup>107</sup> Mary, interview.

<sup>108</sup> Aroha's narrative is in Chapter Three.



long as they knew about the birth, most grandparents actively sought to assume responsibility for the child, taking him or her into their own home or arranging placement with relatives.<sup>109</sup>

A Māori Welfare Officer working in the 1960s states, in an interview with Anne Else, that there was often a tension between the child welfare workers and Māori welfare officers, as the latter would at times disregard what child welfare officers saw as a mother's right to confidentiality by informing the mother's family about an adoption if they thought the family would be in a position to take the child.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

The narratives of Mary and Elizabeth illustrate that silencing, and the keeping of secrets, not only impacted on those within the adoption triad but also those professionals who managed adoptions through their tacit acceptance of such practices.<sup>111</sup> Yet, perhaps somewhat ironically, just as unmarried mothers were coerced into having their children placed for adoption as there seemed no other realistic option, social workers too were coerced by way of public and institutional policy and pressures to keep feeding the adoption production line.<sup>112</sup> Drawing further from the narratives and analysis of this chapter, one can see the biological (in terms of family making) and racial (in terms of matching for marginalisation) self-consciousness that was inherent in the adoption of Māori children into white families. However well-intentioned or sympathetic social workers were to Māori, more often than not, their views and subsequent practices were influenced by their own 'monocultural' and 'assimilationist' worldview prominent at the time.<sup>113</sup>

To this end, social work in the 1950s was a "conservative force which preserved the status quo".<sup>114</sup> Social workers in the field of adoption were women who had little, if any, formal

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<sup>109</sup> Joan Metge, *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995), 220. For a more in-depth discussion, see Metge, pages 220-223.

<sup>110</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187-89.

<sup>111</sup> To list all the works which reference themes of silencing and secrecy would be impractical. I will therefore reference a small yet broad range of work as a sample. E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000); Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, ed. *Mothers of Adult Children, Mothering Lost and Found Adult Children* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013); Caitriona Palmer, *An Affair with My Mother: A Story of Adoption, Secrecy and Love* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2016); Karen Rosenberg and Victor Groze, "The Impact of Secrecy and Denial in Adoption: Practice and Treatment Issues," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 78, no. 5 (1997); Elizabeth J Samuels, "Surrender and Subordination: Birth Mothers and Adoption Law Reform," *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 20, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>112</sup> Both Else, and Quartly, Swain and Cuthbert, argue that closed adoption was primarily a 'market in babies' where the supply and demand for children could be viewed in terms of 'market forces'. See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 107; Quartly et al., *The Market in Babies*.

<sup>113</sup> Nash, "People, Policies and Practice", 182.

<sup>114</sup> Nash, "People, Policies and Practice", 2.

training. They learnt on the job, following institutional directives and employed the opinions of ‘adoption experts’. They were both informed by, and informed, societal attitudes regarding unmarried mothers and their illegitimate children. It was not until the 1970s, as social work “developed a sense of identity and autonomy, [that] a more radical and collective form of social work began to challenge its employer organisations and government policies”.<sup>115</sup>

Some social workers, such as Mary, were part of the vanguard made up of people from different sections of society, with different experiences of adoption, who came together to push for the opening of previously closed files. Their concerted efforts resulted in a sustained pressure on politicians ultimately leading to the implementation of the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*. Under this Act it became possible for adopted people twenty years of age and over, and birth parents, to gain identifying information about each other, if no veto had been placed. Reunions subsequently resulted, many of which were facilitated by social workers specifically employed to assist with enquiries.

While ethnicity was not recorded in official adoption figures, the limited research undertaken on the topic of Māori and closed stranger adoption, as well as my own observations, reveals that while many Māori adoptees have been able to trace their birth mothers, they have had less success tracing their birth fathers. This will be more fully discussed in the narratives of birth parents and Māori adoptees in the following chapter.

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<sup>115</sup> Nash, “*People, Policies and Practice*”, 2.

## Chapter Three

### Testimonies: Birth Parents and Adopted People

#### Introduction

In this chapter I present the six oral histories collected from three birth parents and three adopted people. Up until this point I have, for the most part, used the terms oral histories, narratives, or life stories when discussing or referring to the participants' interviews. However, when listening to the birth parents' and adopted people's narratives, it became clear that in the recording, transcribing, re-production, and presentation of these narratives that both they and I had been 'bearing witness' to significant histories of trauma and distress. In her book *Witnessing Australian Stories*, historian Kelly Jean Butler clearly describes how the act of witnessing and the production of testimony are intimately twinned as both the witness who testifies (in the language of my thesis, the participant) and the witness who listen to the testimony (the researcher; the reader) need each other to complete the testimonial transaction.<sup>1</sup> There cannot be one without the other. Psychoanalyst and academic, Dori Laub, who as a child survivor of the Holocaust and co-founder of the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale University, is dedicated to gathering the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, plainly states:

the absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus confirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story.<sup>2</sup>

Forgetting, not believing, or not listening to a testimony of trauma is, in and of itself, part of the trauma. This chapter addresses such trauma by 'bearing witness'. In 'bearing witness' two points about testimony stand out, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith states:

... testimonies are a way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events [and that] ... a testimony is a form through which the voice of the 'witness' is accorded space and protection.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly Jean Butler, *Witnessing Australian Stories*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Dori Laub, "Bearing witness or the vicissitudes of listening," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, edited by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: Zed Books University of Otago Press, 2005), 144.

For these two reasons, I decided to bring the six narratives together in one chapter. In terms of structure, this chapter is centrally located within the thesis, and these testimonies remain at the heart of the research. Furthermore, I wanted to keep the parents who lost children to adoption, and those who as children were placed for adoption, together. It seemed the right thing to do in terms of providing a safe space for the testimonies. Through sharing their accounts of violence and despair; of lies and estrangement; of racism and shame; both birth parents and adopted people are bearing witness to their experiences of closed stranger adoption. They are making themselves vulnerable, and inviting us to also be vulnerable by bearing witness to their pain, and holding that pain with them, lightening their burden. We are called to read the following testimonies, not as the expert historian interpreting accounts not fully understood by those providing the testimonies. But rather as narratives which the initial witnesses (the birth parents and adopted people) themselves have produced, with their own layers of personal interpretation and historical meaning.<sup>4</sup> Understanding this is important, as it is yet another way of providing the participants the “space and protection” referenced by Smith.

In discussing the testimonies of Aboriginal Australians, who are part of the Stolen Generations, Rosanne Kennedy, a cultural and literary scholar, acknowledges that the testimonies are of a past that is still alive, and entreats us through the words of Sir Ronald Wilson, who presided over the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, to “read with an open heart and mind, and with a willingness to listen, and to listen intently”.<sup>5</sup> Kennedy makes clear that through public acts of listening and understanding that the first steps in healing for those who personally suffered from the processes of removal and separation is made possible.<sup>6</sup> It is through such a supportive environment enabling “people to speak authoritatively about their own experiences” that aids in the processes of healing.<sup>7</sup>

By ‘bearing witness’ a community of memory is created, where we are called to recognise the significance of the experiences shared and hold them for both the current and future generations. We are charged to “listen and remember” the testimonies which embody each

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<sup>4</sup> See: Rosanne Kennedy, “Stolen Generations Testimony: Trauma, Historiography, and the Question of Truth” *Aboriginal History*, 25 (2001): 116-131.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Wilson, “Preface” in *The Stolen Children: Their Stories*, edited by Carmel Bird: Milsons Point, 1998: xiv cited in Rosanne Kennedy, “Stolen Generations Testimony: Trauma, Historiography, and the Question of Truth” *Aboriginal History*, 25 (2001): 128.

<sup>6</sup> Kennedy, “Stolen Generations Testimony”, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, “Stolen Generations Testimony”, 129.

participant's "engagement between consciousness and history".<sup>8</sup> Butler draws out this point by bringing to our attention the conjunction of intimate personal stories of loss and pain with broader national histories.<sup>9</sup> As feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver points out, it is often the secondary witnesses who have access to a cultural and political power which is disproportionate to that of those giving their testimonies.<sup>10</sup> Consequently it is the secondary witnesses who have a "response-ability" to not only listen, but to then act appropriately in response to what they have witnessed.<sup>11</sup> Appropriate action may be to disseminate hitherto ignored or marginalized stories through various channels of political or social, critical or creative works, "bringing into crisis taken-for-granted concepts of history, identity, and citizenship".<sup>12</sup> The testimonies presented in this chapter reflect on those taken-for-granted aspects of New Zealand's history which allowed closed stranger adoption, and in particular the closed stranger adoption of Māori children, to take place.

With reference to the conditions of production, or how the testimonies were produced, I cannot underestimate, or undervalue, my position as an adopted person and a Māori woman, and the role this played in the assemblage of the testimonies. The testimonies of the participants resonate with, and reflect, my own life story in many ways. Both the participants and I brought our singular experiences and placed them together during the interviews. These coupled experiences have then been brought together and can be placed alongside the experiences of others who have produced scholarly works from an insider perspective on adoption. One of the most striking examples of collected essays, fiction, poetry, and art by those affected by closed, transracial adoption is the compelling publication, *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption*.<sup>13</sup> The act of bringing experiences together from an insider position is well articulated by bell hooks, who states:

Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside and from the inside out ... we understood both.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Simon and Claudia Eppert, "Remembering Obligation: Pedagogy and the Witnessing of Testimony of Historical Trauma," *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation* (1997): 176.-191. For details on the processes of witnessing and testimony see: Butler, *Witnessing Australian Stories*; Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson. *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Development* (London: Panos Publications, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Butler, *Witnessing Australian Stories*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Butler, *Witnessing Australian Stories*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), vii.

The six testimonies presented in this chapter provide a view from the outside in and from the inside out. The first three testimonies presented are those of three birth parents: Aroha, Lorraine, and Charles. The three testimonies following these are of Māori adoptees: Mere, Estelle, and Lucia. While all of the testimonies deal with traumatic events, there remains, without exception, voices of bravery and hope, patience and strength, forgiveness and generosity. Each testimony is presented in this chapter without any further introduction, but do include light commentary designed to place the reader in the social, cultural, and political time and place that the participant is remembering and speaking from. For example, I comment on Māori urbanisation throughout the birth parents' testimonies, but do not fully expand on this theme until Chapter Four.

By providing proximity to the experiences, memories, and reflections of birth parents and adopted people, these narratives prepare the ground for the succeeding two chapters. Building on these testimonies the two chapters following further contextualise and analyse the history, and impacts, of closed stranger adoption in relation to birth parents and Māori adoptees.

## Birth Parents

### Aroha: “I was on my own”

**Aroha** is a Māori woman who was born in the early 1950s and raised in a remote Māori community where Māori was her first language. She was one of fifteen children and remembers from a young age the brutality of physical violence and sexual abuse. Her father regularly beat his wife and children.<sup>15</sup> His family feared him, and Aroha remembers how tense the house became whenever her father walked in. The sexual abuse Aroha endured left her wondering “is women just a play, fun thing for men?”<sup>16</sup>

Looking back, almost fifty years later, Aroha now considers the ongoing sexual abuse experienced as a child made her vulnerable to further sexual exploitation.<sup>17</sup> She explains

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<sup>15</sup> The beatings and physical violence were extreme. For example, Aroha remembers being hung by her neck on a wire clothes line.

<sup>16</sup> Aroha, interview with author, 22 March 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Research suggests that childhood sexual abuse leads to long-term negative effects such as re-victimisation, anxiety, fear, and suicidal ideation – especially if family and social dysfunction is also present. See: Calvin A

how she had just wanted to be kissed by the father of the child she placed for adoption. He was older and more experienced sexually. “They groom you aye ... Because I’d already been interfered with I thought, ‘Oh he might like me.’”<sup>18</sup> Aroha had never thought the kiss would lead to pregnancy, and she was quite clear that what transpired between them was brief and without intimacy. She would not describe it as a “relationship”.<sup>19</sup> However, once she realised she was pregnant, she wanted to tell the father of her child, but did not do so as she had found out from a friend that he was engaged to be married. Instead, Aroha, afraid of her father, and fearing for her life and the life of her unborn child, took an opportunity, which arose following her mother’s death, to escape to the city. During the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, work was easy to find. Aroha worked on a factory production line and flatted with members of her extended family who had also come to the city to work. While working she met a Pākehā man, Dick, who would later become her husband. Yet, at that stage, neither he, nor anyone else, was aware of her pregnancy.

Once Aroha’s pregnancy started to show, she was unable to continue working so she stayed home taking on the household responsibilities of washing, cleaning, and cooking for the six people living in the house.<sup>20</sup> Dick asked Aroha to marry him, but she was afraid of her father and his possible reaction and felt uncomfortable with how caring Dick was. Even when Dick knew she was pregnant, he nevertheless wanted to wait until they were married before they became sexually intimate. He never hit her, or raised his voice. Aroha explains the uneasiness she felt with Dick at this time and the uncertainty and anxiety it created for her:

I like this relationship, he is really kind, but I’m not used to it ‘cos I’m not getting a hiding every day. For the first time in my life I really wanted to give myself wholeheartedly to this man ... someone don’t have to come and force me and make me do things ... because every other time was force, force ... but he said, “No dear, when I marry you that’s when we become intimate ... I’m going to go and ask your father for marriage”. Now I feel stupid. Now I’m going to feel like a slut

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Colarusso, *The Long Shadow of Sexual Abuse: Developmental Effects across the Life Cycle*, (Plymouth: Jason Aronson, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Midwife, Jane Stojanovic, states that during the 1950s-1970s the vast majority of married women with children did not work outside the home. Pregnant women were therefore not seen in the workforce. Jane Stojanovic, “Leaving Your Dignity at the Door? Maternity in Wellington 1950 – 1970,” *New Zealand College of Midwives Journal* 31, October (2004): 14.

because you want to offer yourself. But he was gentle. He was kind. He was understanding – something I thought was all lies.<sup>21</sup>

As Aroha struggled to adapt to the possibility of being in a relationship without violence, she was admitted into hospital to deliver her baby. Although she had sought advice on how to place her child for adoption, she was still ambivalent about this. Now in recalling the event, she thinks that the hospital was initially unaware that her child would be placed for adoption.<sup>22</sup> As a Māori woman, there was possibly less overt pressure on her to have her child adopted under the ‘closed stranger’ practice. In fact, when Aroha enquired about adoption procedures, she was queried by the Pākehā clerk. Perhaps he was trying to give her a chance to have a change of mind, or perhaps with the increasing “glut” of babies in 1970 and the added difficulty in finding homes for Māori children, he was trying to make his job, and the job of the welfare officers, a little easier.<sup>23</sup>

Aroha describes the circumstances which led to the adoption of her daughter:

The adoption came into being because I had the dysfunction  
 violence and sexual abuse  
 interference with my body  
 from about eight years old  
 You’ve got to just fight them off all your life  
 I seen my mum beaten

I was brought up beaten  
 there was no peace in the home.  
 Violence,  
 just violence all round,  
 why I adopted her out.

I’m nineteen  
 I had never been kissed until that age  
 never been taught about sexual relationship  
 I wanted to be kissed some more  
 I didn’t know the kiss was going to lead  
 to pregnancy

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<sup>21</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>22</sup> This is in contrast to the stories of Pākehā birth mothers who entered homes where they had been sent to hide their pregnancies and whose ‘fate’ (and that of their babies) had already been decided. See: Anne Else, “‘The Need Is Ever Present’: The Motherhood of Man Movement and Stranger Adoption in New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 23, no. 1 (Auckland, University of Auckland, 1989): 47-67.

<sup>23</sup> Anne Else, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 78.



Let's be clear  
 It wasn't a relationship  
 There was no love between us  
 I just slept with him twice  
 I wanted to tell him but I heard  
 he was getting married.  
 Violence,  
 just violence all round,  
 why I adopted her out.

I thought the moment I see her, I just won't let her go  
 I'll forget everybody else  
 I'll look after her but  
 it didn't go that way.  
 I cried because I couldn't love  
 like how mothers love  
 but now I realise it's all the mess  
 why I had to walk away  
 just violence all round.

I went to a place called Anvil House,<sup>24</sup>  
 the Pākehā man goes  
 "Do you know we rarely see a Māori adopting their baby out?"  
 Already I know that.  
 I've never seen it being done like that  
 But here I am  
 trying to make safety for my daughter,  
 here's this man saying this  
 I can't do nothing.  
 Violence,  
 just violence all round,  
 why I adopted her out.<sup>25</sup>

Aroha recognises that it was not solely because she was an unmarried mother that she was looking to have her child placed for adoption, but also because of her life-long experiences of abuse, and fear that her child would be subjected to the same "dysfunction".<sup>26</sup> However, despite the history of abuse, Aroha demonstrated her own agency by eventually choosing to place her child for adoption outside of her family and kin relations, even though such action was unusual for Māori. Evidence does suggest, however, that Māori women placing a child for adoption outside of family networks was not entirely unheard of. As early as

<sup>24</sup> Anvil House was where the office for Birth, Deaths and Marriages was located in Wellington.

<sup>25</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>26</sup> Aroha, interview.

1954 the solicitor for the Motherhood of Man Movement reported that that while some organisations were “loathe to take mothers of coloured blood” that that organisation treated “Māori and Pacific Island girls” without any discrimination, warning only that finding people willing to adopt their babies was difficult, if not impossible.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps Aroha’s father’s reaction was also unusual, in that he had threatened to harm the baby and any family members willing to whāngai the child. Aroha now thinks that her father’s stance was due to anger and shame because he had heard about her pregnancy from another source, not from Aroha herself. However, at the time, despite their father’s threats, one of Aroha’s sisters planned to come and get the baby but Aroha:

didn’t want her getting into trouble because my father has sent a letter and let them know not to take my child and his word was law. So I had to tell her, “I’ve already signed the papers over”. Which I hadn’t.<sup>28</sup>

In trying to “make safety” for her daughter, and not wanting to put her sister at risk, Aroha misinformed her sister that her child had already been legally adopted.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps Aroha was trying to buy time and work through a situation which was complicated. On the one hand, closed stranger adoption was culturally inappropriate and unfamiliar. Yet, on the other hand, she was worried about the violence that her daughter, and sister, may have encountered if she kept the child within the family. Without any practical support, Aroha decided to leave her daughter in the hospital, knowing that Social Welfare would be looking for a home for the child.

Aroha struggled to reconcile her fears, the legacy of past abuse, and the expectations of herself as a mother. Kate Kripke, a social worker and expert in perinatal care, states that emotional vulnerability and psychological stresses are a “normal adjustment” of the early postpartum period as experienced by approximately eighty-five per cent of new mothers.<sup>30</sup> Kripke asserts that reassurance and support are key to a healthy adjustment into

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<sup>27</sup> The Motherhood of Man Movement (MOMM) was a non-denominational organisation established in 1943. It provided assistance to both married and unmarried mothers. Some of the Society’s work included operating a maternity hospital (until 1978), arranging and providing accommodation for unmarried pregnant women, and managing adoptions. Else, “The Need Is Ever Present”, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>29</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>30</sup> Kate Kripke, “Normal Postpartum Adjustment vs. Postpartum Mood Disorders,” *Postpartum Progress*, September 16, 2014. <http://www.postpartumprogress.com/normal-postpartum-adjustment-vs-postpartum-mood-disorders> (accessed December 31, 2016). See also: Emma Robertson, Sherry Grace, Tamara Wallington and Donna E. Stewart, “Antenatal Risk Factors for Postpartum Depression: A Synthesis of Recent Literature,” *General Hospital Psychiatry* 26, no. 4 (2004).

motherhood which ensures the best outcome for both mother and child.<sup>31</sup> Yet Aroha recalls having very limited support, while at the same time implying that with appropriate support the adoption may not have taken place. She says:

I was on my own  
 People have today all this help  
 All the help  
 So they don't need to go through  
 How I went through.<sup>32</sup>

It was during this early postpartum period that Social Welfare contacted Aroha. She was relieved that her child had a home to go to since the increasing difficulty to find homes for children meant that mothers were particularly worried that their child may not be placed in a 'good home', or in any home at all - in which case the child would be put into foster care or remain institutionalised.<sup>33</sup>

There was a song:  
 "I'm nobody's child,  
 nobody wants me,  
 I'm nobody's child"  
 I was hurt:  
 I imagined hands going out like  
 "choose me, choose me"  
 I prayed:  
 "Lord, find her a home, find her a home"  
 So after three weeks  
 Social Welfare said:  
 "We found somebody to take your daughter"  
 God answered my prayer.<sup>34</sup>

In 1973, Aroha married Dick and they had two children. Yet Aroha never forgot her daughter placed for adoption. In fact, the notion that a mother would forget about her child was a driving principle behind closed stranger adoption. However research, strongly supported by case studies and autobiographical material, confirms that mothers did not forget, with the vast majority of mothers carrying prolonged and unremitting psychological and emotional trauma linked to the adoption.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kripke, "Normal Postpartum Adjustment".

<sup>32</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>33</sup> In 1962 the Motherhood of Man reported that finding homes for Māori babies had become so problematic that their mothers were being warned that they may have to pay for foster homes until adoptive parents could be found. See: Else, "The Need Is Ever Present", 62.

<sup>34</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>35</sup> See: Higgins, *Impact of Past Adoption Practices*, 12-17.

Twenty years after her daughter was placed for adoption, Aroha still carried the legacy of abuse, including the unresolved grief of the adoption, which compelled Aroha to seek psychiatric care on two occasions:

I ended up being a patient  
 I'd sit behind the door  
 I'd imagine there's a hole  
 on top of my head  
 If I bang my head hard enough  
 on the wall  
 Whack, whack,  
 whack my head  
 All the pus,  
 the yucky stuff,  
 Would go out  
 and I'd have peace  
     But not so  
 You can bang your head as much as you like  
 I could never understand  
 Because it's wairua stuff.<sup>36</sup>

The treating psychiatrist informed Aroha she was suffering from “post-trauma” which was due to the extreme abuse she had experienced as a child, yet Aroha claims the “stuff” she was trying to deal with “was always about the same person - the father of my child”.<sup>37</sup> Aroha was still carrying the unspoken hurt and grief surrounding the pregnancy and adoption which had spiritual, relational, psychological and physical consequences.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most pressing concerns for mothers was wondering what had happened to their child. Aroha says:

In my heart you can never forget. You wonder what she looks like, you wonder all this different stuff. You pray and hope they are well and you done the right thing ... there's a part that's always searching.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>37</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>38</sup> A Māori worldview is holistic. For wellness the spiritual, relational, psychological, and physical areas must be in correct balance. The health initiative ‘te whare tapa wha’ is based on this approach. For further explanation see: Tim Rochford, “Whare Tapa Wha: A Māori model of a unified theory of tealth,” *Journal of Primary Prevention* 25, no. 1 (New York: Springer, 2004); Ministry of Health, “Māori health models – Te Whare Tapa Whā”, November 09, 2015. <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha> (accessed December 31, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Aroha, interview.

But searching for her daughter was something Aroha thought would never be possible because of a promise she was forced to make by the solicitor handling the adoption in 1970.

I'll always remember  
 Putting my hand on the Bible  
 And I had to swear before God  
 That I'll never go and look for her  
 That's when you promise God  
 I would have been twenty  
 When that happened to me

Now in my forties  
 I do want to look  
 I never wanted to stop  
 But placing your hand on that Bible  
 Made me keep my promise.<sup>40</sup>

Aroha had never imagined that she would be able to search for the daughter she placed for adoption because she had taken an oath on the Bible that she would not do so. Gillian Palmer states that this was a common practice and while it held no legal binding it was “very effective emotional blackmail”.<sup>41</sup> However, during the 1990s Aroha made friends with a Māori woman who was supportive of her desire to search for her daughter and told her about the *Adult Adoption Information Act*. Aroha had become a born again Christian in 1975 and knew the Bible said “obey the law of the land”, and she believed the *Adult Adoption Information Act* was a law which voided the oath she had taken at the time of her daughter’s adoption.<sup>42</sup> For the first time Aroha held some hope that she would be able to see her daughter again:

I thought about putting  
 my hand on the Bible  
 But now I don't have  
 this big promise

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<sup>40</sup> Aroha, interview.

Growing up in a Māori community Aroha was especially primed to take such an oath seriously. Historian Michael King refers to Colin Scrimgeour who worked at Māori missions in the 1920s observing that “religion and spirituality permeated Māori life more intimately than it did the life of non-Māori”. Karakia formally opened and closed ceremonies, and religious services were a usual part of proceedings at hui and tangihanga. Michael King, *Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ: Penguin Books, 2003), 467.

<sup>41</sup> Palmer, “*Birth Mothers?*”, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Romans 13: 1-2 (The Living Bible)

That not God  
 But man  
 Put on me  
 For the first time  
 In twenty years  
 I had a pitter-patter  
 In my heart.<sup>43</sup>

Aroha, like my own mother, had told her other children about the daughter who had been placed for adoption. Both mothers had feared that we would unknowingly meet our brothers and become intimately involved. Aroha explains: “I heard stories about a brother and a sister marrying one another, so when my boys were maybe eight or nine, I let them know they got a sister”.<sup>44</sup> Even though her husband and children knew about her first born child, Aroha was afraid that they would not be supportive of a reunion. However, Dick willingly assisted Aroha in the search for her daughter. Like many birth mothers, Aroha worried that her daughter had placed a veto on any identifying information and may not have wanted any contact with her.<sup>45</sup> Aroha, aware of the irony of the situation, says: “I was petrified because I might get rejected, like how she felt she was rejected - and now I’m petrified she might not want to see me”.<sup>46</sup>

But Aroha’s daughter, Leah, did agree to meet her, even though the social worker handling the reunion process informed Aroha that Leah’s adoptive mother was “totally against” such a meeting.<sup>47</sup> It was for this reason the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* was purposely designed so that the only people who could place a veto on the sharing of identifying information are the birth parents and the adopted person. Leah was twenty when she met Aroha. Aroha describes some of the feelings she and Leah experienced leading up to the meeting:

She was scared  
 and I was scared.

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<sup>43</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>44</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>45</sup> For adoptions prior to 1 March 1986 access to information on pre-adoptive birth certificates can be restricted by a veto. An adopted person prior to turning 20 years old can apply to the Registrar-General at Births, Deaths and Marriages stating they do not want information which would identify them to be released to their birth parents. Birth parents can also apply to prevent the release of identifying information contained in the child’s original birth certificate. See: Child Youth and Family, “Finding Your Birth Family,” *New Zealand Government*, <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/adoption/finding-your-birth-family/index.html> (accessed September 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>47</sup> Aroha, interview.

She was thinking would I like her?  
I was thinking the same thing.<sup>48</sup>

Studies have shown that the reunion process is a very stressful and anxiety producing occurrence. Adoption counsellor, Ann Nation, states:

Reunions often result in psychological conflagrations with many different emotional peaks and valleys, and with people finding themselves in an unknown land where no-one seems to have maps. Situations often develop where people have to weave new ways of interacting with each other, while withstanding tough psychological onslaughts.<sup>49</sup>

When they did eventually see each other, Aroha says:

I just wanted to hug her  
to hold her in my arms  
it was a high expectation  
that her feelings will be the same  
more than likely I came on too strong,  
coming on too strong  
was actually pushing her away  
I had this big as tangi on  
I cried, and cried,  
and cried, and cried,  
and cried.  
Real tangihanga  
I cried  
like it was someone  
come back from the dead,  
might have been frightening for her  
'cos she wasn't brought up in a Māori worldview.<sup>50</sup>

Nation explains that the powerful psychological underpinnings of adoption reunions entails “altering expectations and relinquishing long-held fantasies [which] can be a very difficult task for all members of the adoption triangle”.<sup>51</sup> Apart from Aroha and Leah, Leah’s adoptive mother also faced her own challenges as Aroha explains:

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<sup>48</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Ann Nation, “Betwixt and Between: An Exploration of Adoption Reunion Realities Following New Zealand Non-Maori Adoptions, from a Psychodynamic Perspective,” *NZAP Forum: The Journal of The New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists* 7 (2001): 108. See also: Daryl Higgins, *Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian Research: Final Report*, (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2010), 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>51</sup> Ann Nation, “Betwixt and Between”, 101.

Even today her Mum just kind of puts up with me. But I wrote her mother saying, “Thank you. She’s your daughter. Thank you. It was your arms that held her when she wasn’t well, it was your arms that fed her, and you’re the one who stayed up late”. I just thanked her for allowing her to see me. And I meant it with all my heart.<sup>52</sup>

However, as Aroha’s relationship with Leah developed, Leah’s adoptive mother pressured Leah to make a choice between continuing to see Aroha or to be cut off from her adoptive family. For Leah, who is physically identifiable as Māori, the need to return to her mother’s community and to establish strong kinship ties was something she needed to do for her self and for her children. Returning ‘home’ with Aroha was an opportunity for Leah to meet with her father, his wife and their children. Although they had not known about Leah, the physical resemblance between her and her father, helped with her being immediately accepted and brought into the family.<sup>53</sup> Leah continued to have a close relationship with her birth father up until his death, at which time both Aroha and she were with him, his wife, and other children.

In fact, one unexpected outcome of Leah meeting her father was the opportunity it provided for Leah to aid in closure and emotional healing for Aroha. Even though Aroha had admitted that she was not in a romantic relationship with Leah’s father, she had nevertheless felt abandoned by him when she realised he was engaged and planning to marry another woman. Aroha remembers a conversation she had with Leah saying:

“Where was your father?”  
and then she goes,  
“Mum where were you? Where were you mum when I needed you?”  
“Oh yeah, you’re right”  
So there it started to heal.<sup>54</sup>

Aroha credits her Christian faith as healing her from the trauma she has lived through. Through her faith she has found a renewed strength which has enabled her to forgive. One reason Aroha gave for sharing her story is her concern for other women “who have gone through the same as I have, because healing comes through sharing”.<sup>55</sup> Aroha has now been reunited with Leah for more years than they were separated. Through all the

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<sup>52</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>53</sup> The term ‘home’ is used by Māori to refer to the ancestral home; See papakāinga in glossary.

<sup>54</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Aroha, interview.



difficulties they have built up a close mother-daughter bond. Leah's adoptive parents have resumed contact with Leah and her children.

### **Lorraine: “I didn’t realise my mother was so racist”**

**Lorraine** is a Pākehā mother of two Māori children placed for adoption. The first child, a son, was born in 1960 and the next child, a daughter, was born in 1964.<sup>56</sup> Lorraine was a child of a World War II widow and spent much of her childhood with her maternal grandmother. When she was a teen, her mother remarried and Lorraine went to live with her and her step-father who was a Dutch immigrant. While they treated her well, and everyone tried “tremendously” to make it work, Lorraine missed her grandparents.<sup>57</sup>

Lorraine says:

It wasn't happy  
My mother didn't really know me  
And my step father  
Had been traumatised during the war.  
Though a kind man  
He was quite nervous and highly-strung.<sup>58</sup>

In 1959, Lorraine decided, much to her mother's “absolute horror”, to leave home and go flatting with a girlfriend in Wellington.<sup>59</sup> They were university students and their little one-room flat backed onto the “Māori Boys' hostel”.<sup>60</sup> The Māori hostel was where young Māori men from rural areas who had come to the city to undertake apprenticeships or trades training were accommodated.<sup>61</sup> At the milk-bar nearby, Lorraine got to know “a couple of the Māori boys”, and this was where she met Matiu who became her first serious boyfriend.<sup>62</sup> She says:

We started going out together  
and eventually of course  
the first boyfriend I'd ever slept with.

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<sup>56</sup> It has been argued that like some adoptive mothers, who never fully grieved miscarriages and subsequently adopted ‘replacement’ children, some birth mothers grieving the loss of their child placed for adoption subsequently becoming pregnant with ‘another’ child outside of marriage. For examples of both instances see: Joss Shawyer, *Death by Adoption* (Auckland: Cicada, 1979), 25, 285.

<sup>57</sup> Lorraine, interview with author, 20 October 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>59</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>61</sup> See: Department of Maori Affairs, “Young Maoris Become Skilled Tradesmen,” *Te Ao Hou The New World*, no. 55 (1966).

<http://teaohou.natlib.govt.nz/journals/teaohou/issue/Mao55TeA/c7.html> (accessed 16 September 2016)

<sup>62</sup> Lorraine, interview.

He used to tell the Matron of the hostel  
 that he was going to his girlfriend's for the weekend.  
 Matron thought he was going out to my parents  
 but in actual fact he wasn't going to my parents,  
 he was going to my flat!  
 So he used to throw his pillow up at my window  
 and come up  
 and we'd spend the weekend together.  
 I didn't think about getting pregnant  
 I'm very, very naive and not very well informed.<sup>63</sup>

Lorraine became pregnant to her boyfriend Matiu after dating him for several months. Prior to her pregnancy, Lorraine had introduced Mat to her family and was surprised by the negative reaction she received because he was Māori. As Lorraine's family had never had "anything to do with Māori", Lorraine was distressed and shocked by a side of her mother she had never seen before:

I didn't realise my mother was so racist.  
 I brought him home for dinner and  
 there was a very stilted silence.  
 I realised how racist she was.  
 My mother,  
 a perfectly lovely and kind and  
 very responsible person.  
 My mother,  
 a good woman, a hard working and  
 responsible woman who was  
 noted for her kindness.<sup>64</sup>

Lorraine's mother, in some ways, illustrates the wider twentieth-century New Zealand psyche. Up until significant Māori migration from predominantly Māori populated rural areas to predominantly Pākehā urban centres, most Pākehā New Zealanders had very little, if any, contact with Māori. If Māori had been out of sight, they had also been conveniently out of mind – or as historian Keith Sinclair less subtly put it, "Maori could be tolerated and

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<sup>63</sup> Lorraine, interview. Unmarried women who were sexually active faced at least two barriers to preventing pregnancy. Firstly, many young women did not have sufficient or accurate knowledge about sex and reproduction. See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 8-9. Secondly, even with adequate knowledge about sex and reproduction unmarried women were generally unable to access prescriptions for contraceptives. See: *The New Zealand Medical Journal* (Wellington: J. Wilkie and Co., 1966): 619. For further information on adoption and single mothers in the 1960s-1970s see: Anne Else, "Adoption - Adoption and single mothers – 1960s and 1970s", *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, May 05, 2011. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/adoption/page-3> (accessed September 2016).

<sup>64</sup> Lorraine, interview.

ignored”.<sup>65</sup> But by the early 1960s most Māori were living in urban areas.<sup>66</sup> For many Pākehā, it was the first time that they had met with Māori face-to-face bringing to the surface attitudes many Pākehā New Zealanders had never had to consider before. Since settlement, Māori warrior tropes have been proudly touted by both Māori and Pākehā, albeit for different reasons.<sup>67</sup> For Pākehā, it set Māori apart from other ‘lesser indigenes’ and helped create a distinctive New Zealand cultural ‘brand’, while at the same time easing colonialist mentality and coloniser guilt.<sup>68</sup> Yet these tropes were double-edged in that they also provided associations of Māori being more “animalistic [and] barbaric”.<sup>69</sup> Viewed in this context, perhaps it is understandable as to why Lorraine’s mother was so concerned for her daughter. In an attempt to intervene and end the relationship, Lorraine’s mother turned to the police. Lorraine says:

I had a phone call  
from the juvenile criminal investigation officer  
at the police department  
and I thought  
“Oh my goodness what have I done?”  
My legs went from under me

He said he wanted to see me  
He said that my mother had rung him  
because I was going out with a Māori boy

So I went down to the police department.  
He came from the South,  
Southern States of the USA  
he was an extremely racist man

He strongly recommended  
that I stop going out with this Māori boy

<sup>65</sup> Keith Sinclair, “Why Are Race Relations in New Zealand Better Than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota?” *New Zealand Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (1971): 123.

<sup>66</sup> By 1945 – 25 per cent of the Māori population were urban based, accelerating rapidly to 35 per cent in 1956; 62 per cent in 1966, and almost 80 per cent in 1986. Paul Meredith, “Urban Māori – Urbanisation”, *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, February 17, 2015. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/urban-Māori/page-1> (accessed September 2016); Erin Keenan, “Stories of Continuity, Times of Change? Māori Oral Histories of Twentieth-Century Urbanisation in New Zealand,” in *Exploring Urban Identities and Histories*, eds. Christine Hansen and Kathleen Butler (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2013), 163. This theme is investigated in more detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>67</sup> Franchesca Walker, “‘Descendants of a Warrior Race’: The Maori Contingent, New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, and Martial Race Myth, 1914–19,” *War and Society* 31, no. 1 (2012): 1.

<sup>68</sup> Keith Sinclair, “Why Are Race Relations”, 124; Walker, “Descendants of a Warrior Race”, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Walker, “Descendants of a Warrior Race”, 7.

Immediately!  
I left there shaking  
Absolutely shaking.<sup>70</sup>

Shortly after this incident, Lorraine's grandmother, who had raised her as a child, passed away. Lorraine was overcome with grief. Even so, following the funeral Lorraine was admonished by her uncle for going out with a Māori man warning Lorraine that:

One of the girls who went to his Bible class married a Māori and it was a shame about the children because they looked half-caste and ...

Lorraine continues:

He sent me a letter that said half-caste children end up having the worst of both races ... That attitude was very prevalent in small town New Zealand.<sup>71</sup>

However, Lorraine's family knew that Mat came from a well-known and well-respected Māori family and his uncle held a high profile public position. Lorraine believes it was for this reason that her mother allowed her to go on a holiday to meet Mat's family over the Christmas period. Lorraine says the family were a traditional Māori family who had extended family living all around them. She was warmly welcomed and had a "lovely, lovely time. They were a very, very relaxed, warm, and friendly family and they were very kind and lovely to me, particularly his mum".<sup>72</sup> Mat's mother showed Lorraine some land which the family were planning to give to her and Mat. On Lorraine's return to Wellington, Mat's mother wrote letters to Lorraine putting in ten pound notes, so she'd have some extra money to spend on herself. "They just took me to their hearts".<sup>73</sup> It was also after this holiday that Lorraine realised she was pregnant. At the same time, her step-father asked her to leave her job and return home to look after her mother who was very ill (her mother was also pregnant). Lorraine returned home thinking it would give her and Mat a chance to "sort things out".<sup>74</sup> After the birth of her step-brother, Lorraine told her family she was

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<sup>70</sup> Lorraine, interview.

New Zealand had no anti-miscegenation laws, unlike the USA where anti-miscegenation laws were still in place in 16 states until 1967; in South Africa until 1985. In Australia miscegenation was 'managed' as Aboriginals required permission from Chief Protectors to marry. Persons of "mixed-race" descent were prevented from marrying those of "full-descent".

<sup>71</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>72</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>73</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>74</sup> Lorraine, interview.

herself seven months pregnant. She was just starting to show. Lorraine told her parents that Mat wanted to marry her. Lorraine says of Mat:

He was 21  
 He was working  
 He could have supported us  
 Anyhow mum said  
 “I won’t hear a bar of it  
 Definitely not!”<sup>75</sup>

Unable to get parental permission to marry Mat, Lorraine booked herself in to a Salvation Army Home for unmarried mothers.<sup>76</sup> Lorraine continues:

My first experience of relinquishing a child for adoption  
 was very, very sad and traumatic.  
 I’d just turned 19  
 the whole living conditions in the home that I went to  
 it was like a prison

The very bad attitude of  
 patronising staff  
 the welfare officer who  
 was verbally cruel  
 It’s had a lifetime effect on me.<sup>77</sup>

Mat continued to support Lorraine and would sneakily visit her, passing fruit to her through the wire fence. They continued to look for ways to build a future together. Lorraine decided to write to his parents, but her baby was born three weeks early “before I had a chance to tell them. I think they would have told me to come back and live with them. I’m pretty sure they would have”.<sup>78</sup>

At the Home, the only visitor Lorraine was allowed was her mother. There was no access to a phone. There was a fence around the grounds. There was constant pressure put on her by her mother and staff to place her baby for adoption. For example, Lorraine says:

My mother used to come and visit me [in the home for unmarried mothers] and she said if I married my boyfriend [or] kept the baby I

<sup>75</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>76</sup> Parental consent to marry was required for those under 21 years of age. See: A. H. McLintock, *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand 1966*. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/marriage> (accessed 20 March, 2017).

<sup>77</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Lorraine, interview.

would never be allowed to see my little brother ever again. Every time my mother came in to see me she got more and more strident.<sup>79</sup>

Just before going into labour the matron told Lorraine: “We place little half-caste babies in the country where no one will see them”.<sup>80</sup> Such a statement reinforces the view that Māori children were seen as problematic, not only to place in adoptive families, but in terms of what they represented – the mixing of the ‘races’ and that their white mothers had been sexually intimate with a Māori man.<sup>81</sup>

Lorraine describes her labour as “horrendous and badly managed”.<sup>82</sup> A not uncommon belief, practiced by some caring for the expectant unmarried mothers, was that the experience of labour and birth should be as unpleasant as possible so as to deter her from any further pregnancies outside of marriage. Such harsh and punitive treatment is believed to have led to secondary infertility for up to twenty percent of unmarried mothers.<sup>83</sup> However, Lorraine also remembers the kindness of two nurses - one who secretly took a forbidden photograph of her son for her to keep and another nurse who when Lorraine asked just before delivery, “Is it meant to hurt this much?” replied, “Yes it is. Be a brave girl”.<sup>84</sup> That such a few words are remembered as a significant act of kindness illustrates how difficult and unsupportive the birthing environment was for most women at the time.<sup>85</sup>

At this Home, the practice was for mothers to bathe and bottle feed their babies - they were not permitted to breast feed and were given drugs to help dry up the milk. When her son was placed in her arms, Lorraine saw “a little Māori boy who looked like his grandfather and I loved him”.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>80</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>81</sup> While there is literature on Māori/Pākehā marriage and intimate relationships in New Zealand, the majority of relationships recorded, at least up until the increased urbanisation of Māori (the time period covered here), were between white men and Māori women. See: Damon Ieremia Salesa, *Racial Crossings: Race, Inter-marriage, and the Victorian British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Angela Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart: A History of Interracial Marriage in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014). This is discussed further in Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>82</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>83</sup> Isabel Andrews, “Secondary Infertility and Birth Mothers,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 30, no. 1 (2010): 80.

See for examples of personal experience: Gillian R Palmer, “*Birth Mothers: Adoption in New Zealand and the Social Control of Women, 1881-1985*” (MA diss., University of Canterbury, 1991), 95-96.

<sup>84</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>85</sup> Stojanovic, “Leaving Your Dignity at the Door”, 15-17. Stojanovic provides numerous other examples throughout her thesis. Jane Stojanovic, “*Leaving Your Dignity at the Door: Maternity in Wellington 1950-1970*.” (MA diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2002).

<sup>86</sup> Lorraine, interview.

Lorraine continued to insist on being allowed to marry Mat and to keep her baby. She believes it was for this reason that the matron decided that Lorraine would no longer be allowed to care for her child. They were separated. The welfare officer told Lorraine she “was being self-willed and selfish and not considerate of other people. She said ‘as an unmarried mother the baby does not belong to you anyhow it belongs to the Education Department’”.<sup>87</sup> Such a statement was untrue, but for young inexperienced women, they often did not question what they were told.<sup>88</sup>

Even though Lorraine had little control over her situation, she still blames herself today for many of the events which unfolded.<sup>89</sup> One of her biggest regrets is that her son was not placed with his father’s family, especially after receiving a letter from Mat’s sister stating she would like to legally adopt her nephew. At the time, Lorraine was advised by the social worker that Mat’s sister would not be able to adopt the baby as she already had a large family of her own.

In desperation, Lorraine ran away from the Home and went to a phone box and called her mother saying if she was not allowed to keep her baby she would kill herself. Lorraine says:

By then I was absolutely distraught,  
I wanted her to know  
how absolutely desperate I was  
“Please somebody hear me, I’m desperate”  
Well because of that  
the baby became a ward of the state.  
Because my mother  
said to the police  
I’d threatened suicide  
the baby became a ward of the state.  
I had no further control.  
The baby was forced off me.<sup>90</sup>

Lorraine recounts feeling coerced by her mother, the social worker, and the police to sign the adoption papers. The fact that Lorraine had to sign the adoption papers points to her

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<sup>87</sup> Lorraine, interview. Between 1925 and 1972 Social Welfare was under the Child Welfare division of the Education Dept.

<sup>88</sup> See: Denise Cuthbert, et al., *The Market in Babies*. As stated in a previous footnote, my own adoption files reveal that social workers deliberately withheld information from my birth mother, leading her to believe inaccurately, that she could not ‘uplift’ me from foster care until maintenance owed was paid.

<sup>89</sup> Feelings of guilt by birth mothers has been well recorded in the literature. A current example is found in adoption information at United States Department of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, “Impact of Adoption on Birth Parents,” *Child Welfare Information Gateway*, August 2013, 1-4. [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f\\_impact.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/f_impact.pdf) (accessed September 2016).

<sup>90</sup> Lorraine, interview.

false belief that her child had been made a ward of the state, yet she fully believed that there was no other option. After the signing, Matron gave Lorraine some money kept back from her board and said to her, “Well after all that, the girls go up town and get a new hairdo and get a new dress”.<sup>91</sup> For Lorraine, such a thought was sickening as nothing could ever make up for, or ease the pain of, what had just happened.

To illustrate their continued commitment to each other in the face of adversity, Lorraine and Mat became officially engaged. However Lorraine’s parents refused to acknowledge her boyfriend or to ever speak about him or their child who had been placed for adoption. Lorraine and Mat went again to his family over the Christmas holiday break where Mat’s family saw pictures of the baby which had secretly been taken by one of the nurses at the Home. From the bedroom where she remained hidden, Lorraine could hear the family weeping. They were grief stricken. They kept saying how much the baby looked like Mat’s uncle.

Without any after-care, the adoption process took a toll on both Mat and Lorraine.<sup>92</sup> Mat began drinking and started to make derogatory remarks about Lorraine, verbally abusing her in public. Lorraine says that at the time she couldn’t understand Mat’s pain over the adoption, as she was the one who had given birth, seen the baby, and held him. Lorraine decided to end the relationship and moved to work in another town. Mat tried to contact her through mutual friends wanting to repair the relationship but Lorraine was too hurt and disillusioned to try again. While Lorraine appeared to be coping, inside she felt an overwhelming grief. The loss of both her son and her grandmother added to her “disorientation.”<sup>93</sup> Lorraine says:

I was not planning for my future  
I didn’t care anymore  
That’s what happened to me after I lost Andrew  
I had no stability  
No goals  
I moved around a lot  
I went on dates with men  
But there was nobody special.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>92</sup> Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald, *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University, 2001), 4.

<sup>93</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>94</sup> Lorraine, interview.



At-23-years old Lorraine met the man who would father her next child. He was a much older man who worked as a private detective and played in a band. Lorraine describes him as “part Māori, not traditionally Māori at all, a city Māori ... good looking and charismatic, any girl’s dream”.<sup>95</sup> He would take Lorraine out for dinner and she felt “protected, looked after, and safe with him”.<sup>96</sup> However, after only spending a few nights together, Lorraine found out she was pregnant. Once she told him of the pregnancy, he became violent.<sup>97</sup> The incident, which finally ended the relationship, came when driving Lorraine home and angered about her pregnancy, he threw her out of the car while it was still moving. The next morning he phoned Lorraine, greeting her with: “This is your sparring partner”. She hung up. He came to her house and she told him she never wanted to see him again. Lorraine remembers she was laying on the sofa, suffering morning sickness:

I can still see the shoes he had on  
They were brown boots  
That zipped up the back  
And they just walked  
Out the door.<sup>98</sup>

Lorraine contacted the Motherhood of Man for assistance with the birth and adoption of her child. It was 1964. This time the experience of placing her child for adoption was far less traumatic than the situation she had experienced with her son. Lorraine describes this adoption as a “conscious choice”.<sup>99</sup> The decision to place her daughter for adoption was based on economics.<sup>100</sup> Lorraine had no way to support herself and a baby. Like Aroha, Lorraine said she would probably have kept her child if the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) had been available.<sup>101</sup>

Lorraine felt that, unlike her previous experience of having a child placed for adoption, she was treated with respect and kindness. At this home, mothers did not have to care for their child, which Lorraine preferred. However, after the birth, a nurse encouraged Lorraine to see the baby. Lorraine did not attempt to hold her but focused on her hands and her face.

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<sup>95</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>96</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Lorraine later found out that he eventually fathered ten children to five different women.

<sup>98</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>99</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>100</sup> See: Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe, *Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>101</sup> The Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) was introduced in 1973. Prior to the introduction of the DPB, an Emergency Benefit was available from 1968. Although young women were generally not given this information as ‘adoption’ was the dominant social script. See: “*Adoption and Single Mothers?*”, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/adoption/page-3> (accessed September 2016).

Similar to Aroha, Lorraine prayed for a good home for her daughter. She also had a say in who would adopt her child: “I was heard and I was being listened to”.<sup>102</sup> In fact Lorraine turned down the first couple who had flown from Australia to adopt. She felt, as her daughter was part-Māori, she should remain in New Zealand. Nevertheless Lorraine was cautioned that “there could be a little problem because the baby’s part-Māori”.<sup>103</sup> In other words, Lorraine was warned that she should think carefully about turning away prospective adoptive parents who were willing to adopt a Māori child. Lorraine knew this herself and reflects:

Māori babies were being advertised in the newspaper on Saturdays. There was one little Māori boy in the nursery, three months old with a hare lip. I worried about him no end. I don’t know, he would have gone into foster care probably.<sup>104</sup>

In the hierarchy of babies, this child would have been one of the most marginalised – a boy, non-white, and with a physical ‘imperfection’.

However, a family was found to adopt her daughter and Lorraine was very pleased with the placement. Encouraged to move on with her life, she returned to stay with her parents. Lorraine states: “to all intents and purposes I was functioning but I kept blacking out. I used to get really bad vomiting and diarrhoea and I was very, very thin”.<sup>105</sup> One day Lorraine was found unconscious on the bathroom floor. Her mother’s general practitioner arranged for her to go to a psychiatric unit where she remained for three months to undergo shock treatment. Lorraine says:

Now that sounds pretty drastic but I was diagnosed as [having] an anxiety illness and that cured it. I never looked back. I’ve never had it since. I was in a really bad way. It was psychosomatic anxiety illness. While I was functioning I was going to pieces physically. I couldn’t keep it up. I had about four lots of shock treatment and my memory went completely but I came out of it and the sun started shining.<sup>106</sup>

In 1967, Lorraine married an Australian man and after moving to Australia she and her husband had two daughters. The marriage lasted fifteen years, after which Lorraine moved back to New Zealand with the girls. In 1987, Janine (the daughter who had been placed for

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<sup>102</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>103</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>104</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>105</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>106</sup> Lorraine, interview.

adoption) made contact with Lorraine with the support of her adoptive parents. Lorraine says when she saw her “all I wanted to do was count her fingers – to take up where we left off”.<sup>107</sup>

Encouraged by the friendship that slowly developed with Janine, and urged on by all three of her daughters, Lorraine decided to try and find her son. She was able to make contact with her son’s adoptive mother who was very positive, informing Lorraine that he, Andrew, was working overseas but she would pass on Lorraine’s contact details. Andrew responded to Lorraine and sent many photos. He met Lorraine and two of his sisters when on a trip back to New Zealand. Lorraine was able to give him a greenstone carved by his father, his father’s photo and the name and address of his cousin. Andrew in turn told Lorraine about his childhood. Although raised in a loving family, which incidentally had been in the country, there was very little money and his adoptive parents had their own child after they adopted him. As a teenager, Andrew went to a high school with a predominantly Māori and Pacific Islands demographic. Andrew shared with Lorraine how difficult that had been as he looked very Māori, but didn’t know his whakapapa. This troubled Lorraine deeply as she knew her son came from “a wonderful lineage”.<sup>108</sup> Andrew travelled to meet his aunty who had wanted to adopt him as a baby. She said, “I have been waiting for you!”<sup>109</sup> She had waited twenty eight years. Andrew went to the cemetery where his grandparents are buried. The extended family gathered to welcome him home and he was given a copy of his whakapapa.

A highlight for Lorraine was when Andrew re-visited New Zealand and they, with Lorraine’s three daughters, went to the mountains for the day. Lorraine reflects: “It was the only day in my life my four children have been together”.<sup>110</sup> Since then, Lorraine has not heard from Andrew again. She says:

I don’t know why it all stopped  
I really don’t  
I keep going back in my mind  
I don’t think I offended him  
I would so like to see him

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<sup>107</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>108</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>109</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>110</sup> Lorraine, interview.

But I don't want to intrude in his life  
I don't want to be hurt.<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps Andrew unwittingly provided Lorraine with a clue to why he may have distanced himself. He had said, in the context of girlfriends, that he found it difficult to maintain close personal relationships.<sup>112</sup> Further, adoption literature reveals that reunions are “highly abnormal situation[s]” and do not always end with the type of contact both wish to have.<sup>113</sup>

Lorraine hopes one day Andrew will return into their lives.

### **Charles: “It was really lovely being a Māori male in a city”**

**Charles** is a Māori birth father who was raised in a rural Māori community. During the 1960s and 1970s, Charles worked at a government department in a large city with Māori clients wanting to legally adopt children – usually grandparents seeking to register what had ultimately been a whāngai adoption so that the adopted person could inherit land.<sup>114</sup>

Charles said that during this period:

It was really lovely being a Māori male in a city where there were a lot of white women chasing fellas and we weren't saying no. It was a good time to be a Māori male in the city with these liberal white women. It was the social times.<sup>115</sup>

In retrospect, Charles acknowledges that he had been “totally irresponsible”.<sup>116</sup> It was in this time of social change that Charles fathered two children at around the same time by two different women. One mother, who was Māori but “hid it under a bushel”, kept their son, while his daughter, whose mother was Pākehā, was placed for adoption.<sup>117</sup>

Charles met the mother of his daughter when they were involved in similar work. Realising she was pregnant, she told her boss, who suggested she tell Charles because Charles’

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<sup>111</sup> Lorraine, interview.

<sup>112</sup> Silverstein and Kaplan identified seven core issues in adoption, one of which is intimacy. Silverstein and Kaplan found adopted people may fear getting close to people and risk re-enacting earlier losses. Bonding issues may also lower capacity for intimacy. See: Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan, “Seven Core Issues in Adoption.” <http://vanish.org.au/media/17324/seven-core-issues-in-adoption.pdf> (accessed December 24, 2016). These core issues affect each person in the adoption triad.

<sup>113</sup> Maurice Greenberg, “Post-Adoption Reunion—Are We Entering Uncharted Territory?,” *Adoption and Fostering* 17, no. 4 (1993): 8.

<sup>114</sup> See *1909 Amendment to the Adoption Act 1881*.

<sup>115</sup> Charles, interview with author, 18 March 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>117</sup> Charles, email to author, 19 September 2016.

mother could take the child. Rather than have the child go to Charles' mother, the mother decided to place the child for adoption.<sup>118</sup> Charles knew about the pregnancy, and although realising the child would be placed for adoption, didn't try to fight the decision as he was aware of the enormous class pressures, and race issues, brought to bear on the mother.<sup>119</sup> Instead, Charles told his mother and other family members, confident that in the future he would find his daughter.<sup>120</sup>

The mother of his daughter was sent to another province to board with a wealthy farming until their baby was born. Charles "saw her off from the railway station".<sup>121</sup> Their daughter, Marion, was born in 1970 and was not able to be immediately placed with an adoptive family. Charles paid maintenance for the few months prior to when she was legally adopted.

At around the same time, Charles was also involved with another woman whose mother was Māori, although Charles viewed the mother as "someone who, despite her colouring, was in denial of her Māoriness".<sup>122</sup> This woman gave birth to a boy, Luke, who was raised by his mother and her family. Luke was not placed for adoption as there was an expectation from the mother that Charles would eventually marry her. They never married, nor did they remain in contact. Charles paid maintenance until his son was eighteen.

Having grown up in a Māori community with extended family, Charles experienced first-hand whāngai adoptions and firmly believes all adoptions should be open. For this reason, Charles decided to make sure his children would have access to their whakapapa, and having paid maintenance his name would have been on record.<sup>123</sup> Charles says:

I am totally opposed  
to closed adoption.  
There are just so many people

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<sup>118</sup> When Charles and the mother of his child met some 20 years later, she told Charles "There was no way I was going to have your mother have the child. It would have happened over my dead body". Charles, interview with author.

<sup>119</sup> Charles, email to author.

<sup>120</sup> In my limited discussions with Māori birth parents, all but one had believed that they would at some stage be reunited with their child. In conversation with my own mother, she conveyed that she knew I would be reunited with my birth family because my whakapapa/ancestors would always bring me back. I also think her understanding of whāngai (which was usually open and at times temporary), at some level crossed over and influenced her views and understanding about adoption.

<sup>121</sup> Charles, email to author.

<sup>122</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>123</sup> Although up until the *Adult Adoption Information Act* in 1985 Charles' daughter who was placed for adoption would not have had access to her original birth certificate.

who don't know who they are.  
Generations of people who have been lost.  
Closed adoptions  
closes you off from who you are.  
Tragic.<sup>124</sup>

Charles would later encounter such tragedy firsthand when a young Māori man who had been adopted sought Charles' advice on trying to trace his whakapapa. Charles says:

He said to me  
"Do you think I'm Māori?"  
And I just said,  
"I don't know man,  
You're brown, but I don't know  
There's no whakapapa  
You're just brown.  
That's it."  
Bloody sad!<sup>125</sup>

In the early 1970s, Charles married and subsequently had two sons. Prior to his marriage, Charles told his wife about his two previous children and that he was still paying maintenance for one of them. When their boys were aged eleven and thirteen, Charles and his wife told them about their other siblings. With the passing of the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*, Charles decided to look for Marion. Charles decided to first find Marion's mother and tell her of his decision. Through some informed guessing and "research skills" he managed to locate her.<sup>126</sup> He says: "While I initiated the search, my informant had given my details to the mother and it was she who phoned me at work two days later".<sup>127</sup>

The voice on the phone  
I recognised straight away.  
It was the birth mother.  
I had not spoken with her for 21 years  
Yet I still recognised the voice.  
I said:  
"I'm contacting you to let you know  
That I will be looking for our daughter.  
I don't know your circumstances,  
You may have married,

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<sup>124</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>125</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>126</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>127</sup> Charles, interview.

Your husband might not know,  
 So I don't want there to be any surprises.  
 I'm not asking your permission  
 I'm just letting you know what I'm gonna do"  
 Then she said:  
 "Oh I can go one further!  
 I can tell you where she is!"<sup>128</sup>

The birth mother was not only able to tell Charles where their daughter was living, but the situation surrounding how they had met. It transpired that both the mother and adoptive mother had become friends while working at the same high school. In sharing their stories with each other, they realised that Marion was the daughter they had in common. Not knowing how to handle the situation, they continued as friends and both went to counselling as they sought advice on how to best explain the situation to their shared daughter. Charles says luckily Marion is very laid back as he had worried how she may have reacted to the 'secret' which went on for a number of years. But when questioned by Charles, Marion responded: "You know, that's what happens".<sup>129</sup>

Perhaps it should be no surprise that "that's what happens" when you live in a country of three million people, which in the 1960s and early 1970s had the highest domestic adoption rate in the Western world.<sup>130</sup> For instance, 3,967 adoption orders were made in New Zealand in 1971 equating to over 6 percent of all live births.<sup>131</sup> Charles believes stories like Marion and her two mothers, illustrate another reason why closed adoptions are flawed:

While it was a closed adoption, it just became open by accident in a small place, and I think that is one of the disadvantages of closed adoption, all of a sudden something might pop up.<sup>132</sup>

I would suggest that when talking to New Zealanders who were born and raised in New Zealand between 1955 and 1975, most would have stories of people they knew, if not people in their families, who were in some way a part of an adoption triad.

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<sup>128</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>129</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>130</sup> Mary Iwanek, "Adoption in New Zealand – Past, Present and Future," in *International Conference on Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the international conference on adoption and healing, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 1997* (Wellington: New Zealand Adoption and Healing Trust, 1997), 67.

<sup>131</sup> Iwanek, "Adoption in New Zealand", 67.

<sup>132</sup> Charles, interview.

Charles arranged to meet his daughter in a public area. He recognised her immediately in the crowd as “she looked like my mother and my cousins”.<sup>133</sup> That was over twenty-three years ago. He has provided her and her children with their whakapapa and they remain in touch. “I think we are pretty close”, he says. He also intends to tell his daughter’s adoptive parents how appreciative he is about the way they have raised her.

As for his son Luke, Charles had only made contact with him in the past year.<sup>134</sup> There seems to be less of a desire on Luke’s side for engagement with his father and his father’s family. Like Lorraine’s son Andrew, who discontinued contact once the initial contact period was over, one can only surmise why this may be. Is it because he is male? Is it because he can trace a whakapapa through his mother’s line so has less need to know in further detail the whakapapa from his father? Is it because he wasn’t placed for adoption and brought up without the added issues of identity faced by adopted people? Whatever his reasons, Charles believes that “even if a child doesn’t develop a meaningful and close relationship they need to know their kin”.<sup>135</sup> Charles takes this need to know where you are from, seriously, and he has recently become involved in legal action supporting a Waitangi Tribunal Claim on behalf of Māori who were made wards of the state, adopted, and/or fostered through the government welfare system.<sup>136</sup>

While Charles had known about the children he fathered outside of marriage, he met his own nephew who was born to a Pākehā mother and placed for adoption without the father, or any of the family, having any knowledge of the pregnancy or birth. This nephew had moved to Australia and started mixing with Māori. Charles says:

He was brown  
 So there was this,  
 “Bro! Cuz!  
 Where you from bro?”  
 And of course he didn’t know.  
 He was adopted.  
 So he became determined  
 to try and find out,  
 to find his birth father.  
 Which he did do.

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<sup>133</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>134</sup> At the time of the interview March 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Charles, interview.

<sup>136</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Adoption, Fostering and Wards of the State (Beckett) Claim* (WAI 1656, Dec 2008).



That Charles and his family, including the boy's father, had no knowledge of his birth was not unusual. The social scripts governing adoption up until the late 1970s usually divided fathers in to two general categories. One was the older predatory male who, seeking only sexual encounters, would deny all responsibility for any ensuing pregnancy.<sup>137</sup> The other, was the irresponsible young man who, after impregnating a young woman, would abandon her.<sup>138</sup> Yet, while these two stereotypes did exist, more often than not, the father was the 'boyfriend' of the mother, who even if he wanted to support her and his child faced two obstacles – the girl's family and lack of means.<sup>139</sup> Evidence suggests that most fathers, if they knew of the pregnancy, were not uninterested, but were shut out from the decisions being made by parents and/or the professionals involved.<sup>140</sup> Although limited research has focused on the fathers of children placed for adoption, what has become apparent is that fathers were also silenced, with many suffering guilt and shame over their inability to help the mother and stop their child from being placed for adoption.<sup>141</sup>

Speaking of his nephew who had been adopted away from the family under closed adoption Charles said he was:

happy to take him to the graveyard where a lot of his ancestors are buried. We will go and have a day there ... it's like a library.<sup>142</sup>

Charles firmly believes it is essential for people to know who their kin are, and where they are from.

Like Aroha and Lorraine, Charles never forgot about his child placed for adoption. Throughout his narrative, Charles reiterates time and again, in one way or another, that the most important thing to pass on to adopted children is knowledge of their whakapapa.

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<sup>137</sup> Note, the father of Lorraine's second child placed for adoption, seemed to belong to this category.

<sup>138</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 22.

<sup>139</sup> See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 14-22.

<sup>140</sup> See: National Archives of Australia, "Fathers", *Forced Adoptions History Project*, 2017. <http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au/effects/fathers> (accessed September 2016).

<sup>141</sup> For a comprehensive book written about birth fathers and their experiences of having a child placed for adoption see: Gary Clapton, *Birth Fathers and Their Adoption Experiences* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002).

<sup>142</sup> Charles, interview.

## Adopted People

### Mere: “I always felt Māori”

Mere was born in 1962 to a sixteen-year-old unmarried mother. Her mother’s great-grandmother was Māori and her grandfather was an Australian Aboriginal boxer. Mere’s mother was sent to a home in the country to have her baby and was able to breastfeed her for three days. However Mere says:

My mother was told  
I had a heart condition  
I wasn’t going to survive  
They’d find a nice family  
To look after me until I died  
And to consider me dead basically.<sup>143</sup>

Mere’s files labelled her as “an imbecile and an idiot”, and her parents were both recorded as “Caucasian” although her mother “was clearly black”.<sup>144</sup> Mere says:

So it was a forced adoption  
It was a lie  
They falsified  
My birth documents.<sup>145</sup>

Mere’s adoptive parents were both Pākehā, and after adopting Mere they had four of their own biological children. Mere describes her adoptive father as “a good man, a fantastic man”.<sup>146</sup> But Mere had difficulties with her adoptive mother who was “an alcoholic and emotionally unstable”.<sup>147</sup> Mere remembers having a lot of anger as a child and her adoptive mother’s brother sexually abusing her from when she was about three years of age. Mere believes this abuse set her up for further sexual abuse as a young teen.

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<sup>143</sup> Mere, interview with author, 13 March 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>145</sup> Mere, interview. It should be noted that using the legal definition of Māori under the *Adoption Act 1955* which focused on blood quantum Mere’s birth mother, despite physical appearances, would not have been classified as Māori.

<sup>146</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>147</sup> Mere, interview.

At primary school, Mere “mixed with Māori kids quite happily”.<sup>148</sup> She says her mother never objected to her having Māori friends, but was otherwise quite racist in her views and comments about Māori. At this stage, Mere and her family were unaware of her Māori heritage, but Mere states:

I've always felt Māori  
 I wanted to do Māori culture at school  
 I wanted to do all that they were doing  
 But felt scared  
 I always felt out of place  
 Because I thought I was white  
 I thought I couldn't  
 I thought I wasn't allowed.<sup>149</sup>

Mere believes that she was disadvantaged and missed out on being able to fully participate in, and actively be a part of, her culture. It was only when one of Mere's adoptive aunts married a Māori man that Mere had a chance to enjoy being part of Māori activities. Mere loved spending time with this couple and their children. She says:

I thought Māori were cool  
 Basically because they belonged to Aotearoa  
 and this is their place  
 and that they knew that certainty of who they were  
 I loved the culture and everything about it.  
 I knew all about toheroa, pipi, cockles and mussels  
 We all knew how to collect them.  
 I used to love digging for the periwinkles  
 Toheroa - they used to spit at ya!  
 I'd have a feed of them afterwards.  
 I loved it!<sup>150</sup>

Although at high school Mere won a prize for an essay she wrote, she was told: “You'll never achieve to anything' ... so I believed that”.<sup>151</sup> Being raped at fourteen led to Mere's further disengagement. Mere says:

I started giving up on school  
 On life in general  
 It was a school for ladies  
 And I failed that one

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<sup>148</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>149</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>150</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>151</sup> Mere, interview.

I just couldn't see any reason to stay  
So when I was fifteen I left  
And mucked around for a few years.<sup>152</sup>

In reflecting on her life, Mere attributes her adoption as negatively impacting on her sense of identity and a major contributing factor in the problems with her adoptive mother, the sexual abuse, and rape. Mere says that adoption “turned my life upside down. I was a screwed up kid, an angry teen”.<sup>153</sup>

At seventeen, Mere had her first child and was persuaded by her adoptive parents to place her son for adoption. Mere says:

I don't remember signing the forms  
But I must have.  
I think that ten day rule is cruel  
It's too soon.  
Especially when they take baby from you  
You're left with the milk drying up  
You go through the hell of it.<sup>154</sup>

In 1980, when her son was born, a benefit for sole parents was available, and had been for six years. However, Mere says she was never told about it, or given this option. She says, “All people talked about was adoption, so I knew nothing better”.<sup>155</sup> However, the adoption in 1980 was ‘open’ so Mere and the adoptive parents were able to meet. It also meant Mere could have some contact with her son David, although this stopped abruptly when he was seven as his adoptive parents thought the contact was negatively affecting his behaviour.

At twenty-one, Mere became pregnant with her second son. She says: “Because he was deformed they wanted me to abort him, and I said, ‘No, I’ll have him’, and he was born with disabilities”.<sup>156</sup> Yet, for Mere, having her son James was what brought an end to her “self-destructive behaviours” and “saved my life ... I didn’t feel like I had a life before that ... Being a mother probably saved me from myself”.<sup>157</sup> As Mere settled down she decided

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<sup>152</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>153</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>154</sup> Mere, interview. Legally, papers giving consent for adoption can be signed no earlier than 10 days after the child’s birth.

<sup>155</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>156</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>157</sup> Mere, interview.

to trace her birth family. She put an advertisement into the local newspaper with the little information she had. Her maternal grandmother saw the advertisement and contacted Mere's birth parents, who had remained together and had other children. It has not been an uncommon experience that birth parents, who were not given parental consent to marry at the time their first child was placed for adoption, to have remained in contact and at a later date marry and have other children. In fact, of the first 1,869 applications by birth parents for information under the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985*, over 12 percent had later married their child's other birth parent.<sup>158</sup>

Mere's birth parents and siblings were all living in Australia, but she met them when they were on a trip to New Zealand. Mere remembers: "I just looked up and I just knew it was my mother immediately. It was obvious".<sup>159</sup> For adopted people seeing some physical resemblance of themselves in another, often for the very first time, can be very moving. Reunions, in and of themselves, are emotionally charged situations which can bring up a multitude of strong feelings and reactions as people come with their own vulnerabilities and expectations.<sup>160</sup> Ann Nation has identified four distinct yet usually overlapping stages of reunion; searching, meeting, reality, and integration, which can take from two to ten years or more to move through. Disappointments and confusion can lead to years without further contact.<sup>161</sup> Mere says of her meeting with her birth family:

It was okay  
But it was weird  
In hindsight  
It should have been done slower  
With some kind of third party help.  
You try and feel your way  
And you make mistakes  
Both sides make mistakes  
People will suddenly want you to fit in  
Be their daughter or something.<sup>162</sup>

Nation stated in 2001 that, "[o]verall a 'she'll be right mate' mentality has been encouraged by busy Departmental staff"<sup>163</sup> Such an attitude translated into limited, if any, support for

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<sup>158</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 197.

<sup>159</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>160</sup> Nation, "Betwixt and Between", 107-108. Although not within the scope of this thesis research suggests that genetic sexual attraction (GSA) is frequently experienced in reunions and is something which needs to be understood and sensitively addressed prior to reunion. See: Greenberg, "Post-adoption Reunion", 5-15.

<sup>161</sup> Nation, "Betwixt and Between", 108-112.

<sup>162</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>163</sup> Nation, "Betwixt and Between", 106.

adopted people and birth parents. Support for Mere came from her adoptive parents. Her adoptive father was happy for her when she reconnected with her birth parents, although, her adoptive mother “was never happy with it”.<sup>164</sup> However, despite her misgivings, it was Mere’s adoptive mother who sent her money to return to New Zealand from Perth when things with her birth parents, who she was visiting, began to unravel.<sup>165</sup> Mary says:

I went to Perth to see them  
And I spun out  
I didn’t cope  
And they left me stranded.

Mere described being in Australia with her birth family as overwhelming. She felt isolated in an unfamiliar country, and she was disappointed with the reality of their lifestyle, which she calls “dysfunctional”.<sup>166</sup> Their alcohol use, and values, differed from her own. For example, Mere does not wear make-up and says she “was not feminine enough” for them.<sup>167</sup> The experience left a lot of tension and Mere had no further contact with her birth family for twelve years.<sup>168</sup>

On her return to New Zealand, Mere realised she still had some healing to do. She believes that the beginning of her healing journey really began when she was on a marae and a kuia “gifted” her the name Mere – the Māori transliteration of her adoptive name Mary.

When I got the name Mere  
I started to face some of the issues  
We started to explore some of the whakapapa and stuff I had found out  
And she called me Mere  
And from there my identity started to come together  
But Mum would always say  
“We called you Mary, not Mere  
We did not raise you to be Māori!”<sup>169</sup>

In my experience, names are often problematic for adopted people as names are intrinsically personal and fundamentally linked with a person’s identity and sense of self.

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<sup>164</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>165</sup> It is interesting to note that the adoptive mothers in this research have often been present, or have passed on information, to support their adopted child during the reunion process – even if they were not themselves comfortable with a reunion.

<sup>166</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>167</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>168</sup> For an in-depth discussion on reunions which end in loss of contact see: Nation, “Betwixt and Between”, 112.

<sup>169</sup> Mere, interview.

The names adopted people are given at birth were typically changed at the time of adoption when the adoptive parents (re)named the child. Further, for Māori, names are not necessarily given because you like the name. Rather, names carry meaning, mana, can connect us to the ancestors and to the spiritual, names bestow something of significance, you ‘wear’ your name.<sup>170</sup> A name can have both spiritual and physical consequences. A Māori elder explains the serious nature of naming children to Joan Metge:

Children’s names are taonga [treasured possessions] placed on their tinana [bodies] and rama mō ō rātou wae wae [lamps for their feet] ... Naming a child has important psychological, social and even political implications.<sup>171</sup>

As such, Mere’s healing journey began with being given a Māori name which she felt more accurately reflected who she was.

Although Mere began to face the many difficulties and setbacks she had encountered, she carries continued grief over the lost relationship with David, her first born son who was placed for adoption. She also grieves not having a relationship with his children (her grandchildren). After contact with David was severed when he was seven, his adoptive parents wanted Mere to reconnect with him when he was sixteen as they were experiencing difficulties with his behaviour.<sup>172</sup>

Mere says: “They got me to meet him when he was sixteen and the anger on that boy was just intense”.<sup>173</sup> Although Mere has tried to remain in contact, there is not a lot of communication back from him. She says while it hurts, she will not live in the shadow of guilt. She says:

I would love my eldest son to have a relationship with me  
But it’s so inconsistent  
I’ve spent every single day thinking about my son  
I’ve written poetry about it  
I still cry when I read it

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<sup>170</sup> See: National Digital Forum “Basil Keane, Historical Māori biographies - NDF 2014”. Filmed [December 2014]. YouTube video, 33:19. Posted [December 2014] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjdgbREjS6c> (accessed October 2016).

<sup>171</sup> Joan Metge, *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995), 142, 145.

<sup>172</sup> Some scholars contend that adopted children have their behaviours overly pathologised. See: Jenny Rockel and Murray Ryburn, *Adoption Today: Change and Choice in New Zealand* (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1988), 183-84.

<sup>173</sup> Mere, interview.

Because it's just so painful  
 And that's never gone  
 It's just never gone  
 That's the hardest thing that ever happened in my life  
 Losing him and  
 I haven't got him back  
 I know I never will.<sup>174</sup>

And perhaps being an adopted person herself, Mere can best understand the difficulties which adopted people face when endeavouring to build relationships with birth parents. Mere has also struggled to find a place within her birth family where she feels comfortable. She says: "I never really bonded. I don't know them to be honest. I hear so many different stories, I don't know".<sup>175</sup>

Trying to synthesise the many different stories told, and never knowing what is truth and what is fabrication, is one of the complicating dilemmas at the heart of closed stranger adoption. Adopted people are especially susceptible to believing the often inaccurate or false stories which they were told as children, because actual facts were unknown. Apart from the legal fiction of adoption, adoptees as children and young adults may also fantasise about a life they may have had, and about parents and siblings they have never known. Adopted people carry with them "the imprint of another life".<sup>176</sup>

For some Māori adopted people, 'the imprint of another life' conjures up an image of a large, loving, welcoming whānau with strong connections to land and marae, who are steeped in knowledge of tikanga and te reo Māori. Television programmes such as *Missing Pieces* (renamed *Lost and Found*), where some participants were united with their previously unknown Māori kin, have relied on this particular romanticised trope.<sup>177</sup> However, the audience never gets to see past the initial reunions and the post "honeymoon phase".<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>175</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>176</sup> Jeanette Winterson, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (London: Random House, 2011), 5. Margaret Homans, *The Imprint of Another Life: Adoption Narratives and Human Possibility* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013). Homans, a literary scholar, uses Winterson's term, 'the imprint of another life', while exploring through different representations of adoption in literature, the challenges, and ways of managing, tensions between notions of families as constructed and fictional, or biological and real.

<sup>177</sup> Both Lucia and Estelle also mentioned this programme in their interviews.

<sup>178</sup> Libby Harkness. *Looking for Lisa*. (Milsons Point NSW: Random House, 1991), 204. Ann Nation states the 'honeymoon' stage is most notable for its "euphoric qualities ... [and] emotional turbulence". Nation, *Between and Between*, 111.



It is not surprising that a programme which, according to its webpage “reunites families and helps people discover their cultural and ethnic heritage”, holds hope for Māori adoptees who have been unable to trace their own whakapapa.<sup>179</sup> Often raised in families and/or communities where physical appearance have set them apart, many Māori adoptees long for a place, or a group, where they feel connected and understood. For Māori adoptees the need to know one’s whakapapa is usually inextricably intertwined with the desire for whānau connection. Moreover, to be marginalised as part of a group, and to be able to relate and support each other in the face of racial prejudice and discrimination, is less onerous than having to face racism and marginalisation alone. Psychotherapist Jenny Rockel and social worker Murray Ryburn argue that “[c]hildren can best cope with racism if they have the support of a family in which they feel the same as the others”.<sup>180</sup> Personal experiences of transracial adoptees bears this out. Accounts in the collection of personal experiences expressed in *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* reveals that even with supportive adoptive parents it is often difficult for transracial adoptees to either tell their white adoptive parents of the racism they encounter, or for their adoptive parents to understand and respond in a helpful way.<sup>181</sup>

While Mere has made connections back to her hapū and marae, she still feels somehow out of place and wonders what will happen when she dies, in terms of a place to be buried.

Mere says:

When you take away a person’s identity at birth  
 You’re taking away the essence of who they are.  
 For Māori it’s worse.  
 You take away their whakapapa  
 Then where do you go?

Where’s your whenua?  
 Where’s your tūrangawaewae?  
 Where’s your home?  
 I’m a wanderer because of that.  
 We talk about where I will go at the end of time  
 My birth mother is up in the whānau urupā

But where do I go?

<sup>179</sup> MediaWorks New Zealand, “Lost and Found”, *TV3* <http://www.tv3.co.nz/Shows/LostandFound.aspx> (accessed December 31, 2016)

<sup>180</sup> Rockel and Ryburn, *Adoption Today*, 182.

<sup>181</sup> Trenka, Oparah, and Shin, *Outsiders Within*.

I don't feel a belonging to be there with her  
 Why?  
 Because my whakapapa was never given to me.  
 I should have had the right to grow up at my marae.<sup>182</sup>

Nevertheless, in thinking about her life and her future, Mere is somewhat philosophical. She says, "Would I have been better off if I was not adopted? I don't know. All that I know is that I was adopted".<sup>183</sup>

Other adopted people have asked the same question. It seems that many adopted people can, on the one hand, recognise the benefits they have received, especially if they were adopted in to a middle class white family with all the inherent privileges and opportunities such a position affords. Yet, on the other hand, the price paid for such privileges is viewed as unjustifiably high. In fact, it has been said that "the adoption process is the only trauma where the victims [adopted people] are expected by the whole of society to be grateful".<sup>184</sup> To Verrier's statement, which has often been quoted in adoption circles, I must add that colonisation is also an intergenerational trauma which Māori (and other Indigenous Peoples) are also expected to be grateful.<sup>185</sup>

Like myself, and other people interviewed for this thesis, Mere too, is a named claimant in the Adoption, Fostering and Ward of State claim lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal.<sup>186</sup> For Mere, the repercussions of her adoption, still impact on her life in a myriad of ways. Mere would like the state to acknowledge the harm caused by adoption, especially in relation to Māori who were adopted outside of their whānau and their culture.

## **Estelle: "Handed a brown envelope"**

**Estelle** was born in 1972 to a Pākehā mother, and remained in the hospital for two weeks until she was placed for adoption. Her adoptive parents were English and they had three

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<sup>182</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>183</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>184</sup> Nancy Newton Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1993), 80.

<sup>185</sup> Peter Adds, "New Zealand's treaty of Waitangi reconciliation processes: A Māori treaty educators perspective," in *Reconciliation, Representation and Indigeneity: 'Biculturalism' in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Peter Adds, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Richard S. Hill and Graeme Whimp, 19-24. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016, 19 comments on the common expectation of many non-Māori New Zealanders that "Māori should be grateful for the treatment they received from the British, as opposed to any other potential colonising empire".

<sup>186</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Adoption, Fostering and Wards of the State (Beckett) Claim* (WAI 1656, Dec 2008).

sons. Estelle was told that she was adopted because her family wanted a little girl. Two years after Estelle's birth, they adopted another girl and their family was complete.<sup>187</sup>

Estelle had a stable childhood, growing up in what she describes as “a small bi-cultural town”.<sup>188</sup> Estelle and her sister always knew that they were adopted, and Estelle says it would have been difficult to hide their adopted status as both she and her sister were brown and looked different from the rest of the family. As a child, Estelle always “knew I was a little bit different”, although “Māori and Pākehā just played together, and as a kid it was less of an issue”.<sup>189</sup> However, no-one knew, or was able to confirm, that either Estelle or her sister were Māori, it was only because of their colouring that this assumption was made and both sisters grew up with this belief. At fourteen, her family moved to a larger town where there was more of a division between Māori and Pākehā.

It was really in my high school years I became quite shy and quite withdrawn. I remember doing a speech about racism in the school, about Māori and Pākehā ... so I think I had that little bit of social justice in me. I did Māori studies and Māori language and my adoptive Mum really encouraged that. I found it quite important and I had a lovely Māori teacher who really supported me along.<sup>190</sup>

In her senior years at high school, most of Estelle's friends were Pākehā as there weren't many Māori at the senior level. The way Estelle coped with her school life was to be studious. She says:

I internalised things rather than externalised – I didn't rebel. My sister was doing that, so I couldn't. I did the opposite. I was the good girl. I think in a way I suffered later in life because I did internalise things more than I should have.<sup>191</sup>

Interestingly, in *The Primal Wound*, Verrier states that:

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<sup>187</sup> Sawyer states reasons adoptive parents may adopt a child include “to trigger ovulation, to disguise failed relationships, to complete ‘incomplete family numbers ... to provide a child of the ‘other’ sex, to replace dead children...” Sawyer, *Death by Adoption*, 25.

<sup>188</sup> Estelle, interview with author, 13 April 2014.

<sup>189</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>190</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>191</sup> Estelle, interview.

[w]hen there are two adopted children in a family, in every case that I have studied, one adoptee assumes the acting-out role and the other is compliant, regardless of their birth order, sex, or personalities.<sup>192</sup>

As a teenager, one of the things Estelle internalised was her curiosity about her biological background. She longed to know more about her origins but felt guilty and disloyal for feeling this way. She felt unable to talk about this curiosity as she didn't want to hurt her adoptive family.

She says:

In my teens  
I was curious about it  
But I felt this guilt  
About wanting to find out  
Because I didn't want to hurt  
My adoptive family.<sup>193</sup>

There is a common theme in adoption literature about adopted people experiencing internal and/or external pressure to be grateful – grateful that they had been 'chosen' and given a home. There was often an unspoken rule that to talk about the adoption would mean that you are ungrateful or unhappy with the 'good' life you have been 'given'.<sup>194</sup> After high school, Estelle moved to the United Kingdom. Of this time in her life Estelle reflects:

I lived in England for about three years  
One thing I loved about being overseas  
I wasn't Māori or Pākehā  
I was just Estelle  
I could just be me  
I've talked to others  
Who feel the same  
We get tired of being stuck  
As Māori  
Or Pākehā.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Verrier, *The Primal Wound*, 63. Griffith also discusses the roles of the good/bad adoptee. See: Keith Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are: Reform of Adoption Law with Honesty, Openness and Integrity* (Ottawa: Katherine W. Kimbell, 1991), Sec. 3: 1.

<sup>193</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>194</sup> It should be noted that some adoptive parents didn't take this view and talking openly about adoption and reunions with birth parents was in some situations well managed.

<sup>195</sup> Estelle, interview.

Estelle exemplifies the burden of being viewed as ‘the other’ in terms of ethnicity. Narratives or identities which frame us in a certain way become wearisome, when we are judged against criteria set by others. For example, demographer Tahu Kukutai asserts Māori have been categorised and their identity manipulated by non-Māori politicians, civil servants, and academics.<sup>196</sup> 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”.<sup>197</sup> In addition, Māori researcher Belinda Borell rightfully argues that Māori are often categorised in deficit terms and “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”.<sup>198</sup> In effect, individuals are constantly aware of being defined and labelled by others.

In her late twenties, Estelle returned to New Zealand and was increasingly thinking about trying to connect with her birth mother. She was hoping that a meeting with her birth mother would provide details about her Māori heritage, and provide a more secure sense of self. She attended a Landmark Forum Course, which coupled with a documentary she saw about the television personality Charlotte Dawson’s search for her birth mother, triggered Estelle’s own search.<sup>199</sup> Estelle applied for her original birth certificate. She says:

When my birth certificate was available  
I had to go and collect it  
You just get handed a brown envelope  
And that’s your history  
There was no kind of guidance  
There was very little support  
I got it in a brown envelope.<sup>200</sup>

In an understated way, Estelle acknowledges the significance of receiving her original birth certificate. The strong association with the brown envelope points to the emotional impact

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<sup>196</sup> Tahu Kukutai, *The Dynamics of Ethnicity Reporting - Māori in New Zealand* (Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri, 2003), 12.

<sup>197</sup> Cited in Coates, Natalie Coates, “*Kia Tū Ko Taikāka: Let the Heartwood of Māori Identity Stand - an Investigation into the Appropriateness of the Legal Definition of ‘Māori’ for Māori?*” (BA Hons. Diss., University of Otago, 2008), 15.

<sup>198</sup> Belinda Borell, “*Living in the City Ain’t So Bad: Cultural Diversity of South Auckland Rangatahi?*” (MA diss., Massey University, 2005), 22.

<sup>199</sup> The Landmark Forum Course is focussed on personal development training. Charlotte Dawson was a New Zealand–Australian television personality and model who was placed for adoption at birth.

<sup>200</sup> Estelle, interview.

of this. The envelope which, carries the information that has been kept from her, becomes the object she remembers most vividly. Also, Estelle makes a similar comment to Mere regarding a lack of guidance or support in the ensuing search and subsequent reunion.

With knowledge of her mother's name at the time of her birth, Estelle went to the library and searched the Electoral Rolls. Finding that her mother's occupation was a nurse, Estelle starting searching in towns and cities with major hospitals, checked phone books, and eventually found her. However, it took Estelle another two years "to pluck up the courage" to make contact. She says:

It was Labour Day  
I was angsting about it all day  
I went to a beach  
I remember it raining  
And I just did a karakia and a mihi  
I spent the whole day just by myself on the beach  
And that night  
When my flatmate got home  
I rang my birth mother  
I said:  
"Did you adopt a child out at such and such?"  
She said:  
"Yeeaaaah"  
I said:  
"I'm it".

Estelle's mother had married after giving birth to Estelle and had two other children. She had never told her other children about their older sister "so I was all a bit of a secret".<sup>201</sup> Secrecy and shame remain strong themes throughout the history of closed stranger adoption for all members of the adoption triad. Yet the secrecy for many adopted people often amplifies their already internalised narratives of 'not being wanted' or 'not being good enough'.

Estelle and her birth mother met, and Estelle remembers how strange it was to meet "someone who looked a bit like me".<sup>202</sup> They were both quite tentative towards each other and Estelle knew that her mother's other children still hadn't been told about her. However, as time progressed, her mother did tell her other children and Estelle has come to have a somewhat distant relationship with her mother – "more like a distant aunt kind of

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<sup>201</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>202</sup> Estelle, interview.

relationship”.<sup>203</sup> Estelle’s mother told her that she had given birth to her on a weekend, and she had to go back to work on the Monday. Estelle says:

That was kind of like  
 Have your baby  
 Give it up  
 Then just cut it out of your life  
 So that’s what I guess she’s had to do for many years  
 There is still this bit of a gap between us.<sup>204</sup>

However, her mother did provide Estelle with information which confirmed her father was Māori. For Estelle, this knowledge provided some reassurance to the life she had been living and the way she had identified herself. She says:

It was the first time  
 I didn’t know for many years  
 I always felt Māori but I didn’t know for sure.<sup>205</sup>

Yet, Estelle’s mother has been unable - or unwilling - to pass on any further details which would help her trace her father and to subsequently identify which iwi she is from. This has been frustrating for Estelle, but she has started to deal with this lack of knowledge in a different, more empowering way. She says:

In the past when you had to give your mihi,  
 your whakapapa,  
 I’d just make it up.  
 Because I’m from Waikato, I must be Tainui.  
 But now,  
 until I know for sure what my Māori whakapapa is,  
 I’m not going to make it up any more  
 I think  
 I’ve had my history  
 made up for me  
 all my life  
 I don’t have to keep  
 having my current background  
 made up for me.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>204</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>205</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>206</sup> Estelle, interview.

In situations when it is necessary, or appropriate, to give a mihi Estelle describes how Pākehā generally relate to her:

I've found Pākehā kind of warm when they're in Māori situations, they kind of naturally want the support of me ... you can see how uncomfortable they are, so they find me a little less intimidating than a staunchly kaupapa Māori person perhaps.<sup>207</sup>

Although when talking about her experiences with Māori, her tone changes:

There needs to be a bit of sensitivity and realisation about the ramifications of the Adoption Act ... that finding out your whakapapa and background is not always possible.<sup>208</sup>

Like other adopted people, Estelle experiences the ongoing consequences of closed adoption's 'legal fiction'. Without knowledge of her Māori ancestry, it is impossible for Estelle to fully locate herself as Māori. In general, adopted people are forced by necessity to rely on other people's interpretations or presumptions, not only about their origins, but about their identity, when they have no other factual or verifiable information. At worst, such information can be a deliberate fabrication. Much adoption literature argues that the fictitious nature of adoption, and the manipulation of an adopted person's identity, can lead to many adopted people struggling with issues of trust in their inter-personal relationships.<sup>209</sup>

However, Estelle refuses to focus on what she considers were, and are, some of the negatives associated with closed adoption. She says:

It's hard because I don't want to have the sort of life where I'm a victim, an adoptee, poor is me 'cos there's certainly some advantages of being an adoptee. I'm quite adaptable and able to relate to different types of people.<sup>210</sup>

Estelle further explains:

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<sup>207</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>208</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>209</sup> See for instance: Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan, "Lifelong Issues in Adoption," in *Working with Older Adoptees: A source book of innovative models*, eds. Lorenetal Coleman, Karen Tilbor, Helaine Hornby and Carol Boggis (Portland: University of Southern Maine, 1988): 45-53; Griffith, *The Right to Know*, Sec 2:3; Verrier, *The Primal Wound*, 81-83.

<sup>210</sup> Estelle, interview.



I feel like a bridge  
 A bridge between  
 Māori and Pākehā  
 A bridge within my own family  
 I am trying to connect people

But being a bridge  
 I'm sometimes trod on  
 Like when I'm in Pākehā circles  
 I feel a bit brown  
 When I'm in Māori circles  
 I feel a bit white  
 Walking between the two worlds  
 Navigating, switching  
 I've learnt  
 It's not what people define me as  
 It's who I choose to define myself

And one thing  
 I'm Māori  
 I'm a Māori who doesn't know their full whakapapa  
 I'm like a moon  
 It's the other side of the moon I can't see  
 But it doesn't make me incomplete  
 I'm still a moon.<sup>211</sup>

While Estelle firmly identifies as Māori, she is aware that under the practice of closed stranger adoption the names of a Māori parent's iwi were not asked for, or recorded even if they were known. Estelle says "I've been a product of an assimilative practice".<sup>212</sup> If one of the aims of such a practice was to isolate Māori adoptees from their Māori roots, then this has been the case for many. Estelle says:

I don't have children  
 A family of my own  
 And my adoptive family aren't that close  
 I'm kind of yearning for that whanaungatanga  
 And that whānau.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>212</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>213</sup> Estelle, interview.

Although she has described herself as a bridge able to connect others across social and cultural divides, Estelle has been unable to connect with her own whakapapa and family. The fullness of her moon remains invisible.

### **Lucia: “Social Welfare stripped us of our mana”**

**Lucia** was born in 1976 to an unmarried Pākehā mother. In her adoption file, a social worker recorded that Lucia’s mother had a history of drinking and so it was decided by social workers prior to Lucia’s birth that her mother was ‘unfit’ and her child would be placed for adoption. After giving birth, Lucia’s mother left the hospital but returned three days later stating that she wanted a chance to “turn her life around and look after her child”.<sup>214</sup> However, she was told that her daughter had already been sent to the Home of Compassion for adoption.<sup>215</sup>

At the Home of Compassion, Lucia was cared for by a nun - named Sister Lucia - which is how she acquired her name. After three months no adoptive parents had been found so a woman, who worked for the nuns, volunteered to adopt Lucia thereby adding a daughter to her family of five sons. Lucia’s adoptive family were Pākehā. Initially, because Lucia was a ‘fair baby’, her adoptive mother hadn’t realised she was Māori.<sup>216</sup> It only became evident when she questioned the nuns about the bluish bruise-like mark at the base of Lucia’s spine. She was told that Lucia’s mother was white but her father must have been either Māori or from the Pacific Islands because of this ‘Mongolian spot’. Although Lucia’s adoptive family never knew her father’s ethnicity, they presumed he was Māori and raised Lucia in this belief.

Adoption has been likened to the market place with market forces based on supply and demand leading to a hierarchy of babies and the practice of matching for marginality.<sup>217</sup> Given that Lucia was a Māori child, she was less in ‘demand’. The fact that Lucia had remained at the Home of Compassion for three months illustrates this point, while paradoxically making her even harder to place since potential adoptive parents preferred

<sup>214</sup> Lucia, interview with author, 22 October 2013.

<sup>215</sup> From 1903 to 2012, the Home of Compassion Crèche was the longest-running crèche in New Zealand. It was established by the Sisters of Compassion and provided free child care for families who were without means to support their children, ‘foundling’ orphans, and foster children. See: Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “Home of Compassion, Island Bay,” *New Zealand History*, October 29, 2015. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/home-compassion-island-bay> (accessed 17 December 2016).

<sup>216</sup> In New Zealand the term ‘fair’ or ‘fair-skinned’ equates with someone of light complexion or colouring.

<sup>217</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 109.

new-borns. Therefore, it is significant that Lucia's adoptive parents were what would have been considered, using the language of one social worker, "at the dicey end of being approved", as both parents were deaf and they already had five children.<sup>218</sup>

As a child, Lucia was aware that she looked different from the other members of her family. She says:

I knew I was very different from a young age. I knew because I was brown and they weren't. The whole family was Pākehā – my adoptive mother, my adoptive father, and my five brothers. All White. I was the only Māori.<sup>219</sup>

Other people also noticed this. Lucia reflects that being Māori made her stand out from the rest of her family and led to casual, but hurtful, comments from strangers. She says, "It's as I got older that it started to hit me and you have more understanding and more hurt".<sup>220</sup>

Two incidents particularly stand out in Lucia's memory. She says:

I was  
At a basketball game  
Someone asked me why my parents were both white  
I said "oh, I'm adopted".  
And they said "Oh your mother didn't want you".  
It was like someone had put a knife in my heart.<sup>221</sup>

Lucia also recalls the constant teasing, by one of her adoptive brothers:

He apologised when he was in his twenties but he used to tease me. One time it really hurt. He said "No you can't sit there because you're too black". And I thought "Wow, I really don't belong. I don't belong in this family".<sup>222</sup>

Due to her adoptive parent's hearing impairments, Lucia found she was marginalised in other ways as well. She says:

My growing up was around a lot of deaf people  
I not only felt I'm a brown person in a white family

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<sup>218</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 190.

<sup>219</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>220</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>221</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>222</sup> Lucia, interview.

I also felt I'm in a hearing impaired family  
I felt like I had two handicaps.<sup>223</sup>

But for Lucia, the worst thing was the constant abuse by her adoptive father, who “favoured my brothers because they were his”.<sup>224</sup> Feelings of not belonging, and being singled out, intensified during in her first year of high school as her parent’s marriage started to disintegrate. Lucia started “acting out” and it was suggested by a counsellor that she be put into a bilingual unit.<sup>225</sup> Lucia’s adoptive mother fully supported this idea, and the Māori teacher was told that Lucia was adopted and did not know her whakapapa or very much about Māori culture. Her teacher encouraged and reassured Lucia, who was anxious about going to marae and having to stand up and give her mihi. He told her just to say she was a whāngai and that she was Ngāti Whatua because she had grown up in Auckland.<sup>226</sup> Lucia describes how happy she was in this class:

There was sixty of us  
Literally like one big whānau  
I loved it.  
It was the biggest thing I missed when I left school.<sup>227</sup>

It was possibly missing her school whānau and a longing for a place to belong which led Lucia at nineteen to search for her birth mother. Because she was not yet twenty years old, she was unable to obtain her original birth certificate under the *Adult Adoption Information Act*. Instead she contacted Jigsaw who offered support and advice. It can be difficult for non-adoptees to fully comprehend what it is like, to be in the world, and not know the name of the woman who gave birth to you. Most people grow up knowing the names of both their parents, and so may struggle to grasp the enormity of this event, as adopted people must wait until adulthood for such information. Receiving her original birth certificate gave Lucia, for the first time, knowledge of her own mother’s name. On receiving her original birth certificate, Lucia highlights the magnitude of emotions she experienced:

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<sup>223</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>224</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>225</sup> Lucia, interview. Bilingual, or immersion, units are attached to English-medium schools where a minimum of fifty per cent of classes are taught in te reo Māori. Ministry of Education, “About Māori-medium education”, July 10, 2015. <http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/nga-whanaketanga-rumaki-maori/about-maori-medium-education/> (accessed 31 December, 2016).

<sup>226</sup> Ngāti Whātua are a group whose tribal area includes Tāmaki Makaurau – present day Auckland.

<sup>227</sup> Lucia, interview.

It was like wow!  
I cried that day  
Seeing her name!<sup>228</sup>

However, as was the practice at the time, her father was recorded as ‘unknown’. Lucia “hated” that.<sup>229</sup> Lucia exemplifies the persistence and determination of many adopted people, as she spent “hours and hours” at a public library searching for her mother’s name amongst electoral rolls and the records of birth, deaths, and marriages.<sup>230</sup> Through her searching she was finally able to locate her mother’s family. After several phone calls, she connected with her maternal uncle who gave her the news that her mother had passed away two years previously. Lucia remembers crying – for the mother she would never know. And although her uncle said he had heard Lucia’s mother was going out with a Māori boy (presumably at the time she was conceived), for Lucia the death of her mother also meant the lost opportunity of finding out her father’s name and consequently the ability to trace her whakapapa. Lucia did, however, meet some members of her birth mother’s family. For Lucia, who identifies strongly as Māori, she saw no physical or cultural similarities between herself and her maternal aunty and cousin who are Pākehā. Lucia says in a quiet, understated way, “it was a bit strange”.<sup>231</sup> They have had no further contact, and Lucia remains grieving for her unknown whakapapa. She says of trying to trace her father and her Māori identity:

I just wanted to trace it. I wanted to go back to a marae. I wanted to see if there was any whānau still alive. I’d like to take my kids there. I don’t have to know him [father] but I’d just like to be able to say to my kids where they’re from.<sup>232</sup>

In reflecting on her adoption Lucia, like many other adopted people, tries to focus on the good. She does not want to appear ungrateful or disloyal to her adoptive family.<sup>233</sup> Lucia says:

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<sup>228</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>229</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>230</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>231</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>232</sup> Lucia, interview.

<sup>233</sup> A common experience reported by adoptees in an Australian study, was feeling that “they had to show gratitude/appreciation to their adoptive parents for ‘taking them’” often resulting in “over-achievement and over-compliance” See: Pauline Kenny, Daryl Higgins, Carol Soloff and Reem Sweid, “Past Adoption Experiences” *National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices*, 7.2 Gratitude (Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012). <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/past-adoption-experiences/7-persons-who-were-adopted> (accessed, October, 2016). Other examples include: Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 103; Quartly, et al., *The Market in Babies*, 23.

I've also got fond memories of my childhood. We used to go fishing, we used to go to my Nana's bach and we'd run through the tracks. My grandmother spoilt me. She was the most amazing woman. I love her to bits.

Yet despite her focus on the positive, Lucia voices concern about adoption in general, and about her adoption in particular. Lucia believes that the Social Welfare Department should have allowed her mother the opportunity to care for her. Because Lucia's birth mother was classified as 'unfit', no other options were considered, even when her mother asked for the chance to prove herself. Lucia considers such disregard as constituting a forced adoption.

Lucia also questions the wisdom of having been placed in a home where she was the only girl, with parents who were both deaf, and that the Department did not follow up or audit her progress. She says:

Nobody checked. You were placed and then left, because they believed they were a good family. They should have stayed in touch, they should have had meetings with me alone ... There was none of that.<sup>234</sup>

Further, Lucia wants some reform to the adoption law which would prohibit Māori children from being placed into Pākehā families, and which would safeguard the rights of Māori children to have access to knowledge of their whakapapa. She says:

Social Welfare stripped us of our mana.  
The minute they put us into a Pākehā family  
They stripped us of our mana.  
They said:  
"You don't need to know your culture  
Your culture doesn't need you  
So off you go".  
And so many of us went into Pākehā families.  
It's awful.  
They should never have done it.<sup>235</sup>

Lucia does acknowledge, however, that those implementing in practice the closed adoption of Māori children into Pākehā families:

probably thought they were doing the best thing – "Oh this poor little Māori girl don't put her into a foster home". I can understand they

<sup>234</sup> Lucia, interview. For a comprehensive review/history of New Zealand children in state care see: Stanley, *Road to Hell*.

<sup>235</sup> Lucia, interview.

probably thought they were doing a good thing, but they didn't think through the damage it would have done to that child. You're putting a fish out of water with Māori being adopted into Pākehā families, and even if they had done that, they should have followed up, they should have stayed in touch.<sup>236</sup>

Lucia tells her story in the hope that lessons can be learnt from her adoption experience - that policy makers and those working with families and children are aware of the complicated and at times contradicting needs of all parties involved.

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<sup>236</sup> Lucia, interview.





## Chapter Four

### Birth Parents Revisited:

### Urbanisation, Race, and Morality in Post-War New Zealand

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, the testimonies provided a very human face to the often unseen, and for the most part untold, experiences and repercussions of closed stranger adoption in relation to Māori. Aroha shared a narrative laden with fear and family violence, Lorraine illustrated New Zealand's racist attitudes towards Māori and interracial couplings, and Charles explained the importance of whakapapa, and what it was like being a young Māori male new to the city in the 1960s. Inspired by the testimonies of Aroha, Lorraine, and Charles, this chapter will consider more closely the social forces that impacted upon parents who had a child placed for adoption under the closed stranger system. However, this chapter is not an analysis or a critique of the birth parents' testimonies. Rather, it is an analysis of some key themes, which their testimonies have helped guide us to. I particularly discuss, and interweave throughout the chapter, three themes which cut across all three birth parents narratives: urbanisation, racism, and sexual mores and morality. I draw upon these themes to examine the socio-historical context surrounding the period when their children were conceived, born, and placed for adoption. This discussion elucidates New Zealand's deeper history of colonisation and racism with its broader ongoing inter-generational effects, much like the ongoing inter-generational effects of closed stranger adoption itself.

Before further discussion, it is timely to remember, that closed stranger adoption was a practice based entirely on Eurocentric values. Those values affected both Māori and Pākehā, and much of the discussion in this chapter, specifically pertaining to closed adoption, focuses on Pākehā practices and experiences. This is not only because it was those Pākehā practices and experiences which affected, and at times reflected, Māori experiences, but perhaps more pointedly because the experiences of Māori birth parents are missing in the official history of adoption in New Zealand. Throughout this thesis I argue that the *Adoption Act 1955* made legal adoption particularly onerous for Māori because of the Eurocentric nature of the legislation in both policy and practice. New Zealand's policies of assimilation and integration, while at the time appeared democratic and egalitarian,

remained conveniently unattuned to Māori concerns. Māori custom and concerns were excluded consideration under the closed adoption process, where within mainstream Pākehā society, closed stranger adoption was viewed as the ‘perfect solution’ to the problems of apparent infertility and illegitimacy. In one swift move, social intervention could rescue the child while helping the childless.<sup>1</sup> Due to the stigma associated with infertility and illegitimacy, closed stranger adoption was fundamentally a practice imbued with secrecy and lies. Closed adoption itself was a practice beset with public illusions and legislative sleight of hand. For instance, replacing, and making unavailable, the original birth certificate containing the mother’s name and issuing a ‘new’ birth certificate with the adoptive parent’s names is described by many as “a legal fiction”.<sup>2</sup> The fictitious nature of adoption was an illusion in which society, from parliament to parents, colluded.

In fact, as I have previously stated, New Zealand was a nation founded and built on illusions and was well adept in the art of sleight of hand. While New Zealand prided itself on its down-to-earth egalitarianism, and progressive social policies, especially in relation to Māori and women, it was also a master of state-sanctioned illusions which at times resulted in self-deception on a national scale. For example, The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 is often cited as progressive in its colonial treatment and negotiations with Indigenous Peoples, yet, there has been ongoing contestations and conflict over the Crown’s ‘(dis)honouring’ of the Treaty. Of particular significance is Chief Justice James Prendergast’s 1877 decision declaring the Treaty “worthless” and a “simple nullity”.<sup>3</sup> The Prendergast ruling influenced government policy and legislation for almost a century, allowing Māori interests to be repeatedly ignored and excluded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Else, Anne, *A Question of Adoption: Closed Stranger Adoption in New Zealand, 1944-1974* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991). Else, 53.

<sup>2</sup> As early as 1861, adoption was described as a legal fiction. See: Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1871). A legal fiction is defined as “A ruling or status in law based on hypothetical or inexistent facts”. It is “an assumption of a possible thing as a fact, which is not literally true, for the advancement of justice, and which the law will not allow to be disproved, as far as concerns the purpose for which the assumption is made”. Lyod Duhaime, “Duhaime’s Law Dictionary,” *Duhaime.Org Learn Law*. <http://www.duhaime.org/LegalDictionary/L/LegalFiction.aspx> (accessed September 2016).

<sup>3</sup> *Wi Parata v Bishop of Wellington* [1877] 3 NZ Jur (NS) 72 (SC)

<sup>4</sup> Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “Chief Justice declares Treaty ‘worthless’ and a ‘simple nullity,’” *New Zealand History*, August 18, 2015. <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/the-chief-justice-declares-that-the-treaty-of-waitangi-is-worthless-and-a-simple-nullity> (accessed September 2016). Two further examples are included below. Both illustrate early Acts which substantiated (for many non-Māori) a belief that New Zealand was founded on an equality between Māori and Pākehā. For generations to follow New Zealand was held up as the gold standard for having ‘the best race relations in the world’. *The New Zealand Constitution Act 1852: An Act which allowed Māori males over 21 the same rights as European males over 21 to vote*. However, qualification to do so was based on European land tenure thereby effectively denying most Māori, who owned land collectively, the right to vote or participate in parliamentary processes. Approximately only 100 Māori, out of a total electorate of 5849 voted in the first general election in 1853. See: Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “Setting up the Māori seats,” *New Zealand History*, November 28, 2016. <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/Māori-and-the-vote/setting-up-seats> (accessed December 31, 2016).

Yet Māori cultural practices ‘of the past’ were not ignored when called upon to showcase New Zealand’s unique heritage, with historian Graham Butterworth wryly noting, “interest in dead Maoris admittedly did not necessarily extend to their living descendents”.<sup>5</sup> It was not until the rapid urbanisation of Māori following the Second World War that Pākehā were forced, to privately, publicly, and politically, re-evaluate their relationships with Māori.

## Urbanisation

The Second World War was not only a momentous event on the world stage, but also on smaller stages all around the globe. Many Māori who enlisted from the rural ‘backblocks’ viewed their participation in the war as “the price of citizenship”.<sup>6</sup> By the war’s end, the “heroism and prowess” of the 28<sup>th</sup> (Māori) Battalion was celebrated as part of New Zealand’s proud national narrative.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Māori returned servicemen and their families remained “second grade citizens” in their own country.<sup>8</sup> If war was the price of citizenship, then the Māori Battalion, who had a casualty rate fifty per cent higher than any other battalion, had not only paid in full, but were short-changed at the end of the day.<sup>9</sup> Wartime bravery did not translate into peacetime equality. What the war effort had brought, however, was a fixed pattern of accelerated urban migration as Māori left their rural communities to live and work in larger towns and cities. In 1973, demographer Campbell Gibson wrote that to the best of his knowledge:

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*The Māori Representation Act 1867*: An Act creating four electoral seats specifically for Māori. However, the four seats gave Māori far less representation in Parliament than the general seats gave Europeans. See: Rawiri Taonui, “Ngā māngai – Māori representation - Representation in Parliament,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, July 15, 2016. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/zoomify/33905/Māori-representation-act-1867> (accessed December 31, 2016); New Zealand Parliament, “The Origins of the Māori Seats,” *Parliamentary Business*, May 2009. <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/parl-support/research-papers/00PLLawRP03141/origins-of-the-m%C4%81ori-seats> (accessed September 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Graham Butterworth, “A Rural Maori Renaissance? Maori Society and Politics 1920 to 1951.” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 81, no. 2 (1972): 163.

<sup>6</sup> Apirana Ngata, *The Price of Citizenship: Ngarimu V.C.* (Wellington: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1943). A notable absence from the war were Māori largely from Taranaki and Tainui–Waikato. Their objection was due to their land having been confiscated for the so-called rebellion against the British Crown in the 1860s.

<sup>7</sup> Bronwyn Labrum, “Developing “the Essentials of Good Citizenship and Responsibilities” in Maori Women: Family Life, Social Change, and the State in New Zealand, 1944-70,” *Journal of Family History* 29, no. 4 (2004): 447.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Charles Bennet in his address to the 1964 Easter Reunion of the Māori Battalion in Gisborne.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “Impact,” New Zealand History, December 20, 2012.

<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/Māori-and-the-second-world-war/impact> (accessed September 2016).

the urbanization of the Māori population since 1936 has been more rapid than the urbanization of any national population or of any other sizable ethnic subpopulation at any time in history.<sup>10</sup>

By 1945, twenty-five per cent of Māori were urban dwellers and this increased to sixty-four per cent in 1966 and over seventy percent in 1971.<sup>11</sup> Anthropologist Joan Metge believed the ‘big three’ motivations behind Māori urban migrations were work, money, and pleasure.<sup>12</sup> Māori were moving to cities in anticipation of freedom and opportunity.<sup>13</sup> But with the opportunities also came difficulties. Firstly, at a political level, the Māori war effort was seen by many white New Zealanders to have ushered in a “broader sense of equality in social citizenship”. However, Māori were not as convinced.<sup>14</sup> In effect, it was again a case of a legislative sleight of hand and Pākehā illusion, where policies and practice outcomes were not necessarily one and the same.<sup>15</sup> Once the war ended, Māori, who during wartime had realised a greater degree of autonomy over their own affairs, were again subjugated to Pākehā bureaucracy and systems, which arguably hindered rather than helped Māori to achieve social and economic advancement.<sup>16</sup> For example, during the war years, the Māori War Effort Organisation (MWEO) was a hugely successful and fully functioning pan-tribal organisation which thrived under Māori leadership and autonomy. Yet post-war, the organisation, despite Māori resistance, was incorporated into the Department of Native Affairs, and became increasingly ineffectual under government administration.<sup>17</sup> Having paid the price of citizenship, Māori did not expect that such paternalistic attitudes, from the state, would prevail. But they did.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell Gibson, “Urbanization in New Zealand: A Comparative Analysis,” *Demography* 10, no. 1 (1973): 82.

<sup>11</sup> Labrum, “Developing the Essentials of Good Citizenship”, 447; Erin Keenan, “Stories of Continuity, Times of Change? Māori Oral Histories of Twentieth-Century Urbanisation in New Zealand,” in *Exploring Urban Identities and Histories*, ed. Christine Hansen and Kathleen Butler (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2013), 162

<sup>12</sup> Joan Metge, *A New Maori Migration: Rural and Urban Relations in Northern New Zealand* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1964), 128.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Moon, *New Zealand in the Twentieth Century: The Nation, the People* (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2011), 307. For an intimate view of Māori urbanisation (from a rural North Auckland settlement to Auckland city), from a Māori perspective, and illustrating Māori agency see: Melissa Matutina Williams, *Panguru and the City: Kāinga Taui, Kāinga Rua: An Urban Migration History* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Labrum, “Developing the Essentials of Good Citizenship”, 447, 448.

<sup>15</sup> For examples see: Monty Soutar, *Nga Tama Toa: The Price of Citizenship: C Company 28 (Maori) Battalion 1939-1945* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd, 2008), 373 and Claudia Orange, “An Exercise in Maori Autonomy: The Rise and Demise of the Maori War Effort Organisation,” in *The Shaping of History: Essays from the New Zealand Journal of History*, ed. Judith Binney (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001), 71.

<sup>16</sup> Soutar, *Nga Tama Toa*, 37. See also: Orange, “An Exercise in Maori Autonomy”, 62-77.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “Difficult times,” *New Zealand History*, January 13, 2016. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/maori-war-effort-organisation/difficult-times> (accessed December 31, 2016); Ministry for Culture and Heritage, “An uneasy compromise,” *New Zealand History*, December 20, 2012. <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/Māori-war-effort-organisation/an-uneasy-compromise> (accessed September 2016).

Secondly, at the private and personal level, Māori were still struggling to be fully accepted within mainstream New Zealand society. Anthropologist Bernard Kernot, in a 1964 article on Māori-European relationships, found that:

Europeans do not welcome Māori as neighbours. They fear depreciation in the value of their land, they object to Māori behaviour in respect to drink, sex and language, and they are anxious lest their children pick up skin diseases and dirty heads from Māori children at school.<sup>18</sup>

Pākehā anxieties fuelled hostilities towards Māori. Lorraine, whose testimony was presented in Chapter Three, was surprised by the hostile attitudes of her otherwise kind and respectable mother. But for Lorraine's mother, there was the need to keep up appearances and fraternising with Māori risked a "loss of status with other Europeans".<sup>19</sup> One Pākehā woman reported losing Pākehā friends because of her contact with Māori and illustrates the fears and hypocrisy at play:

whenever I meet my Maori friends on the street I always say "good-day" to them, no matter who I am with. This is very different from some of the other pakehas here who only greet the Maoris if they are walking by themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The same woman continues to talk about her friendships with Māori, which was unusual at the time, given her middle-class background and her husband's position in the community. Yet, the assimilationist attitudes of the time are also evident as she unselfconsciously describes one of her closest Māori friends:

Mrs. Brown is really a fine type of Maori woman, she is almost a pakeha in her ways, you know, except she speaks Maori and knows all those Maori songs.<sup>21</sup>

As evidenced, while negative attitudes about Māori were commonplace, they were not always publicly announced.<sup>22</sup> Psychologist Richard H. T. Thompson, recognising that "the public ideals of tolerance towards Maori makes it difficult to assess the unofficial but

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<sup>18</sup> Bernard Kernot, "Maori-European Relationships and the Role of Mediators," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 73, no. 2 (1964): 174.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Kernot, "Maori-European Relationships", 175.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Beaglehole and Pearl Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1946), 316.

<sup>21</sup> Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 316.

<sup>22</sup> See: Later in this section under Mixed marriages and Half-castes. See also: David Paul Ausubel, *The Fern and the Tiki: An American View of New Zealand National Character, Social Attitudes, and Race Relations* (Massachusetts: Christopher Publishing House, 1977).

effective attitudes of European New Zealanders to this group of their fellow countrymen”, devised a study in 1959 entitled “European Attitudes to Maoris”. Thompson found that despite Pākehā “public ideals of tolerance”, underlying racism and negative stereotypes remained commonplace.<sup>23</sup> The study revealed particularly negative attitudes to Māori, mixed marriage, and ‘half-caste’ children.<sup>24</sup>

Research undertaken in the 1960s on Māori-Pākehā relations by social anthropologist John Harré foresaw an increase in marriages between Pākehā women and Māori men.<sup>25</sup> Of particular relevance are the descriptions of “Pakeha girls” and their interest in meeting with “Maori boys” new to the city.<sup>26</sup> Harré states:

Maori boys have the reputation, and rightly so, of being excellent dancers ... they are thus in demand at all modern dance halls and some Pakeha girls are attracted to places which Maori boys are known to frequent ... a Maori band playing ‘pop’ music attracts the Maori and Island boys, and the combination of these two attracts the Pakeha girls.<sup>27</sup>

While the sexual revolution of the 1960s did not raise the social status of women, it did promote greater sexualised femininity.<sup>28</sup> Harré reports:

There are a number of Pakeha girls who believe that Maori men are better equipped sexually than Pakehas and attempt to meet them because of this. Many Māori men are aware of this and take advantage of it.<sup>29</sup>

What Harré did not report on was the sexual double standard which was firmly in place. On the one hand, women were being told in magazines and books to make themselves both attractive and desirable for men, as they were encouraged to anticipate sexually fulfilling experiences (albeit strictly within the confines of marriage). On the other hand, women were expected to behave demurely and were charged with being solely responsible for preventing pre-marital sex.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard H. T. Thompson, “European Attitudes to Maoris: A Projective Approach,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 68, no. 3 (1959): 205.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, “*European Attitudes to Maoris*”, 208-209.

<sup>25</sup> John Harré, *Maori and Pakeha: A Study of Mixed Marriages in New Zealand* (Wellington: Reed, 1966), 145.

<sup>26</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Sandra Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine: A New History of New Zealand Women since They Won the Vote* (Auckland: Viking, 1993), 142.

<sup>29</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Garton, “‘Fit Only for the Scrap Heap’: Rebuilding Returned Soldier Manhood in Australia after 1945.” *Gender and History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 51; Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 7.

For some young people, the anti-authoritarian and revolutionary movements of the 1960s were tied to sexual freedom. White middle-class morality and moral puritanism were viewed as expressions of class domination and patriarchy. Socialising within mixed gendered and racial groups was a political statement and a chance for young adults to resist the social establishment and ideals of their parents. Harré observes:

A survey of mixed dating at the Teachers' Colleges indicated that the parents of many of the Pakeha students were thought by the students to be prejudiced in their behaviour towards Maoris. In some cases where such students had developed more tolerant attitudes they went out of their way to mix with Maoris in defiance of, or in reaction to, their parents' attitudes.<sup>31</sup>

Harré further notes a status gain “experienced by some Pakeha girls who found it especially gratifying to be seen in public with someone who stood out, even if only by virtue of his colour”.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the long held social taboo associated with sexual intimacy between white women and non-white men was still evident. Harré writes:

Pakeha girls at university who dated Maori men lost status in the eyes of Pakeha men, but Pakeha men did not lose status when dating a Maori girl – status loss only happened if he married her.<sup>33</sup>

While both Māori men and women were seen as being less sexually inhibited than Pākehā, Māori women were particularly vilified.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps this vilification was part of the sexual double-standard where it was the accepted norm for men (Māori or Pākehā) to pursue sexual activity and to be the initiators in any romance, while it was the prescribed norm for women to remain sexually innocent. Naivety, and even a feigned uninterest in sex, was viewed as virtuous. This double standard was not part of Māori culture prior to colonisation and the introduction of Christian morality.<sup>35</sup> Māori women were therefore

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<sup>31</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 56.

<sup>32</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 62.

<sup>34</sup> See: Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 116; Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 61.

<sup>35</sup> Māori women's sexuality and sexual exploits have traditionally been celebrated in poetry, songs, stories, and oral histories. For examples see: Ani Mikaere, *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Māori Women of the Colonisation of Tikanga Māori* (Auckland: International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education and A. Mikaere, 2003), 37-46

erroneously judged as “naturally promiscuous, easily led into temptation, and could not make a good wife or a constant and faithful partner”.<sup>36</sup>

Harré reported that because many Pākehā men considered Māori women sexually loose, they were especially sought after by seamen at the dance halls. In apparent support of this view, “...the police told me that the majority of girls who ‘get involved’ on visiting ships are Maoris”.<sup>37</sup> Historian Angela Wanhalla concurs that Māori women were assumed to be sexually promiscuous, a notion which was even emphasised by Pākehā groups providing sex education in the 1960s.<sup>38</sup> However, Wanhalla argues that contrary to the popular belief at the time, the problem was not so much Māori women, but social conditions and economic structures which left Māori women vulnerable.<sup>39</sup>

The term ‘urban drift’ or ‘urban flood’ is perhaps better described as ‘Pākehā panic’ as young Māori were increasingly moving to urban areas and socialising with Pākehā in greater numbers. Notwithstanding social and parental disapproval, this led to an increase in inter-racial marriages and liaisons, and a subsequent increase in the number of ‘mixed’ or ‘half-caste’ children. Historically, half caste children and their families had been well-integrated within Māori communities where their existence did not disturb Pākehā society.<sup>40</sup> However, ‘half-castes’ became problematic for Pākehā New Zealand as more Pākehā women were giving birth to mixed-race babies. If these children were not placed for adoption, then their mothers would either have to marry the father, or care for the child within her family. Either way, “coloured blood” or “a bit of the tar brush” would visibly colour, or taint, the whole family. Given the negative attitudes towards Māori, it is not surprising that Pākehā women pregnant to Māori men were generally compelled, either by direct pressure from family and/or professionals or indirect pressures by society, to have their children placed for adoption.

In his interviews with mixed-race couples, Harré discovered that some of these marriages were due to the first child being conceived out of wedlock.<sup>41</sup> The belief that Māori had a lower standard of sexual morality than Pākehā, underlined a fear by Pākehā parents that if

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<sup>36</sup> Angela Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart: A History of Interracial Marriage in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014), 155.

<sup>37</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart*, 149; Claire Gooder, “*A History of Sex Education in New Zealand, 1939-1985*,” (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2010), 151-54.

<sup>39</sup> Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart*, 148-49.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Binney, ““In-between” Lives: Studies from within a Colonial Society,” in *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, eds. Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), 116.

<sup>41</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 74.



their child, particularly a daughter, dated a Māori then pregnancy would result.<sup>42</sup> Yet New Zealand had an exceptionally high proportion of children conceived ex-nuptially.<sup>43</sup>

Sociologist Lesley Patterson estimates that over half of all New Zealand women marrying in the late 1960s were already pregnant at the time of marriage.<sup>44</sup>

A point noted by both John Harré and American psychologist David Ausubel, was that white New Zealanders were often reluctant to detail their objections to Māori-Pākehā couplings if it showed them as prejudiced.<sup>45</sup> Harré draws particular attention to a code of acceptable behaviour, where unqualified prejudice against Māori would be seen as “very bad form”.<sup>46</sup> Such an attitude highlights the inconsistencies and self-delusions of many white New Zealanders in regards to race relations.<sup>47</sup> Harré provides examples of the equivocal reasons given for disapproving of mixed relationships including:

It's better to stick to your own race

It's disgraceful the number of Pakeha girls you see with Maori boys these days [without any explanation as why it's disgraceful]

It's just asking for trouble.<sup>48</sup>

Māori parents could also be less than enthusiastic about their child marrying a Pākehā, although their reasons were generally less ambiguous. Some voiced concern about their son or daughter not being accepted and welcomed by their in-laws, while others wanted their children to marry Māori as a way to preserve and maintain Māori cultural traditions.<sup>49</sup> However Māori parental objection, according to Harré, was less severe with Māori parents usually only stating their preference. Interestingly, Harré notes that:

both Maori and Pakeha view mixed ancestry in the same way – each considers the smallest amount of Maori blood makes a Maori. The difference is that for Pakeha this acts as an excluding device; while for Maori its effects are inclusive.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 70.

<sup>43</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Lesley Patterson, “Parenting - Marriage, separation and sole parenting,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, June 23, 2015. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/parenting/page-3> (accessed December 31, 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 83.

<sup>46</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 83.

<sup>47</sup> See: Ausubel, *The Fern and the Tiki*, 149-157

<sup>48</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 65.

<sup>49</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 61; Ausubel, *The Fern and the Tiki*, 166.

<sup>50</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 136.

In his interviews, Harré found that some Pākehā parents never accepted their child's Māori partner, or their 'part-Māori' grandchildren.<sup>51</sup> One Dutch migrant who married a Māori woman could not understand the attitudes of many Pākehā New Zealanders stating that in "Europe the girls of Polynesia are always depicted as very desirable".<sup>52</sup> Such a statement is mirrored in adoption practices. While it was often difficult to come by Pākehā couples willing to adopt a Māori child, my own findings from interviews and personal experience show new immigrants to New Zealand were often more inclined to accept a Māori child who had been placed for adoption.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps having a 'native' child (or wife) helped new immigrants to feel more at home in their new country, and their exotic stereotype of Māori had not yet been tarnished with New Zealand's particular brand of home-grown racism.

While most, if not all, New Zealand historians have conceded that prejudice and discrimination against Māori played a part in New Zealand's colonising history, the magnitude and consequences of such discrimination is contested.<sup>54</sup> Like most non-Māori New Zealanders, Pākehā historians have generally continued to minimise the effects of racism in New Zealand as they gauge the treatment of Māori as favourable in comparison with other Indigenous populations.<sup>55</sup> However some scholars, such as Ausubel, rightly asserted that in New Zealand race relations:

are not nearly as good as people think or claim they are ... [with white New Zealanders] determined ... to feel self-righteously virtuous and superior to racial bigots in other countries, but at the same time to indulge all of their own biases and discriminatory practices.<sup>56</sup>

If up until rapid urbanisation following the Second World War, Māori had been out of sight, they had also been out of the mind of the wider population. One benefit for Māori was that Māori communities had been able to retain relative autonomy over their kin relationships, family structures, and child rearing practices without intense government intervention. Arguably, this was one reason there was less overt pressure for Māori women to have their children placed for adoption. It was expected within Māori society that an

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<sup>51</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> While still a minority, it has not been uncommon for Māori adoptees I have spoken with, to have had at least one adoptive parent from either Holland or England. Lorraine had stressed that her step-father who was Dutch had seen her son after birth and had commented on what "a nice little boy" he was, compared to her mother who had made derogatory remarks about his Māori ancestry.

<sup>54</sup> James Belich, "Myth, Race, and Identity in New Zealand," in *The Shaping of History: The New Zealand Journal of History*, ed. Judith Binney (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001), 357.

<sup>55</sup> Keith Sinclair, "Why Are Race Relations in New Zealand Better Than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota?" *New Zealand Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (1971): 121.

<sup>56</sup> Ausubel, *The Fern and the Tiki*, 150.

illegitimate child would be absorbed into existing extended family networks.

Anthropologists Earnest and Pearl Beaglehole write from the perspective of their observations of living in a rural Māori settlement on the Māori attitude to illegitimate children:

[It] is so different from the pakeha attitude. It is probably true to say that the Maori has never become so completely obsessed with the tie-up of sex and sin that is so characteristic of pakeha culture ... together with the basic family attitude of co-operativeness and friendliness to everyone closely allied by blood to the family, makes it easy for the Maori family to undertake the care of an illegitimate child. To the middle-class pakeha family, competitive-minded, budget –ridden, standard-of-living anxious, the arrival of another child in the family must be planned for ... To the Maori, however ... the unplanned child is the normal child. It can always be squeezed into the elastic family.<sup>57</sup>

Yet with urbanisation, and expanded welfare payments, came increased scrutiny and intervention in the lives of Māori families and their children.<sup>58</sup> The *Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act 1945* finally ushered in equal levels of benefit payments for Māori, who prior to the Act received less in payments than Pākehā.<sup>59</sup> With more income and the move from rural areas, Māori welfare officers within the Department of Māori Affairs were to oversee and instruct Māori families as they embraced ‘modernity’, intervening “in ways that made their work both acceptable and extremely useful to Maori families”.<sup>60</sup> Budgeting advice, home maintenance, assistance with forms and applications were staples of their work. However, in reality Māori welfare officers “dealt with every facet of their clients’ lives ... [and their] work went well beyond the regulatory surveillance duties required of child welfare officers”.<sup>61</sup> Māori welfare officers were often caught between helping their clients to successfully navigate Pākehā society, and defending those same clients from Pākehā bigotry and disparagement. Furthermore, within other government departments, Māori welfare officers “were looked down upon and misunderstood”, and even within the Department of Māori Affairs paternalism and racism remained entrenched.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> Bronwyn Labrum, “‘Bringing Families Up to Scratch’: The Distinctive Workings of Maori State Welfare, 1944-1970.” *New Zealand Journal of History* 36, no.2 (2002), 163.

<sup>59</sup> Labrum, “Bringing Families Up to Scratch”, 162.

<sup>60</sup> Labrum, “Bringing Families Up to Scratch”, 163.

<sup>61</sup> Labrum, “Bringing Families Up to Scratch”, 164-165.

<sup>62</sup> Labrum, “Bringing Families Up to Scratch”, 179. With the exception of Tipi Ropiha (1948-1957) successive ministers of the Department of Māori Affairs were Pākehā illustrating the paternalistic nature of state services.

Not surprisingly it was in the area of family work, including adoptions, that Māori welfare officers and child welfare officers had the most contact.<sup>63</sup> Tensions between the two were not uncommon.<sup>64</sup> The care of unmarried Māori mothers, and the placement of children for adoption, was a particularly contentious point. Māori welfare officers, and the Māori Women's Welfare League, did not automatically assume an illegitimate child should be placed for adoption. Rather they encouraged the mother to contact her family, advocating that the whānau should be included in any decision in the long-term care of a related child. On the other hand, child welfare officers, focused on what they perceived were the best interests of the child, and the mother's right to confidentiality, and were loath to even inform Māori kin of a pregnancy and birth.<sup>65</sup> Aside from departmental conventions, common negative stereotypes about Māori were likely to have influenced child welfare officers in their stance. The Beagleholes uncovered prevalent attitudes of Pākehā New Zealanders with remarks "that often more correctly represents the real and private opinions of an individual than the guarded statements he issues for public consumption".<sup>66</sup> In private interviews with the Beagleholes, Pākehā people from different walks of life described Māori as "liars", "inferior", "thieves", "unfriendly to Pakehas", "dirty", "sullen", "lazy", "cheeky" and, perhaps a little more kindly, but no less derogatory, "good-hearted but stupid".<sup>67</sup> One district official was quoted as saying that it is always best to assume, "unless proved to the contrary, all Maoris are liars, stealers, and adulterers. But when proved to the contrary, the Maoris are generally respectful of property and about as moral sexually as the average low-class pakehas".<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, many negative judgements and stereotypes were made by Pākehā in regard to Māori homes. Yet Māori homes were used in different ways than Pākehā homes, as "Maori collective and extended family social structures were at odds with [a] nuclear individualistic focus".<sup>69</sup> In Māori homes there were usually more family members living together under one roof coupled with less income available for everyday needs – which in the language of government officials equated to overcrowded, dirty, and impoverished. In truth, though, "living conditions were a huge problem for Maori families".<sup>70</sup> But the problem was more

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<sup>63</sup> Labrum, "Bringing Families Up to Scratch", 177.

<sup>64</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187-188; Labrum, "Bringing Families Up to Scratch", 177.

<sup>65</sup> See: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 188-189 for a first person account illustrating the difference in approach between Maori welfare officers and the Maori Women's Welfare League, and child welfare officers.

<sup>66</sup> Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 308.

<sup>67</sup> Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 307-309.

<sup>68</sup> Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 311.

<sup>69</sup> Labrum, "Bringing Families Up to Scratch", 168.

<sup>70</sup> Labrum, "Bringing Families Up to Scratch", 161.

systemic than individual. Historian Bronwyn Labrum joins other historians in bringing to attention the colour bar in place which adversely affected Māori. Labrum notes, “there was a colour bar in jobs, the rental and real estate markets, when being served in hotels, with seating at cinemas, and even at hairdressers”.<sup>71</sup> In short, Māori were discriminated against in many aspects of their lives and were often unable to afford buying a home, while excluded from renting suitable accommodation.

The colour bar also extended to notions of dating practices, and marriage. During the years of rapid urbanisation, one white New Zealander commented:

When a white girl marries a Maori. She gets dragged down to his level. But when a white man marries a Maori girl, why that’s different, because he nearly always brings her up to his level. This shows that the best way to improve the Maori is to have white men marry all the Maori girls.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, ‘race-mixing’, and by inference having mixed race children, was more acceptable if the mother was Māori. In *Matters of the Heart*, Wanhalla recognises that mixed Māori-Pākehā intermarriages and unions have been conducted in New Zealand since the arrival of the first Europeans, and that “successive governments and their agents saw interracial marriage as an important part of the push to create ‘one people’”.<sup>73</sup> I would argue this push was also for land and resources, and highly gendered – meaning up until the 1960s not all, but most, interracial liaisons were between Māori women and Pākehā men. Historian and feminist writer, Sandra Coney, observed that throughout New Zealand’s colonising history, marriages between Pākehā women and Māori men were unusual and severely frowned upon within Pākehā society.<sup>74</sup> Attitudes, reported in the public press as early as 1873, are revealing:

I, for one, would sooner see any female relative in the grave, than sharing the residence (however palatial) or the attentions (however polished) of any Maori, even though he might be removed by three generations from the cannibalism of his ancestors.<sup>75</sup>

Such sentiments were still thriving a century later. It seems likely, then, that an illegitimate ‘half-caste’ child would be less problematic if the mother was Māori and kept with the

<sup>71</sup> Labrum, “Bringing Families Up to Scratch”, 161.

<sup>72</sup> Beaglehole, *Some Modern Maoris*, 313.

<sup>73</sup> Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart*, xiii.

<sup>74</sup> Coney, *Standing in the Sunshine*, 180.

<sup>75</sup> “Maori Misegeneration,” *The Grey River Argus*, April 8 1873.

mother's family. As already noted, generally speaking, in Māori families children born out of wedlock were well cared for, with practices of whāngai and customary extralegal marriages remaining commonplace.

Harré reported that “many Maori girls who left the country for the city were aiming at marriage with a Pakeha”.<sup>76</sup> Leaving close-knit and isolated rural communities provided both men and women the opportunity to mix with, and possibly marry, Pākehā. In her interview, presented in the previous chapter, Aroha had said:

I had vowed when I was a little girl, I will never marry a Māori. Okay. Now you must understand – I will never marry a Māori – because the sad thing for me is my father represented Māori. My father represented being a male. And so the answer was I vowed in my heart that I'll never marry a Māori.<sup>77</sup>

While such a view may be extreme, it was not isolated. My mother who came from a loving family, with no history of physical abuse, had also desired to marry a Pākehā. She said of her move to the city in the late 1950s that she viewed Māori men like brothers or cousins and was attracted to my Pākehā father because she found him exciting and different. She also believed the way of the future was ‘Pākehā’ and she wanted to give her children the best chance of success. As sociologist Barbara Harrison states: “Nearly two centuries of prejudice in New Zealand has had an effect on the present generation of both Pākehā and Māori”.<sup>78</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, many Māori, like my mother, lived part of their lives with the effects of internalised racism and cultural stigma. Yet, while they tried to adapt to ‘city life’ and ‘Pākehā ways’ most could not help but hold on to Māori values which were intrinsically part of their upbringing and way of approaching life.<sup>79</sup> Many Māori lived a life conforming to “European behaviour in public, while continuing to think and, to a degree, act as Maori in private”.<sup>80</sup> Despite the popular belief amongst many Pākehā and the state that Māori culture “would ‘blend’ out of existence”, this did not happen.<sup>81</sup> Māori wanting to take up

<sup>76</sup> Harré, *Maori and Pakeha*, 57.

<sup>77</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>78</sup> Barbara Harrison, review of “*Proud to Be White? A Survey of Pakeha Prejudice in New Zealand*,” by Angela Ballara, *Pacific Studies* 12, no. 1 (1988): 182.

<sup>79</sup> For instance, maintaining kinship ties and hosting visiting family members (however distant), participating in, and financially contributing to, whānau and other Māori events and gatherings.

<sup>80</sup> Richard S. Hill, “Maori Urban Migration and the Assertion of Indigeneity in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1945-1975.” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 14, no 2 (2012): 265.

<sup>81</sup> Hill, “*Maori Urban Migration*”, 257.

Pākehā opportunities while maintaining their cultural values proved not to be mutually exclusive. In fact, historian Richard Hill maintains the mass movement of Māori to cities was foundational in the formation of a new wave of Māori renaissance beginning the 1970s.<sup>82</sup>

## Morality

In a rapidly changing social landscape, increased tensions between entrenched and shifting attitudes about race relations, family values, and women's liberation left many young New Zealanders forced to manoeuvre unfamiliar and previously uncharted territory. Young Māori often faced the added readjustment to being away from the strict social confines of their small communities and extended whānau supports, while adapting to living and working alongside Pākehā on Pākehā terms. Perhaps like my mother, other young Māori found the initial experience intoxicating. Due to opportunities arising from closer proximity, coupled with the excitement and new found freedoms of the 'younger generation' (both Māori and Pākehā), it is not surprising that there was an increase in intimate Māori-Pākehā relationships.<sup>83</sup> It is also not surprising that most Māori children placed for adoption had Pākehā mothers.<sup>84</sup> As repeatedly stated, Māori did not generally view an out-of-wedlock pregnancy and birth as catastrophic. A child's (il)legitimacy did not alter the fact that they were taonga who carried the lineage of their ancestors. The child had whakapapa and keeping the knowledge of that whakapapa was of upmost importance. For this reason, perhaps there was less pressure, from Māori communities and whānau, on young Māori women to have their child adopted via closed stranger adoption, and more hands ready to step in and support a child.<sup>85</sup>

On the other hand, Pākehā social mores generally placed unmarried mothers in an unenviable position. They and their unborn children were living proof that a moral code had been broken and steps would have to be taken to put a right to this wrong. In a paper presented at an international adoption conference in 1977, Karen Svendsen stated: "[b]eing sexual without evidence of that act brought no shame in itself, however becoming pregnant did".<sup>86</sup> The shame of an ex-nuptial pregnancy not only fell upon the mother but also upon

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<sup>82</sup> Hill, "Maori Urban Migration", 257. The impact of the Māori renaissance is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>83</sup> Hill, "Maori Urban Migration", 259.

<sup>84</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 187.

<sup>85</sup> Even in Aroha's case, it was the history of abuse and family violence which compelled Aroha to have her daughter placed for adoption through Social Welfare, rather than to allow her sister to whāngai her child.

<sup>86</sup> Karen Svendsen, "Themes of Aotearoa "Birthmothers" in *Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the International Conference on Adoption and Healing, Wellington New Zealand, 1997*, edited by Kees Sprengers, 323-328 (Wellington: New Zealand Adoption Education and Healing trust, 1997), 325.

her family.<sup>87</sup> Enormous pressure was put on unmarried mothers to have their children placed for adoption and the conditions under which most mothers spent their pregnancy seemed to reinforce the idea that they were “unable to control their own lives, let alone take responsibility for a child”.<sup>88</sup> Several approaches were used by families and professionals to influence birth mothers to place their child for adoption. Else notes that all the decisions were made by others both before and after the birth with the assumption the birth mother “...would *not* be keeping the baby”.<sup>89</sup>

Expectant mothers were threatened with being disowned, most often by the girl’s own mother.<sup>90</sup> Further, birth mothers were seldom informed of their rights and possible avenues to assist in keeping their child. Though arguably, the most convincing strategy in persuading unmarried mothers to sign the adoption order was for her to be told that the most loving thing she could do for her baby was to place the child for adoption into an emotionally and financially stable two-parent home.<sup>91</sup> However, the sleight of hand occurred after the adoption papers were signed, when the act of placing her child for adoption went from a loving one (good mother) to an uncaring one (bad mother). The mother was subsequently portrayed as someone who had given birth to an “unwanted baby”. The common social narrative told of “unwanted children” in popular press and successively repeated in terminology affected both the birth mothers and the adopted child. Adopted people came to believe that they had been “unwanted” and “given away” by mothers who had never loved them. Paradoxically, although most birth mothers felt they had little choice but to place their child for adoption, they also took on society’s views feeling responsible and guilty for having “given away” their babies.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Sheryn Gillard-Glass and Jan England, *Adoption New Zealand: The Never-Ending Story* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2002), 35.

<sup>88</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 38. Italics in original

<sup>90</sup> Janette Logan, “Adoption, Loss and Mental Health and Mental Health - Birth Mothers’ Experience,” in *International Conference on Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the international conference on adoption and healing, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 1997*, edited by Kees Sprengers, 88-93 (Wellington: New Zealand Adoption and Healing Trust, 1997), 89.

<sup>91</sup> Marian Quartly, Shurlee Swain and Denise Cuthbert, *The Market in Babies* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013), 54.

<sup>92</sup> Logan, “*Adoption, Loss and Mental Health*”, 89. See also: Daryl Higgins, *Impact of Past Adoption Practices: Summary of Key Issues from Australian Research: Final Report*, (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2010). Some effects of adoption are common to birth parents and adopted people i.e. issues with self-esteem, but the cause is different, e.g. “the impaired self-esteem of some mothers may have resulted from an inability to defend themselves against bullying. But an adopted person’s impaired self-esteem may derive from a belief that they were unwanted by their parents.” National Archives of Australia. “Effects.” *Forced Adoptions History Project*, 2017. <http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au/effects> (accessed September 2016).



Health researchers, Helen Wilson and Annette Huntington, claim that the good/bad mother dichotomy has long been a key feature of maternal discourse.<sup>93</sup> Mothers who failed the normative expectations of motherhood by becoming mothers outside of marriage were considered deviant and unfit to parent.<sup>94</sup> Unmarried mothers themselves often believed they would be unfit and inadequate parents, and this belief was reinforced by “the conditions under which most spent their pregnancy ... [which undermined] any vestige of self-confidence”.<sup>95</sup> Yet without emotional or financial support, and the stigma surrounding the conception of their children, feelings of inadequacy as a new mother should have been expected.<sup>96</sup> Unmarried mothers faced hostility and ostracism, not reassurance. Some birth mothers I have spoken to (including my own mother) had experienced the loss of a close family member prior to having a child placed for adoption. Karen Svendsen remarks that in her study fifty percent of birth mothers had lost a loved one prior to the adoption.<sup>97</sup> The loss of a close family member prior to a woman placing a child for adoption is not fully explored in this thesis, or more generally in adoption literature, and is a study which deserves further examination.

Birth mothers held many negative self-images, suffered from low self-esteem, and perceived themselves as bad and needing to be punished and to atone.<sup>98</sup> Punishment was easy to find, even if one was not looking for it. There are enough documented cases where mothers were purposely denied medical attention, or were treated harshly, because of their unmarried status, to suggest this was not an uncommon occurrence.<sup>99</sup> As previously stated, one reason for such punitive treatment was the belief that it was fitting punishment for her immorality and a deterrent from becoming pregnant outside of marriage again.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, international research proved this to be true for up to twenty per cent of first time unmarried mothers who, some scholars have argued, were either too physically or emotionally damaged to bear other children.<sup>101</sup> Examples of cruel treatment abound, but

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<sup>93</sup> Helen Wilson and Annette Huntington, “Deviant (M)others: The Construction of Teenage Motherhood in Contemporary Discourse,” *Journal of Social Policy* 35, no. 1 (2006): 61.

<sup>94</sup> Wilson and Huntington, “Deviant (M)others”, 61

<sup>95</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 37.

<sup>96</sup> Aroha, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Svendsen, “*Themes of Aotearoa*”, 324.

<sup>98</sup> Logan, “*Adoption, Loss and Mental Health and Mental Health*”, 89.

<sup>99</sup> See: Audrey Marshall and Margaret McDonald, *The Many-Sided Triangle: Adoption in Australia*. (Melbourne: Melbourne University, 2001).

<sup>100</sup> Gillian R Palmer, “*Birth Mothers: Adoption in New Zealand and the Social Control of Women, 1881-1985*” (MA diss., University of Canterbury, 1991), 95-96.

<sup>101</sup> Isabel Andrews, “Secondary Infertility and Birth Mothers,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 30, no. 1 (2010). Andrews concludes that between 13 and 20 per cent of birth mothers did not have other children. Compare with: Higgins, *Impact of Past Adoption Practices*. Higgins finds 14 per cent of birth mothers did not have other children.

one interview with a nurse who attended the delivery of a baby whose mother was eleven years old is particularly distressing given the mother's age and that she was obviously the victim of rape. The interviewee stated:

It had never occurred to me that a girl so young could have babies. She was a very afraid little girl. The midwife stood there and if the girl so much as peeped she said, "well, you got yourself into it, you can get yourself out of it, and don't expect any pain relief from us, anyway it might teach you a lesson" – that sort of comment. I remember going to the head of the bed and holding her hand, and trying to convey to her that somebody cared. I got reprimanded for doing that.<sup>102</sup>

It was often a simple act of kindness, such as holding a hand, that was missing and which made the ordeal of birth all the more distressing. Even simple indifference added to the condemnation and punishment. Conversely, small kindnesses were remembered and appreciated. Jane Stojanovic, who worked as a midwife in maternity wards in the 1970s, presents the argument that the birthing process had been thoroughly medicalised and "women were isolated from their support systems and required to adapt to an alien institutions and routines at a time when they were at their most vulnerable".<sup>103</sup> There was immense pressure on severely overworked staff, almost all of who were single women with no personal experience of childbirth, in a culture which was hierarchical, disciplinary, and oppressive. Stojanovic suggests that such circumstances may have contributed to a lack of empathetic care towards new mothers.<sup>104</sup> Stojanovic does not mention unmarried mothers, but one can assume that their negative experiences were intensified as they carried the additional shame and stigma of their particular situation.

## **Secrecy, Lies, and Invisibility**

Mothers lacked autonomy and their desires and concerns were downgraded and discredited.<sup>105</sup> It was therefore the prerogative of the hospitals and homes on how much contact the unmarried mother could have with her child. Some hospitals did not allow the mother to see the baby, taking the baby away from the mother immediately after delivery, some allowed the mother to see the child but have no further contact, while other places had the mother breast feed until the baby was placed for adoption. Whatever the practice

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<sup>102</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 87.

<sup>103</sup> Stojanovic, "Leaving Your Dignity at the Door", 15.

<sup>104</sup> Stojanovic, "Leaving Your Dignity at the Door", 15.

<sup>105</sup> Stojanovic, "Leaving Your Dignity at the Door", 15.

of the particular institution, Else notes that “staff commonly made blanket decisions” without asking the mother how much contact they wanted.<sup>106</sup>

Svendsen’s study found that secrecy and lies were often viewed by birth mothers as one of the most damaging aspects of their experience.<sup>107</sup> While it was claimed that the original reasons for secrecy were to protect the child from the stigma of illegitimacy (and adoption), and to protect the mother from the scandal of her illegitimate sexual activity, it also provided adoptive parents with the security that the child would be theirs with no interference from the birth parents and that any shame associated with possible infertility would be negated.<sup>108</sup> In effect, Gillian Palmer observed that secrecy was yet another form of punishment for the birth mother.<sup>109</sup> Not only was her child removed, but she was denied evidence that the birth had ever taken place.<sup>110</sup> Mothers felt like their lives were a lie. “They were mothers who were not mothers. Their children were not recognised”.<sup>111</sup>

Operationally, closed stranger adoption rendered birth mothers invisible.<sup>112</sup>

Another recurring theme in the literature, as well as evident in testimonies in this thesis, is the birth mothers’ experiences of ongoing loss, grief, and trauma.<sup>113</sup> As birth mothers were expected to put the birth of their child behind them, many were deprived of being able to grieve the loss of their child. Psychologists Arthur Sorosky, Annette Baran, and Reuben Pannor liken the experience to a “psychological amputation”.<sup>114</sup> Not surprisingly this suppressed grief has been identified as a key factor for many birth mothers subsequently developing higher rates of mental health issues in comparison to women who did not have children placed for adoption.<sup>115</sup> A 2010 report, entitled *Impact of past adoption practices: Summary of key issues from Australian research*, found that in Australia fifty-seven per cent of respondents to their survey exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Additionally, many respondents reported an overall lower life satisfaction than the national

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<sup>106</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 87.

<sup>107</sup> Svendsen, “*Themes of Aotearoa*”, 324. Baran and Pannor also observed that some of the psychological problems experienced by birth mothers, adopted people and adoptive parents seemed to be directly related to the anonymity, and secrecy of sealed records under closed stranger adoption. Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor. “Perspectives on Open Adoption.” *The Future of Children: ADOPTION* 3 no. 1 (1993): 119.

<sup>108</sup> Palmer, “*Birth Mothers*”, 72.

<sup>109</sup> Palmer, “*Birth Mothers*”, 79.

<sup>110</sup> Palmer, “*Birth Mothers*”, 78.

<sup>111</sup> Svendsen, “*Themes of Aotearoa*”, 324.

<sup>112</sup> Palmer, “*Birth Mothers*”, 72.

<sup>113</sup> See: Christine A Cole, *Releasing the Past: Mothers' Stories of Their Stolen Babies* (New South Wales: Sasko Veljanov, 2008); Joss Shawyer, *Death by Adoption* (Auckland: Cicada, 1979).

<sup>114</sup> Arthur D. Sorosky, Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle*. (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 56.

<sup>115</sup> National Archives of Australia, “Mothers.” *Forced Adoptions History Project*, 2017. <http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au/effects/mothers> (accessed September 2016).

average.<sup>116</sup> While it could be argued that self-respondents may have a bias and therefore report more negatively, numerous studies have concluded that grief and mourning continued to be experienced by the majority of birth parents years after relinquishment.<sup>117</sup> Australian psychologists, Robin Winkler and Margaret van Keppel, describe relinquishment as “a particularly lingering loss”, with mothers stating that:

compared with other stressful life-events, relinquishing their child was the most stressful event they have ever experienced. Many added the stress of relinquishment was long-lived.<sup>118</sup>

Further, Winkler and van Keppel found that forty-five per cent of mothers surveyed reported that their sense of loss had in fact intensified since their child had been placed for adoption with a further six per cent reporting the loss had remained the same. This loss had remained constant in some cases for up to three decades.<sup>119</sup>

Just as birth mothers were silenced and made invisible, so too were birth fathers (as Charles’ narrative in the previous chapter indicates). Else reports that the usual term used was “putative father” – the man the mother reputed the father to be.<sup>120</sup> Such a term cast doubt on the mother’s morality while providing a ready-made script for young men wanting to abandon their responsibilities. If an unmarried mother did want to keep her child she would almost certainly require financial assistance either from her family or the father of her child.<sup>121</sup> If the father was unwilling to acknowledge paternity, then the case would go to court. A 1966 report from the secretary of the MOMM found that taking a case to court was usually futile:

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<sup>116</sup> National Archives of Australia, “Mothers.”

<sup>117</sup> Shona Hobday, “So Long as We Both Shall Live: Once a Birth Mother, Always a Birth Mother.” In *Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the International Conference on Adoption and Healing, Wellington New Zealand, 1997*, edited by Kees Sprengers, 318-319 (Wellington: New Zealand: New Zealand Adoption and Healing Trust, 1997), 316-319; Reuben Pannor, Annette Baran, and Arthur D Sorosky, “Birth Parents Who Relinquished Babies for Adoption Revisited,” *Family Process* 17, no. 3 (1978): 335; Anne Brodzinsky, “Surrendering an infant for adoption: The birthmother experience,” in *The Psychology of Adoption*, edited by David M. Brodzinsky, and Marshall D. Schechter, 295-315 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 304.

<sup>118</sup> Robin Winkler and Margaret van Keppel, *Relinquishing Mothers in Adoption: Their Long-Term Adjustment. Institute of Family Studies Monograph No. 3* (Melbourne: Institute of Family Studies, 1984), 64.

<sup>119</sup> Winkler and van Keppel, “*Relinquishing Mothers*”, 58

<sup>120</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Up until 1973, with the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit, an unsupported mother could obtain a sickness benefit for the final three months of her pregnancy, and for three months post-delivery if she was breast feeding. Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 37.

so many of the girls have lost the case even though the young man knows perfectly well he's the father. It is altogether a humiliating experience.<sup>122</sup>

It was a humiliating experience because the unmarried mother was viewed as of lax moral standards with court judges seemingly swayed by the possibility that the father could be any of a number of men, and she was trying to find someone to 'pin the blame on'.<sup>123</sup> Social worker and researcher Helen Cunningham reported that the sense of abandonment by the child's father was often the greatest emotional stress during an unmarried mother's pregnancy and confinement.<sup>124</sup> As previously mentioned, some men did conform to the stereotype of a boyfriend who abandoned his girlfriend as soon as he knew she was pregnant, but this was not usually the case. From the early 1960s, Major Thelma Smith recalled that in her experience as Matron of Bethany in Auckland the strongest opposition did not come from the birth fathers but from others. The fathers she spoke to:

were extremely distressed and felt terrible about what had happened, but were completely at a loss about what to do .... In some cases the woman's parents, the institutions, or both kept the father at arm's length and prevented contact with the mother, letting her think he had deserted her.<sup>125</sup>

One unmarried mother who had her child placed for adoption is quoted in Else saying:

I know now my son's father did try to contact me. He called at my parent's home and had the door closed in his face. He called the [unmarried mothers'] home but was denied access. He wrote to me many times but I received no letters. He felt as I did – that the other didn't care. I believe now he suffered as much as I did.<sup>126</sup>

In fact, this was another sleight of hand. While some men did not want to marry the mother of their child, many others did. For example, the Australian Forced Adoptions History Project found that:

Some men who offered to marry or otherwise support the mother of their child were rejected by the mother's parents or by the professionals involved. In some cases, when the mother was under the age of 16, the

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<sup>122</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 15.

<sup>124</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 18.

<sup>125</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 19.

<sup>126</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 19-20.

father was threatened with arrest for carnal knowledge which could have resulted in criminal prosecution and imprisonment.<sup>127</sup>

The message given to many young men was to keep away from the mother and not make things worse for her. Until recently, very few birth fathers have spoken about their experiences.<sup>128</sup> Journalist and adopted person, Ann Howarth, quotes one father who said the adoption of his child was like “slow suffocation”.<sup>129</sup> Societal attitudes have been described as “crippling for birth fathers”, with many men carrying guilt and shame for years.<sup>130</sup> Guilt over what had happened to the mother and their child, and shame that they had not had the strength or courage to fight for their child.<sup>131</sup> They, like the mothers, often felt powerless against the overwhelming pressures applied by their parents and/or social workers and other ‘professionals’. In fact, researchers found that some adoption professionals held “the strongest negative opinions” about fathers and gave “short shrift to involvement with the birth father”.<sup>132</sup> Social workers, Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, argue that: “Professionals failed to consider the birthfather as having any rights whatsoever. In fact, the birthfather was seen as an intruder”.<sup>133</sup> Else suggests that when professionals did seek to involve the father, it was with the expectation that he would help to persuade the mother to agree to adoption.<sup>134</sup>

For Māori men, the experience of becoming a birth father may have followed a different route. If their extended families knew of the pregnancies, it would have been usual for the

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<sup>127</sup> National Archives of Australia. “Fathers.” *Forced Adoptions History Project*, 2017. <http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au/effects/fathers> (accessed September 12, 2016); See also: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 19.

<sup>128</sup> Dr Gary Clapton is a birth father who has undertaken research, and written on birth fathers and their experiences. See: Gary Clapton, *Birth Fathers and Their Adoption Experiences* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002); Gary Clapton, “Birth Fathers and Adoption: An Academic, Professional and Personal Stock-take of the Past and Present plus Some Future Challenges.” *Australian Journal of Adoption* 6, no. 1 (2012). <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/98265/20130416-0013/www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/aja/article/view/2559.html> (accessed January 29, 2017).

Other birth father studies include: Eva Y. Deykin, Patricia Patti and Jon Ryan, “Fathers of Adopted Children: A Study of the Impact of Child Surrender on Birth Fathers.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 58, no. 2 (1988); Celia Whitney, “Original Fathers: An Exploration into the Experiences of Birth Fathers Involved in Adoption in the Mid-20th Century.” *Adoption & Fostering* 28, no. 3. (2004): 52-61.

<sup>129</sup> Ann Howarth, *Reunion: Adoption and the Search for Birth Origins – The New Zealand Story* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1988), 182.

<sup>130</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 22.

<sup>131</sup> National Archives of Australia. “Fathers.” *Forced Adoptions History Project*, 2017. <http://forcedadoptions.naa.gov.au/effects/fathers> (accessed September 12, 2016); Nikki Hartmann, “Father Unknown: How birth fathers became invisible in early adoptions.” *Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)*, December 1, 2016. <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/article/2016/06/27/father-unknown-how-birth-fathers-became-invisible-early-adoptions> (accessed January 25, 2017).

<sup>132</sup> Marshall D Schechter and Doris Bertocci, “The Meaning of the Search,” in *The Psychology of Adoption*, eds. David M. Brodzinsky and Marshall Schechter (1990): 63.

<sup>133</sup> Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, “Open Adoption,” in *The Psychology of Adoption*, ed. by David M. Brodzinsky and Marshall D. Schechter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 324.

<sup>134</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 21.

family to want to care for the child.<sup>135</sup> However, under closed stranger adoption Māori kin, seeking to adopt a related child placed for adoption, were consistently denied the right to do so.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how closed stranger adoption silenced and made invisible birth parents who were conditioned, or coerced, to fit the roles both described and prescribed by others. Such silencing was essentially an erasure of self as birth mothers were denied the choice to mother, or even to grieve for their child placed for adoption. Birth fathers, if they knew about the pregnancy, were often shut out of the process as they too were silenced and denied rights to their child. Perhaps this was especially so for Māori fathers, as family members often wanted, and in some cases tried, to whāngai or adopt related children being placed for adoption. Social attitudes to gender roles and sexuality in effect made it possible, even easy, for men to abandon any responsibility for their ex-nuptial child and the child's mother, while simultaneously posing obstacles for men (or their kin) who did want involvement in their child's life.

The historical and ongoing effects of colonisation impacted on adoption practices. In general, Pākehā New Zealanders believed New Zealand to be a racially tolerant and egalitarian society. However, such thinking was an illusion which dominated both public and private spheres. This illusion became less convincing during the rapid urbanisation of Māori post World War II when many Pākehā encountering Māori for the first time, were covertly, if not openly, hostile. Nevertheless, increased encounters between Māori and Pākehā subsequently led to an increase in opportunities for sexual engagement and the birth of mixed-race children who were placed for adoption. Most of these children had Pākehā mothers and were adopted into Pākehā families.

The sleight of hand in terms of racial harmony and equality only went so far. The reality was that Māori children were harder to place than non-Māori children because of their “*Māori blood*”. The Pākehā mothers of Māori babies observed first-hand some of the negative racial stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination to which Māori were subjected.

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<sup>135</sup> Both Matiu (the father of Lorraine's child) and Charles had kin who would have taken their children as whāngai. In Matiu's case, his sister expressed to Lorraine that she was willing to legally adopt her nephew. This was something Lorraine did not agree to and which she would later regret. The mother of Charles' daughter did not want her child to be bought up by her paternal grandmother. Just as my mother, during the 1960s, had believed that a 'Pākehā life' would be the best thing for her children, perhaps these mothers also thought the same thing.

<sup>136</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 189-190.

In many ways, it was ‘business as usual’ for state practices in New Zealand which had always involved public illusions and legislative sleights of hand when dealing with Māori.

The next chapter will further examine some of the impacts of closed adoption on adopted people by more carefully examining adoption through the interconnecting sites of identity politics, psychology, and racial and adoption microaggressions.



## Chapter Five

### Adopted and In-Between

#### Introduction

In their testimonies in chapter three, Mere, Estelle, and Lucia poignantly illustrate how Māori who were adopted into Pākehā families are forced to navigate an ‘in-between space’, a space where they are ‘betwixt and between’, ‘neither, nor’.<sup>1</sup> This chapter is in many ways a response to those testimonies, highlighting both the concerns, and the conditions in society, which were touchstone moments for many Māori adoptees born during the period of closed adoption from the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s.

This chapter is therefore organised in two parts. In the first, I place the narratives into a historical context, allowing us to follow the changing political and social arena as Mere, Estelle, and Lucia moved from birth, through high school, and into adulthood. The chapter begins by examining two significant and related events which rose to prominence in New Zealand as the first sizeable generation of urban-born Māori continued to increase. One was the Māori renaissance, and the second was the state’s endorsement of biculturalism. I argue that both these events profoundly influenced the lives, situations, and choices of many Māori adoptees, and are vital to understanding the social and political environment shaping race relations, and identity formation, in New Zealand at the time when Māori adoptees were searching for their identities, at both a familial and cultural level.

In the second, I consider the ways in which, Mere, Estelle, Lucia, and other Māori adopted people, navigate the in-between space, which is at least three-fold for Māori adoptees, as they are positioned between their birth and adoptive families, between a Māori and Pākehā identity, and between having their behaviours and feelings overly pathologised while at the same time being required to integrate the traumatic and arguably “violent act” of closed stranger adoption without understanding and specialist support.<sup>2</sup> This chapter specifically explores the navigation, and intersections, of these in-between spaces through the lenses of

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Nation, “Betwixt and Between: An Exploration of Adoption Reunion Realities Following New Zealand Non-Maori Adoptions, from a Psychodynamic Perspective” *NZAP Forum: The Journal of The New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists* 7 (2001): 101; Ann Weaver and Ann Nation, “Post Reunion Realities,” in *Adoption and Healing: Proceedings of the International Conference on Adoption and Healing, Wellington New Zealand, 1997*, edited by Kees Sprengers, 267-272 (Wellington: New Zealand Adoption Education and Healing trust, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Joss Shawyer, *Death by Adoption* (Auckland: Cicada, 1979),1.

identity politics, psychology, and adoption and racial microaggressions.

## Identity Politics

As noted in previous chapters, since early contact between Māori and Europeans, inter-racial partnerships and subsequent mixed-race progeny has been wide-spread. “Half-caste” or “hawhe-kaehe” was a common term used by both Māori and Pākehā to describe Māori of mixed heritage.<sup>3</sup> In fact, from 1886 to 1926 the census undertook the recording of two separate types of half-caste: those living as Māori in ‘tribes’ and those living as Europeans in European settlements.<sup>4</sup> Demographer Ian Poole argues that during early settlement, most people of mixed-race ancestry in the North Island identified as Māori as most mixed-race families resided within the mother’s predominantly Māori community. Conversely, mixed-race families in the South Island resided mainly within the father’s predominantly white community and therefore identified primarily as white. This tendency for those with mixed Māori and Pākehā ancestry to associate more strongly with one parent’s background meant that, unlike some other mixed-raced peoples, the formation of a new independent identity did not officially occur.<sup>5</sup> Between 1926 and 1971, most people who identified themselves as “half or more Māori” were, for census purposes at least, enumerated as Māori.<sup>6</sup> However, in 1974 the *Māori Affairs Amendment Act* altered the definition of Māori to reflect the notion of self-identification. This 1974 legislation moved away from the discourse of ‘half-caste’ and blood quantum measurements of ‘race’, as identity politics and the ‘Māori renaissance’ ushered in a new era in “Māori-Pākehā contestation for space and legitimacy in New Zealand’s cultural politics”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Although, Lachy Paterson in his article “Hawhekaihe: Māori Voices on the Position Of ‘Half-Castes’ within Māori Society,” *The Journal of New Zealand Studies*, no. 9 (2002), 138, notes “a proportionately larger preoccupation with mixed race in the English-language press than in the Māori one”. Mention is particularly made of ‘half-castes’ as most Maori adopted under closed stranger adoption had white mothers and at the time of their birth (between 1955-1974) would have been designated a ‘half-caste’ or ‘part-Maori’ status. For instance, my own adoption file in 1966 records my ‘Race’ as ‘Part-Maori’.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Pool, *Te Iwi Maori: A New Zealand Population Past, Present and Projected* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1991), 18. Prior to the larger urban based Māori population from the 1960s onwards, the majority of mixed race children were parented by Māori mothers and white fathers.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Metis of Canada, Mestizo in Latin America, and Cape Coloureds in South Africa.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Meredith, “A Half-Caste on the Half-Caste in the Cultural Politics of New Zealand,” *Maori und Gesellschaft* (2000), 11.

<http://lianz.waikato.ac.nz/PAPERS/paul/Paul%20Meredith%20Mana%20Verlag%20Paper.pdf> (accessed January 19, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Meredith, “A Half-Caste on the Half-Caste”, 12-13.

Just eleven months after the *Māori Affairs Amendment Act 1974* was enacted, the *Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975* was passed which established the Waitangi Tribunal.<sup>8</sup> The Tribunal was created as the Crown grappled with major social and political pressures as a result of Māori demands on the state to act on promises undertaken at the signing of the Treaty in 1840.<sup>9</sup> The Waitangi Tribunal was “the first judicial body, a commission of inquiry”, which allowed Māori to litigate with the government over breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>10</sup> At this stage only claims dating from 1975 could be heard. Academic and Treaty negotiator Peter Addis maintains that for many New Zealanders, this was the first time that they had even considered that New Zealand might have some serious racial issues which needed resolving.<sup>11</sup> He states that “as New Zealanders many of us actually believed [that] ... New Zealand was the one place on the planet where racial harmony prevailed. ... so successful was the indoctrination through the 1950s and 1960s”.<sup>12</sup> As the illusion of racial harmony was being publicly exposed, the State moved to address past assimilationist practices by instigating a policy of biculturalism. The aim of biculturalism was to reset a new era in New Zealand’s colonial history where the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi were to foreground a more just and inclusive relationship between Māori and Pākehā.<sup>13</sup> In short, biculturalism represented the rejection of former assimilationist and integrationist policies encouraged by a new wave of Māori nationalism.<sup>14</sup>

However, Māori academic and researcher, Paul Meredith, points out that this new bicultural approach was contested in both meaning and application, as it was promoted within various institutional arrangements of government and civil society with varying success.<sup>15</sup> Where biculturalism was possibly the most successful was in its possibly unintentional encouragement of the further binary positioning of Māori and Pākehā

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<sup>8</sup> Richard S. Hill, “Settling historical Māori claims under the Treaty of Waitangi: An assessment of the first twenty-five years, 1989-2014,” in *Reconciliation, Representation and Indigeneity: ‘Biculturalism’ in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Peter Addis, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Richard S. Hill and Graeme Whimp (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 74.

<sup>9</sup> Hill, “*Settling historical Māori claims*”, 74

<sup>10</sup> Peter Addis, “New Zealand’s treaty of Waitangi reconciliation processes: A Maori treaty educators perspective,” in *Reconciliation, Representation and Indigeneity: ‘Biculturalism’ in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Peter Addis, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Richard S. Hill and Graeme Whimp (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Addis, “*New Zealand’s treaty of Waitangi reconciliation processes*”, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Addis, “*New Zealand’s treaty of Waitangi reconciliation processes*”, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Vaughan Bidois, “A Genealogy of Cultural Politics, Identity and Resistance: reframing the Māori-Pākehā binary,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9, no. 2 (2013): 147.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 136.

<sup>15</sup> Meredith, “*A Half-Caste on the Half-Caste*”, 13. For a Pākehā critique of biculturalism see: Richard Mulgan, *Maori Pakeha and Democracy* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1989), 74.

identities.<sup>16</sup> Māori academic and researcher, Vaughan Bidois, states that in response to Treaty politics, biculturalism, and the Māori renaissance, “cultural politics of resistance and counter resistance ... transpired as a result”.<sup>17</sup> A them versus us mentality, present since the colonialist era of “colonizer-colonised”, “civilized and savage”, was brought to the surface.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, Māori, aware that an assimilationist discourse was, and arguably still is, deeply ingrained in a large section of New Zealand society, promoted a visible and accentuated otherness in relation to Pākehā, convinced that such a fraction would prevent a return to all-consuming and prejudicial assimilationist policies.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, there was a cultural knee-jerk reaction by many Pākehā as they felt both “culturally and historically vilified” and that the utilisation of the colonial binary was “non-inclusive and racist”.<sup>20</sup> Whatever view is taken, identity politics from the mid-1970s onwards was undoubtedly one of marked polarity between Māori and Pākehā with little room for ethnic plurality.<sup>21</sup>

It is critical to comprehend the weight of this binary positioning as it provides an important context to the difficulties experienced by Lucia, Mere, and Estelle as they tried to fit into such a heavily bifurcated society, which ironically parallels the binary positioning between birth and adoptive families. Their quest for identity as Māori is an example of when the political becomes the personal. Their self-identification as Māori, whether or not they are physically identifiable as Māori or have knowledge of their whakapapa, is intrinsically linked to the social confines and contexts in which they were born, raised, and continue to live.

Yet this pressure of having to fit into, choose, or reflect an ethnic identity prescribed by others can be overwhelming. In her testimony, Estelle explained how while living outside of New Zealand she had felt a freedom where her ethnicity didn't matter and she wasn't “stuck” in the binary position of being either Māori or Pākehā. Further, in contemporary New Zealand society, race/racism is not based solely on skin colour (although skin colour will always be an easily recognisable marker), but on ‘racial’ origins, stereotypical traits, and the social marginalisation of particular groups.<sup>22</sup> This could be described as the racist

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<sup>16</sup> Bidois, “A Genealogy of Cultural Politics”, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Bidois, “A Genealogy of Cultural Politics”, 143.

<sup>18</sup> Bidois, “A Genealogy of Cultural Politics”, 144.

<sup>19</sup> Simone Drichel, “The Time of Hybridity.” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34, no. 6 (2008): 591.

<sup>20</sup> Bidois, “A Genealogy of Cultural Politics”, 147, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Meredith, “*A Half-Caste on the Half-Caste*”, 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Tahu Kukutai, “White Mothers, Brown Children: Ethnic Identification of Maori-European Children in New Zealand.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 5 (2007): 1153. Kukutai astutely acknowledges that “although persons of Māori parentage vary greatly with respect to skin colour and facial features, subtle distinctions may still be invoked to underscore difference”. i.e. Māori heritage. Tess Moeke-Maxwell,

ideology embedded in New Zealand history where Māori are viewed as lesser. Cultural anthropologist, Toon Van Meijl, describes how some Māori youth articulate this racist ideology as “identification as outcasts in daily practices of New Zealand society”.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this, Māori adopted into Pākehā families are often ascribed a Māori cultural identity because of their colour. Yet colour alone does not denote ‘Māoriness’. For instance, I have met four identifiably non-white adopted people who, without access to their father’s identity, have been left wondering if they are in fact of Māori descent. Witnessing their pained speculations as they agonise over assumptions (both their own and others’) is difficult to observe, in as much as it is difficult for them to find solace, and a place and genealogy to belong to. The first-hand experience of Australian cross-cultural adoptee, Gordon Matthews, exposes the pain and confusion of such a dilemma. In his memoir, *An Australian Son*, Matthews, who knew his mother was white, reveals how he was teased mercilessly because of his colour. At the private boys’ school, he attended he was bullied by his peers who identified him by the derogatory and racist terms of ‘Abo’ and ‘Boong’. Isolated by his peers, he himself began to accept the Aboriginal identity imposed upon him, and was recognised and accepted as such by the Australian Aboriginal people he worked with in the Public Service. This acceptance provided Matthews with a sense of security about his cultural identity and he lived in the belief he was of Aboriginal descent. However, in Matthews’ search for his birth parents, he discovered his father was not Australian Aboriginal but Sri Lankan. This knowledge renewed past fears and anxieties as his identity was once again thrown into confusion. Like Matthews, Māori adopted people must therefore find ways, besides their physical features or colouring, to support their identification as Māori. The most conclusive way to do this is through knowledge of whakapapa.<sup>24</sup>

## Whakapapa

For all people adopted under the ‘closed stranger’ era, their genealogical links are usually, at some point in their lives, something they wish to have knowledge of for a variety of reasons. For example, patients are routinely asked about hereditary diseases and illnesses

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“Bi/Multiracial Maori Women's Hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26, no. 4 (2005): 505. Moeke-Maxwell emphasises how “[t]he presence or absence of brownness or whiteness acts as a cultural marker”.

<sup>23</sup> Toon Van Meijl, “Multiple Identifications and the Dialogical Self: Urban Maori Youngsters and the Cultural Renaissance.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 4 (2006): 917.

<sup>24</sup> McBreen writes elegantly on her personal experiences of being adopted and Māori. See: Kim McBreen, “Defining Māori,” *He Hoaka Blog*, January 11, 2011 <http://starspangledrodeo.blogspot.com.au/2011/01/defining-maori.html> (accessed January 19, 2017).

when seeking medical treatments. However, for Māori adoptees, knowledge of their genealogical links, are what enables a person to fully identify and participate as Māori. In other words, apart from the physical loss (of the mother) experienced by adopted people and the psychological losses (such as issues related to trust and intimacy), many Māori adoptees also experience the loss of a secure cultural identity. From interviews gathered, it could be argued that for Māori adoptees the most devastating loss is not in fact the loss of ‘mother’, although that certainly contributes to issues around attachment, trust, and security, but the loss of being able to trace their whakapapa, and subsequently have a reliable link to their identity as Māori.<sup>25</sup> For example, Lucia grieved the fact that she was unable to meet her birth mother as she had passed away before Lucia attempted to make contact with her. Yet, the primary lingering grief Lucia carries is not the death of her mother but the lost opportunity of finding out who her father was and where he was from. Lucia, like many other Māori adoptees wanted to be able to find her marae, to have a place her children could whakapapa back to. There is much grief in living with an unknown whakapapa. In her thesis, *Manu is my Homegirl: Navigating the ethnic identity of the Māori adoptee*, Māori adoptee Emma West describes a similar situation with an adoptee whose birth mother is Pākehā and birth father Māori:

While Dulcie’s motivation for reunion with her birth mother was to gain information so she could provide her children with a whakapapa, the event did not produce the desired outcome.<sup>26</sup>

Under closed stranger adoption, information relating to whakapapa was effectively destroyed and connection and rights to family and tribal lands legally extinguished.<sup>27</sup> Mere, who has made contact with her Māori family, says of those who cannot trace their whakapapa:

It’s a huge mamae, and that’s the painful part if you don’t have your whakapapa, or if you meet your birth mother and she says “I don’t know who your birth father was” and you’re lost to them [Māori family/iwi], lost to them forever.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See: Silverstein and Kaplan, “*Lifelong Issues in Adoption*”

<http://www.fairfamilies.org/2012/1999/99LifelongIssues.htm> (accessed December 24, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Emma West, “*Manu is my Homegirl: Navigating the ethnic identity of the Māori adoptee*.” MA diss., University of Waikato, 2012, 79.

<sup>27</sup> See: Paul Frederick, Alec Reynolds and Cheryl Waerea-i-te-Rangi Smith, *The Gift of Children: Māori and Infertility* (Huia Publishers, 2012), 154.

<sup>28</sup> Mere, interview.

The importance of whakapapa cannot be over-emphasised. Knowledge of one's whakapapa is "generally agreed to be the lynchpin of Māori identity".<sup>29</sup> Jackson (in Coates) states "Māori have always defined 'Māoriness' in terms of *whakapapa* or genealogy".<sup>30</sup> Whakapapa is a marker used by many Māori institutions, and formal tribal structures, as a condition of registration and a prerequisite to gaining access to certain benefits and rights.<sup>31</sup> Mead further insists that the absence of knowledge of one's whakapapa means a "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".<sup>32</sup> Closed adoption denies an adopted person full-personhood, for Māori adoptees this includes denying, or at the very least limiting, their Māori selves.

### **Mihi Whakatau**

As part of a Māori way of being in the world, many Māori people when meeting together talk about whakapapa. Where you are from, who you are related to, and how, are common conversation starters. Māori people are constantly making connections. As a culture based on ancestors and ancestral lineages, Māori have a need to place each other in relation to themselves and find common points of relationship – no matter how close or how distant. In a more formal setting where people are gathered together for a particular purpose, and meeting for the first time, it is common for people to stand and give a short mihi. A mihi has been described as "a formal way of respecting people by acknowledging their mana and tapu (dignity and sacredness) [and is] a sign of hospitality and respect".<sup>33</sup> In a simple mihi, a person will name their ancestral connections by stating the names of their mountain/s, river/s, waka, marae, parents, and finally themselves. It allows for people listening to 'place' the speaker. An example is found at the beginning of this thesis where I introduce myself.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, and perhaps as a by-product of bi-culturalism, mihi whakatau are increasingly becoming part of the induction process during training or team building situations within many workplaces, and is not uncommon in classrooms and across universities.<sup>35</sup> Yet giving a mihi can pose problems for Māori adoptees who have no knowledge of their whakapapa.

<sup>29</sup> Tahu Kukutai, *The Dynamics of Ethnicity Reporting - Māori in New Zealand* (Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri, 2003), 21.

<sup>30</sup> Natalie Coates, "*Kia Tū Ko Taikāka: Let the Heartwood of Māori Identity Stand - an Investigation into the Appropriateness of the Legal Definition of 'Māori' for Māori.*" BA diss., University of Otago, 2008, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Coates, "*Kia Tū Ko Taikāka*", 27-28; Mead, Sidney M. *Landmarks, Bridges and Visions: Aspects of Maori Culture: Essays* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997), 211.

<sup>32</sup> Mead, *Landmarks*, 208.

<sup>33</sup> Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand. "Mihi Whakatau – Formal Welcomes." *Caritas*, [http://www.caritas.org.nz/sites/default/files/Appendice\\_Mihi%20Whakatau.pdf](http://www.caritas.org.nz/sites/default/files/Appendice_Mihi%20Whakatau.pdf) (accessed March 09, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> See: 'Prologue', page: xvii.

<sup>35</sup> For example see the University of Otago's guidelines for mihimihi/pepeha: University of Otago.

"mihimihi/pepeha." <http://Māori.otago.ac.nz/reo-tikanga-treaty/te-reo/mihi> (accessed October 15, 2016).

For instance, while adopted people in general can choose when and where to tell people of their adoption, this is more difficult for Māori adoptees when standing to give their mihi, and/or when they are questioned about their origins. West acknowledges this difficulty stating, “[f]or Māori adoptees shame highlights their fictitious identity ascribed by others. Thus, having to relay a mihi invades their privacy and uncovers the secret, that they are an adoptee raised in a non-Māori Family”.<sup>36</sup> Some Māori adoptees I have spoken to feel great shame about this.

Most Māori people I have interviewed who were adopted under the closed stranger practice, and who do not have knowledge of their whakapapa, will either “make up” their mihi (in terms of using the ancestral markers from the area they live or grew up in) or will be forced to say “I don’t know I’m adopted”.<sup>37</sup> As West explains, “Not knowing one’s whakapapa highlights for the Māori adoptee a displacement from the wider Māori collective”.<sup>38</sup> Mead rightly asserts without knowledge of whakapapa a person is made vulnerable and laid low.<sup>39</sup> Mere had revealed that some Māori questioned the identities of Māori adoptees who did not have knowledge of their whakapapa, while others were more inclusive stating that you can never be lost from your ancestors.

While I agree that we can never be lost to our ancestors, in reality if you are without knowledge of your whakapapa, these unknown ancestors remain lost to you and therefore you are unable to connect to other Māori at an iwi, hapū, or whānau level.<sup>40</sup> Both Lucia and Estelle, who have been unable to trace their whakapapa, used to “make up” their mihi and say they were from the iwi whose tribal area they had grown up in.<sup>41</sup> However, for Estelle this eventually became uncomfortable as she felt it was another case of “having my identity made up for me”.<sup>42</sup> Within te ao Māori it would be difficult for a person not to feel challenged or whakamā if other Māori, particularly those from an iwi you are connecting to, would enquire further about your ancestral connections as they tried to find a relationship to further identify with you. While some Māori might be supportive of the use in their mihi of the area a person grew up in, others would see this as inappropriate. I would suggest the

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<sup>36</sup> Emma West, “*Manu is my Homegirl: Navigating the ethnic identity of the Māori adoptee.*” MA diss., University of Waikato, 2012, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Maria Haenga-Collins, “Listening to the Silenced: The Closed Stranger Adoption of Māori Children into Pākehā Families,” in *New Zealand Psychotherapists (NZAP) Conference* (Wellington, New Zealand, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> West, *Manu is my Homegirl*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Mead, *Landmarks*, 208.

<sup>40</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>41</sup> Estelle, interview.

<sup>42</sup> Estelle, interview.



determining factor would be the relationship a person has with the group they are in. What is acceptable with a group of people who know and support you, may not be acceptable with a group who do not know you, and with whom you have no relationship or at least a context in which they can place you.

Van Meijl holds the view that since the re-emergence of the Treaty of Waitangi and the Māori renaissance as socio-political forces in the 1970s and beyond, “*marae* practices are emblematic for a Maori identity”.<sup>43</sup> In relation to his work with Māori youth in the 1980s, he believes that a focus on such essentialist practices (of which giving a mihi would be included), excludes Māori who are unable to comfortably participate. He states:

[t]he renaissance of Maori culture has played a significant role in the political campaigns of New Zealand’s indigenous population over the last few decades, [while simultaneously highlighting that many Maori] ... are unable to construct a cultural identity in terms of the discourses of culture and tradition that dominate the political arena.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, another example of perhaps an unintentional and unexpected dimension of the Māori renaissance, in particular, the Treaty settlement process, is the ability to “exacerbate divisions within Māori society”.<sup>45</sup> Boast argues that “*ivi* and *hapu* identity may always have been quite fluid” but as Treaty claims have predominantly focussed on negotiations between *ivi/hapū* and the Crown, coupled with a drive from Māori to politically and socially strengthen *ivi*, *hapū*, and *whānau* structures there is often no, or little, room for Māori adopted people who do not have knowledge of their *whakapapa*. For example, some *ivi* do not allow for either *whāngai*, or those legally adopted, without *whakapapa* connection to succeed tribal lands, while *Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993* does not allow succession for children who were legally adopted outside of their Māori birth families.<sup>46</sup>

### **Other Cultural Losses**

However, this is not the only way Māori adoptees are ‘lost’ to their culture. For instance, Mere never knew she was of Māori descent and so never participated in Māori cultural events or joined Māori culture clubs at school. I have had conversations with other

<sup>43</sup> Van Meijl, “Multiple Identifications and the Dialogical Self”, 917.

<sup>44</sup> Van Meijl, “Multiple Identifications and the Dialogical Self”, 917.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Boast, “Negotiations for reconciliation: How they can exacerbate division as well as promote reconciliation” in *Reconciliation, Representation and Indigeneity: ‘Biculturalism’ in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Peter Addis, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Richard S. Hill and Graeme Whimp (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 95.

<sup>46</sup> Valerie Perkins, “*He Aroha Whaea, He Potikiipiripobo: The Unique Experiences of Māori Adoptive Mothers in the ‘Closed Stranger’ Adoption System*” (MA diss., Massey University, 2009), 16-17.

adopted people, who growing up were unaware of their Māori ancestry, and they too were drawn to participate in Māori cultural activities but felt it wasn't their right or their place to do so. All have felt it was a lost opportunity for them to have connected at a younger age with their Māori culture and that such an opportunity can never be replaced or gained back. In both Lucia and Estelle's formative teenage years, Māori language teachers and a whānau class provided much needed cultural support and affirmation. Such classes were no doubt a by-product, at least in part, to the adoption of biculturalism at a state level. From my own observations, Māori language teachers did much more for Māori teens than what was set out in the curriculum. Māori teachers nurtured children in a holistic way and the experience of being with other Māori in whānau classes gave Māori children, particularly urban based and adoptees, a stronger sense of belonging and confidence to identify as Māori.<sup>47</sup>

Although, Mere never knew she was Māori, she had wanted to be included in Māori cultural activities, and to feel that she too 'really belonged' and had a connection to culture and land. Such thinking provides interesting insights on at least two different levels. Firstly, there was "a vast revival and assertion of Māori culture, and a related flourishing of Māori political activism ... [with] a very high profile in the media" during the 1970s and 1980s when adoptees from the closed stranger era were transitioning from childhood into their early teens.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, such a statement is about whakapapa, identity, and belonging to both people and place. Māori adoptees often believe that if they were able to trace their whakapapa then their Māori identity would be legitimised and that they would have whānau to belong to. For Māori adopted people, the 'imprint of another life' may encompass both familial and cultural belonging. However, while whakapapa is necessary in terms of identity and being able to locate oneself to a specific place, it will not necessarily provide immediate and intimate access to a family. This is the same with all reunions but again Māori have the added difficulty of not only wanting to 'fit' or be accepted by their birth parents and birth families, but also to fit or have their 'Māori-ness' validated. Most Māori adoptees I have met, who have grown up not knowing their whakapapa or Māori family of origin, want to be acknowledged as Māori and to have their Māori identity confirmed.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Several Māori I have spoken to, attribute much of their learning to the extra care and support provided by Māori teachers and whānau/bilingual units. The positive impact and influence that Māori teachers had on Māori students – often at great personal cost, and with enormous expectation to attend to any Māori child experiencing difficulties. See: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Getting out from Down-under: Maori Women, Education and the Struggles for Mana Wahine." In *Feminism and Social Justice in Education: International Perspectives*, eds Madeleine Arnot and Kathleen Weiler, (London: The Falmer Press, 1993): 57-76.

<sup>48</sup> Adds, "New Zealand's treaty of Waitangi reconciliation processes", 20.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, while in Australia undertaking this thesis I have been contacted by two people, who unsure if they have Māori ancestry, have sought my advice, yet the real issue for both was the need to have their possible Māori identity validated in some way.

Some Māori adoptees have felt betrayed by Māori as a group, believing Māori should have done more to search for related children placed for adoption and/or been more welcoming to adoptees who cannot trace their whakapapa, or have limited knowledge of Māori protocols and so are uncomfortable in Māori spaces. West provides confirmation of this from her own research and provides several examples. One participant spoke about her anxiety when:

Being the only identifiable Māori in a group of non-Māori when navigating tikanga experiences also caused angst. Charlene described an experience at her children's childcare centre where two Māori ladies were visiting to provide professional development to the predominantly non-Māori staff. Upon seeing the ladies she purposely avoided them, so she would not be chosen to lead the rest of the staff in the appropriate protocol ... [because of] her adoptee status.<sup>50</sup>

West's research also reveals that some Māori adoptees experience judgements from other Māori because of their adopted status. She quotes one participant:

I don't have a lot to do with Māori now, but when I did a few years ago – yeah my perception was of them quite different, because they were very, very, judgemental of me being brought up in a white family rather than Māori.<sup>51</sup>

Some Māori adoptees I have spoken with, including those who contributed to this thesis, want Māori to be more sensitive to others who may not know their whakapapa or family history, and have questioned why Māori who had children placed for adoption did not do more to find their 'lost' family member.

While sympathetic to such concerns, it should be acknowledged, and understood, that many Māori families did not know of children placed for adoption, especially if the father was Māori. Moreover, there are recorded cases of Māori kin wanting to adopt a related child they knew was being placed for adoption with strangers, but who were refused the right to do so.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, it can also be difficult to integrate adults back into a family or community when there may be unrealistic expectations and unfounded assumptions, on

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<sup>50</sup> West, "Manu is my Homegirl", 81

<sup>51</sup> West, "Manu is my Homegirl", 81.

<sup>52</sup> For examples: Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 188-189; Keith Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption: History and Practice, Social and Legal, 1840-1996* (Wellington: K. C. Griffith, 1998), 227.

both sides, which are a common part of the reunion process.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, some participants who have searched for their whakapapa and found it, still carry a sense of loss and displacement. For instance, when interviewing Mere her first words were “I know who my parents are” (meaning her birth parents), which for adopted people, as has been established, is not always the case.<sup>54</sup> Yet even though Mere has made contact with her birth family and subsequently traced her whakapapa Māori, she still does not feel she has bonded and found a place to really feel at home. In short, while Mere knows where she is from, she has not connected with people and place on a level where she feels part of the community. Building relationship takes time and effort. Susan Harness, a Native American adoptee, poignantly describes the difficulty of fitting into Reservation life, and trying to rebuild connections with her birth family after years apart, as a tenuous relationship which is “thicker than water, thinner than time”.<sup>55</sup> It is not easy.

In looking at the diverse experiences and realities of the Māori population as a whole, others too have spoken of the need to find home. Dislocation from hapū and iwi is not the sole domain of Māori adoptees. In her 2005 book, *Skin to Skin Intimate: true stories of Maori-Pakeha relationships*, journalist and oral historian Carol Archie reveals that some children from “modern Maori-Pakeha intermarriage” can also have a sense of dislocation – especially if they have been raised away from their extended Māori families.<sup>56</sup> In the 1996 New Zealand Census, one in six people of Māori descent did not identify with an iwi. Māori respondents either did not wish to answer this question, or were unable to.<sup>57</sup> However, this in no way negates the experiences of Māori adoptees. Rather it incorporates those experiences within a wider group of Māori who also struggle to form or present an ‘authentic’ Māori identity. The notion of an ‘authentic’ Māori identity is highly contentious and problematic. Numerous Māori academics recognise and seek to articulate the cultural heterogeneity of Māori and “emphasise that there are many different ways of ‘being’ Māori”.<sup>58</sup> For instance, highly respected Emeritus Professor Mason Durie identified three rudimentary Māori subgroups: those who are ‘culturally Māori’, who know their whakapapa, and are competent in Māori language and customs; those who are ‘bicultural’, who identify as Māori but who to a larger degree effectively engage with Pākehā

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<sup>53</sup> Mead, *Landmarks*, 209; Nation, “Betwixt and Between”, 117-118.

<sup>54</sup> Mere, interview.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Devan Harness, “*In Between: Too White to Be Indian, Too Indian to Be White*,” (unpublished memoir), 190.

<sup>56</sup> Carol Archie, *Skin to Skin: Intimate True Stories of Maori-Pakeha Relationships* (Penguin Books, 2005), 9.

<sup>57</sup> Carla A. Houkamau and Chris G. Sibley. “The Multi-Dimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement.” *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* 39, no.1 (2010): 8.

<sup>58</sup> Houkamau and Sibley, “The Multi-Dimensional Model of Māori Identity”, 8.

institutions and systems; and those who are ‘marginalised’, who are unable to engage effectively with either Māori or Pākehā systems.<sup>59</sup>

Māori academic, Evan Poata-Smith, argues that while there is acknowledgement of the diversities of Māori lived experiences there remains a tendency “to fall back on reified and simplistic notions of tradition, language, and culture as constituting an unchanging ‘authentic’ essence of Māori identity”.<sup>60</sup> Poata-Smith argues that these essentialist notions of a Māori identity were enhanced during the “cultural nationalist strategies”, or Māori renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>61</sup> Scholar and Māori adoptee, Kim McBreen, posits that because of such essentialist notions, many Māori are conflicted about their identity worrying that they are not “Māori enough”. McBreen speaks from personal experience:

I am too pale, too urban, too schooled in Pākehātanga, too middle-class, too vegan, too kūare, too geeky, and as smart as I think I am, I cannot speak te reo. I can’t sing, I don’t play sport, I don’t eat meat or seafood, I don’t listen to music, I’ve never lived at a pā, or even within my iwi’s rohe, and until three years ago, I hadn’t set foot on the land of my tūpuna Māori.<sup>62</sup>

Further, McBreen states that essentialising Māori as the ‘other’ in terms of ‘who is and who isn’t’ was created by the processes of colonisation and the practices of the coloniser.<sup>63</sup> This process “didn’t just make up stories about Māori, it forces us to live them as our reality, and judges us as inauthentic if we don’t ... [and] eventually we end up judging ourselves against them too”.<sup>64</sup> Sociologist Avril Bell convincingly argues that Māori were pressured to assimilate but later “patronised and belittled for doing so”, with McBreen reminding us that the way we view ourselves as Māori is not independent of the external feedback we receive from other people and their reactions and reading of our chosen ethnicity.<sup>65</sup> As such, it is this feedback which affects our own sense of self and our own comfort, or discomfort, in

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<sup>59</sup> Mason Durie, *Whaiora: Māori Health Development* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1994), cited in Houkamau and Sibley, 2010: 8

<sup>60</sup> Evan Poata-Smith, “Emergent Identities: The Changing Contours of Indigenous Identities in Aotearoa/New Zealand” in *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*, edited by Martin Nakata, Michelle Harris, and Bronwyn Carlson (Sydney: University of Sydney E-Press, 2013), 30.

<sup>61</sup> Evan Poata-Smith, “*Emergent Identities*”, 30.

<sup>62</sup> McBreen, “*Defining Maori*”.

<sup>63</sup> McBreen, “*Defining Maori*”.

<sup>64</sup> McBreen, “*Defining Maori*”.

<sup>65</sup> Avril Bell, *Relating Indigenous and Settler Identities: Beyond Domination* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 124.

See: Evan S Poata-Smith, “*Emergent Identities*”, 31. Wendy Hollway, “Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity,” in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* eds. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (London/Thousand Oaks. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2001), 272-283.

our identity as Māori and how that identity is expressed. Poata-Smith clearly perceives and articulates well the challenging dynamics concerning what it means to be Māori “amid a flow of competing cultural discourses”.<sup>66</sup> He states the inherent difficulties in both “claiming and resisting identities from within a set of prevailing discourses about the authenticity of particular indigenous categories”.<sup>67</sup> Like McBreen, Poata-Smith views state agencies as actively encouraging Māori to adopt particularly prescribed ways of identifying into “more administratively convenient and allegedly authentic groupings”.<sup>68</sup> Poata-Smith asserts that the radically diverse ways Māori life experiences have been influenced by the complex articulations of “racism, colonialism, ethnicity, class, and gender” results in continued debates and controversies over what constitutes a Māori identity.<sup>69</sup> Postcolonial theorist Simone Drichel adds that:

[i]dentity politics, with its emphasis on a distinct Māori identity within a bicultural framework, tends to rely on precisely the essentialist rhetoric of indigeneity, authenticity, purity, distinctiveness ... [where] collective identity and essentialism appear as two sides of the same coin.<sup>70</sup>

Amid such debates, Māori adoptees often struggle with their own search for a Māori cultural identity.<sup>71</sup> On one side of this coin is their Pākehā upbringing and white adoptive families. On the other side is their identification as Māori and a Māori family and iwi which they may, or may not, know.

In 1984, Māori activist Donna Awatere published a manifesto for Māori Sovereignty that both promoted Māori traditions and values and demanded the “reclamation of the language, history and lands of Māori people decimated by colonization”.<sup>72</sup> The following year under the newly elected Labour Prime Ministership of David Lange, the *Treaty of Waitangi Amendment Act 1985* was enacted allowing for historical grievances dating back to 1840 to be heard. The same year the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* was enacted. Māori

<sup>66</sup> Poata-Smith, “*Emergent Identities*”, 26.

<sup>67</sup> Poata-Smith, “*Emergent Identities*”, 26.

<sup>68</sup> Poata-Smith, “*Emergent Identities*”, 28.

<sup>69</sup> Poata-Smith, “*Emergent Identities*”, 28.

<sup>70</sup> Simone Drichel, “The Time of Hybridity”, 591, 593.

<sup>71</sup> There is considerable contestation around the concept of ‘identity’. While I do not go into further detail in this thesis (as my research is primarily concerned with the ways the participants use the term identity, which is made clear through their interviews), works addressing issues of identity include: Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996); Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000); Paul Spickard, *Mixed blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Paul Spickard, *Race in Mind: Critical Essays* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*. (Auckland: Broadsheet, 1984). Bidois, “A Genealogy of Cultural Politics”, 146.

nationalism and adoption activism both experienced legislative victories which inadvertently provided a source of recourse for Māori adoptees adopted under closed stranger adoption. There have been and are currently claims filed with the Waitangi Tribunal in relation to the harm and disadvantage Māori have suffered as a result of New Zealand's adoption laws.<sup>73</sup> The following section will look more specifically at some of the psychological harms on Māori adoptees and how they came into effect in the period from childhood through to adulthood.

## Psychology and Its Harms

Populist views of adoption, and adopted people, as advanced by social workers and psychologists from the 1950s onwards became entrenched within the broader social narratives around adoption. One commonly held belief was that children placed for adoption were 'unwanted' babies. In fact, the term 'unwanted' was often used in articles promoting adoption and in advertisements seeking adoptive parents.<sup>74</sup> The 'unwanted baby' narrative conveniently, even if unintentionally, helped ease the minds of those instrumental in legitimising adoption and assisted in the social acceptance of the practice. Social workers were able to focus on finding homes for unwanted children rather than to challenge the status quo by assisting women of 'low moral standards' to keep their children and thereby be seen as contributing to society's further moral decline and the derogation of the institution of marriage.<sup>75</sup> Adoptive parents were able to look past their own often painful reasons for wanting to adopt and focus instead on helping a needy child. If children were 'unwanted', they did not 'belong' to anybody. Their mothers had 'given them away'. Newborns could come to their new family without a past as there had been a clean break from their birth mother. Societal conventions imagined that the birth mother's scandalous slate had been wiped clean while the child's slate remained suitably blank, if not entirely erased.<sup>76</sup>

For many adopted people, beliefs about being unwanted and the experiences of being different from other family members were internalised as feelings of not belonging, not

<sup>73</sup> For example: Waitangi Tribunal, *The Adoption of Children Claim* (WAI 286, May 1992), Waitangi Tribunal, *Maori Land and Laws of Succession Claim* (WAI 634, Nov 1996), Waitangi Tribunal, *Guardianship, Adoption & Maori Customary Law Claim* (WAI 879, Dec 2000), Waitangi Tribunal, *Adoption, Fostering & Wards of State (Beckett) Claim* (WAI 1656, Dec 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 80-81. See also: Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, "Perspectives on Open Adoption", *The Future of Children: ADOPTION* 3 no. 1 (1993), 120.

<sup>75</sup> Australian Senate and Community Affairs References Committee, *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* (Canberra: Senate Printing Unit, 2012), 24.

<sup>76</sup> Keith Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are: Reform of Adoption Law with Honesty, Openness and Integrity* (Ottawa: Katherine W. Kimbell, 1991), Sec. 4:1-2.

fitting in, in being somehow less, or not good enough.<sup>77</sup> Current research focussing on adult adoptees overwhelmingly records how these deficit narratives have continued to negatively affect many adopted people. Psychologists working with adopted people today argue that these internalised deficits may be linked to the higher rate of mental health issues amongst adopted people as compared to non-adopted people.<sup>78</sup>

In her 1993 ground-breaking book, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child*, psychologist and adoptive mother, Nancy Verrier, states that notwithstanding the intellectual or altruistic explanations given, adopted people will experience separation from their birth mother as abandonment and rejection. As such, adoption is an inevitably traumatic experience.<sup>79</sup> Verrier argues that as most closed adoptions happened when adoptees were pre-verbal, they often have no words to describe this original separation and trauma, and there is no pre-trauma self. Trauma associated with abandonment, rejection, loss, and hopelessness become imprinted at a cellular and neurological level.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps this is what Lucia was trying to explain when she says:

I don't know what I was thinking at three months old, but I'm sure I would have felt very abandoned by then. Just in a cot in this room with all these babies and being left.<sup>81</sup>

Yet, the blank slate and attachment theories continued to drive the practice of closed adoption.

## The Blank Slate meets Attachment Theory

The blank slate theory (*tabula rasa*) became popular in adoption ideology post-World War II as two forces converged. Firstly, the new professionalization of social work relied heavily

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<sup>77</sup> Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are*, Sec. 2:1-4.

<sup>78</sup> For instance: Amanda L. Baden and Mary O'Leary Wiley, "Counseling Adopted Persons in Adulthood Integrating Practice and Research," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 6 (2007), record 17.71 per cent of adoptees compared to 8.67 per cent of non-adoptees seek therapy. See also: Lauren D. Stokes and Shruti S Poulsen, "Narrative Therapy for Adoption Issues in Families, Couples, and Individuals: Rationale and Approach," *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 25, no. 4 (2014). Another theory is that in the case of adopted children, adoptive parents, and other professionals, may see any troubling behaviours as a sign of problems with the adoption, or stemming from a genetic predisposition. Even with the drive of nurture overcoming nature, there remained a view that an adoptee's 'bad blood' could always seep through. See: Linda Cannon Burgess, *The Art of Adoption* (Washington: Acropolis Books, 1976), 99; Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are*, Sec. 11:10.

<sup>79</sup> Nancy Newton Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1993), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Nancy Newton Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound*. (London: British Association for Adoption & Fostering, 2010), 5-7.

<sup>81</sup> Lucia, interview.



on psychodynamic theories in determining practice models. And secondly, the (pseudo)science of the eugenics movement, having raised cautious concerns about the genetic inferiority of children placed for adoption (due to their illegitimacy), quickly fell out of fashion following the horrors of the Holocaust.<sup>82</sup>

As a result, a shift from favouring nature (inherited genetic characteristics) to a focus on nurture (acquired, learned characteristics) gained prominence.<sup>83</sup> Freudian developmental theories advanced the early separation of mothers from their children so that the child would go to the adoptive parents a ‘blank slate’ – a blank slate whose personality and intelligence would lack the influence of the birth mother and ultimately reflect those of the adoptive parents. This was yet another way the child would be ‘as if born to’ the adoptive parents so as to fit seamlessly into the new family that was being created.<sup>84</sup> However, even without taking into account general differences occurring between children and parents in non-adoptive families, for most Māori children adopted into Pākehā families the slate could never be blank, but was always going to be coloured brown. Growing up Māori in a Pākehā family, many adoptees faced racism at worst, or a keen sense of difference and isolation at best, both inside and outside of their home environment.

Additionally, attachment theory, pioneered by psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby, was promoted by adoption workers as yet further evidence to encourage and enforce an early separation of mother and child. It was believed that the earliest possible placement of children into adoptive families would ensure bonding with the adoptive mother and the likelihood of a successful adoption would subsequently eventuate. In Bowlby’s highly influential work, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, first published in 1953 and with over sixteen reprints, Bowlby states, “an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship his mother (or permanent mother-substitute – one person who steadily ‘mothers’ him)”.<sup>85</sup> Ironically, and contrary to what I believe was Bowlby’s intention, removing children from their birth mothers in preparation for adoption resulted in children being placed in nurseries without the consistent care of one

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<sup>82</sup> H David Kirk, *Shared Fate*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Port Angeles: Ben-Simon Publications, 1984), 84-86. For further discussion on the influence of eugenics and the eugenics movement over time, see: Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>83</sup> See: Australian documentary titled “The Single Mother” (1966): Origins SPSA Inc. “Blank Slate Theory Upon Which the Clean Break Theory was Based. AVI”. Filmed [1966]. YouTube video, 1:56. Posted [August 2010]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blT5hG4pBcM> (accessed January 05, 2017).

<sup>84</sup> Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption*, 12

<sup>85</sup> John Bowlby, Margery Fry, and Mary D Salter Ainsworth, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Penguin, 1953), 13.

person until adoptive parents were found. For example, Lucia was three months old before she was placed in a permanent home. Waiting periods, especially for hard-to-place children, such as Māori, could be lengthy particularly from the mid-1960s onwards when the balance went from a shortage of children available for adoption to a shortage of prospective adoptive parents.<sup>86</sup>

### Creating Happy Families

Prevailing theories that viewed unmarried mothers as “emotionally immature” confirmed the need to place children into the psychological and financially stable homes of a married couple.<sup>87</sup> Yet, the heightened pressure to be the perfect family often brought with it heightened dysfunction. For instance, researchers have found that adoptive mothers felt enormous pressure to be the very best mother they could be with less room for any normal friction between parent and child. Further, as fewer families were willing to adopt a Māori child, social workers would often be forced to consider placing a child into a less than favourable home rather than into no home at all. For this reason, Māori children were more at risk of being placed into families who would not have normally been considered as suitable. Many adoptees felt “left”. This once more illustrates that abandonment is an often recurring narrative in the lives of adopted people. Verrier states:

[t]he primary or core issues for adoptees are abandonment and loss. From those two issues the issues of rejection, trust, intimacy, loyalty, guilt and shame, power and control, and identity emanate.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, in terms of ongoing, lifelong impacts, Verrier convincingly argues that abandonment and loss “lives inside every adoptee all his or her life”, however well-adjusted the adopted person may appear.<sup>89</sup> Certainly from talking with other adopted people over the course of almost a decade, I have noticed that most, if not all of us, in our more reflective moments are aware of how issues of abandonment and rejection can still impact in our everyday lives and in our ongoing relationships. Incidentally, while many of the adopted people I have spoken with, both for this thesis and in more personal settings, are highly successful in their careers, they have also accessed mental health or counselling services at some point in their lives, specifically for issues stemming from their adoption experiences.

<sup>86</sup> Anne Else, “‘The Need Is Ever Present’: The Motherhood of Man Movement and Stranger Adoption in New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 23, no. 1 (Auckland, University of Auckland, 1989): 48.

<sup>87</sup> Leontine R Young, “Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers,” *FAMILY* 26, no. 8 (1945); Anne McCreary Juhasz, “The Unmarried Adolescent Parent,” *Adolescence* 9, no. 34 (1974).

<sup>88</sup> Verrier, *The Primal Wound*, 104.

<sup>89</sup> Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound*, 20.

## Dichotomous Lives

Adopted people were exposed to other commonly held, and often erroneous, beliefs that affected their sense of self and challenged the validity of their own experiences. For instance, adoption workers in the 1950s described adolescents who had been adopted and were curious about their birth origins as “very disturbed young people” and “sick youths”.<sup>90</sup>

As a result of the labelling and judgement of others, many adopted people not only struggled to express themselves and their own needs, but to even know what those needs were. Verrier argues that a rupture in the personality development of adoptees occurs in infancy when in the adoptive family there is no-one who mirrors the adoptee’s “personality, character traits or physical features”.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, as previously mentioned, there is no pre-trauma self “as a reference point for the personality”.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, adopted people are, whether consciously or not, assigned roles within their adoptive families. These roles may be explicitly set in their adoption story (the story of why they were chosen), or may be at a more subconscious level. However, I would suggest through my own experience of adoption, and in conversation with other adoptees, that adopted people often conform to their expected roles as they ‘pay’ for being chosen. In the adoption market place, adopted people are commodities, and commodities serve a purpose. For example, advice given to adoptive parents, during adoptions boom years, was to tell the adopted child that they were ‘chosen’ because they were ‘special’. The result has been that many adopted people often feel they have to live up to those ‘special’ expectations. Therefore, while adopted people often try to adapt to the role requirements of others, they are also simultaneously creating a space so that other people can fulfil or feel at ease with their roles. For example, an adoptee provides the adopters with the role of parent. Furthermore, studies have found that adopted people often put their own feelings and needs aside to tend to the needs of others in the adoption triad.<sup>93</sup> Mere illustrated how grief over her adoption needed to be dismissed as she dealt with the guilt carried by her birth parents over having placed for adoption and, similarly, Estelle’s curiosity about her birth origins conflicted with loyalty to her adoptive parents – a very common phenomenon.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 117.

<sup>91</sup> Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound*, 19

<sup>92</sup> Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Verrier, *The Primal Wound*, 57.

<sup>94</sup> Griffith, *The Right to Know Who You Are*, Sec. 11:32; Arthur D. Sorosky, Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle*. (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 145.

Some cross-cultural adoptees have also spoken out about the particular roles required in being non-white in white adoptive families. Cross-cultural adoptee, writer and educator, Marie Rollins, states that:

[t]ransracial adoption itself is too often the place where white people who desire close proximity to bodies of color, their “exotic”, their “natural rhythms and cultures” make their fetish dreams come true.<sup>95</sup>

In terms of commodification, acclaimed feminist writer and social critic, bell hooks, argues that “[w]ithin commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture”.<sup>96</sup> While, in 1950s and 1960s New Zealand, this may not have been the case for most Māori adoptees adopted by New Zealand Pākehā, it became a more familiar narrative for Māori adoptees as they reached adulthood during the move towards biculturalism in the 1980s, when a cultivated Māori ethnic awareness significantly increased social and cultural currency in many circles, with cross-cultural and inter-country adoptions becoming more fashionable.<sup>97</sup> Hirini Moko Mead draws attention to the “deplorable practice” of adopting Māori and other Indigenous children as “exotic babies who are treated like exotic pets”.<sup>98</sup>

In the meantime, adoptees continue to search for their place in the world. Questions relating to identity, roles, personhood and belonging are common. Verrier acknowledges that:

[t]he problem of not being allowed to be oneself can also exist in biological families [however] ... in adoptive families, where there are separate origins, the problem is magnified.<sup>99</sup>

Māori people adopted into Pākehā families experience being different with a heightened intensity as they are forced to navigate the belonging/not belonging dichotomy – both within their families and within Māori and Pākehā worlds.

<sup>95</sup> Lisa Marie Rollins, “Transracial Lives Matter: Rachel Dolezal and the Privilege of Racial Manipulation.” *Lost Daughters*, October 02, 2015. <http://www.thelostdaughters.com/2015/06/transracial-lives-matter-rachel-dolezal.html> (accessed October 30, 2016).

<sup>96</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 21.

<sup>97</sup> For further discussion on ethnic identification see: Tahu Kukutai, “White Mothers, Brown Children: Ethnic Identification of Maori-European Children in New Zealand,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 5 (2007).

<sup>98</sup> Mead, *Landmarks*, 210.

<sup>99</sup> Verrier, *Coming Home to Self: Healing the Primal Wound*, 20.

## Microaggressions

To comprehend the, at times, invisible struggles in navigating the belonging/not belonging dichotomies associated with cross-cultural adoption, it is useful to examine microaggressions and their long-term effects on cross-cultural adoptees. Psychologists, Ellen Pinderhughes and Amanda Baden (also a cross-cultural adoptee), found microaggressions were a commonplace but often unarticulated phenomena within the adoption triangle.<sup>100</sup> The term microaggression was first used in the 1970s by African-American psychiatrist, Chester M. Pierce, to describe the brief everyday exchanges, which sent subtle denigrating messages to African Americans by whites.<sup>101</sup> Such ubiquitous prejudices were relayed through covert and often inadvertent slights, insults, indignities and dismissals.<sup>102</sup> Since Pierce's initial articulation of this concept, other psychologists, most notably Derald Wing Sue, have expanded microaggressions to include other marginalised groups (women, ethnic minorities, LGBTI communities) facing the similarly subtle, yet tangible, negative stereotypes and insults directed towards minority groups.<sup>103</sup> To clarify the way microaggressions are experienced by adopted people, Baden identified four different ways they may manifest.<sup>104</sup> Baden's findings coupled with the narratives of Lucia, Mere, and Estelle illustrate the racial and adoption microaggressions which are intrinsic to the experiences of cross-cultural adoptees.

Firstly, microassaults are an outward, often conscious, verbal or nonverbal attack targeting an individual or group by name-calling or exclusionary behaviour. For example, when Lucia was a child her brother refused to allow her to sit next to him because she was Māori.<sup>105</sup> Secondly, microinvalidations include verbal and non-verbal communications targeting an individual or group by excluding, negating, invalidating, or devaluing their thoughts, feelings, or experiences. Adopted people often have their adoption grief and trauma devalued and invalidated. For example, in talking about my own adoption and associated grief, a general practitioner asked, "Did you have an unhappy adoption?" This question

<sup>100</sup> Amanda L Baden, "'Do You Know Your Real Parents?' and Other Adoption Microaggressions," *Adoption Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (2016), 2.

<sup>101</sup> Tori De Angelis, "Unmasking 'racial micro aggressions'," *American Psychologist* 40, no. 2 (2009), 42.

<sup>102</sup> Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 5

<sup>103</sup> Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 3. See also: Derald Wing Sue, Christina M Capodilupo and Aisha Holder, "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (2007); Derald Wing Sue, Christina M Capodilupo, and Aisha Holder, "Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 39, no. 3 (2008), 329-336.

<sup>104</sup> Adoption microaggressions were first identified by Amanda L. Baden, "Do You Know Your Real Parents?", 7-8.

<sup>105</sup> Lucia, interview.

assumes adoption itself cannot be a reason for grief, and subtly plays into the notion that adoptees should be grateful. Thirdly, microinsults target an individual or group with attitudes or messages that contain subtle, rude, demeaning, or insensitive beliefs about them. For instance, asking adopted people if they know their “real parents”. The hidden message is that the relationship they have with their adoptive parents is not real or authentic, further adding to notions of isolation and not belonging. As microaggressions are oftentimes outside of the perpetrators’ conscious awareness, perpetrators may be unaware of the snub they convey. Lucia illustrates this when, as a teenager, another girl flippantly said about her adoption, “Oh your mother didn’t want you”.<sup>106</sup> The perpetrator may not have intended this as an insult, but Lucia has carried this hurt, with the meta-message that she was unwanted, all her life. Lastly, microfictions is a term developed by Baden which she applies specifically to the experiences of adopted people.<sup>107</sup> In the adoption process, histories can either be deliberately or unwittingly altered resulting in inaccurate adoption stories and/or pasts that obscure or withhold information. Arguably the most notable microfiction is the ‘new’ birth certificate which is produced so that only the adoptive parents’ names appear, and unless otherwise informed adopted people would be unaware of their adopted status.<sup>108</sup> Mere’s interview clearly demonstrates how all parties in the adoption triangle were told altered histories. Mere’s birth mother was told Mere would not live, and neither Mere nor her adoptive parents were informed about her Māori heritage. I would suggest microfictions affect all adopted people at some stage in their lives. As a child, I was told by a member of my adoptive family that my birth mother didn’t want me because I was a girl – the assumption based on the fact that none of my brothers had been placed for adoption. This was something I had believed as a child, but in speaking with my mother, and in reading my adoption file, I found this to be untrue.

Collectively, microaggressions emphasise and create subtle ‘microinequalities’. For instance, microinvalidations directly and insidiously deny the racial and adoption realities for Māori adopted into Pākehā families. At an international adoption conference in 1997, Else clearly underlined a problem faced by Māori adopted people stating:

[r]acism is a central aspect of New Zealand’s past which is intensely painful to deal with. The evidence is clear: adoption routinely deprived

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<sup>106</sup> Lucia, interview

<sup>107</sup> Baden, “Do You Know Your Real Parents?”, 7-8.

<sup>108</sup> Baden, “Do You Know Your Real Parents?”, 8. See also: Dana Katherine Kressierer and Clifton D Bryant, “Adoption as Deviance: Socially Constructed Parent-Child Kinship as a Stigmatized and Legally Burdened Relationship,” *Deviant Behavior* 17, no. 4 (1996).

children of Māori and Pacific Islands descent of the specific cultural identity with which they were obviously physically connected, leaving them exposed to the extremely uncertain mercies of the Pākehā world.<sup>109</sup>

I would argue that one of the “uncertain mercies” was the ‘reality’ created for Māori adoptees by others. According to Sue, “the power to impose reality upon marginalized groups represents the ultimate form of oppression”.<sup>110</sup> As Māori adoptees have had both their birth identities and cultural identities – their lived realities – created by others, they live with this oppression. The participants in this study reveal a clear intersection and overlap between racial and adoption-related microaggressions. The plurality of microaggressions therefore intensifies the marginalisation experienced by Māori adoptees, while perpetrators may remain unaware of the cumulative psychological harm that cross-cultural adoptees routinely experience.

Because the attitudes and assumptions which constitute microaggressions are so deeply ingrained in values and practices at individual, institutional, and societal levels, they are often difficult to challenge (much like bullying), and as a result may be more psychologically harmful over time than more direct forms of discrimination.<sup>111</sup> Māori adoptees also experience microaggressions from other Māori. Estelle clearly states: “With Pākehā I’m too brown and with Māori I’m too white to be brown”.<sup>112</sup> As discussed previously, this ‘walking between worlds’ is a common and often repetitive theme for Māori adoptees, although I would suggest that on occasion the ‘walking between worlds’ may feel more like ‘falling between the cracks’.

## Conclusion

While Māori adoptees experienced much in common with other non-Māori adoptees during the era of closed stranger adoption, their experience is particularly complex. Past adoption practices, driven by the social stigma of illegitimacy, and influenced by ‘the clean break’ and attachment theories, resulted in what became known as ‘closed stranger adoption’. The practice of closed adoption oftentimes resulted in adopted people feeling different and struggling to ‘fit in’. For cross-cultural adoptees, such as Māori adopted into Pākehā families, this experience of isolation and ‘not belonging’ is exacerbated. The

<sup>109</sup> Else, *A Question of Adoption*, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, 37. Italics added. See interview with Derald Wing Sue: Wiley. “Microaggressions in Everyday Life”. Filmed [October 2010]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4> (accessed January 05, 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, 105-109.

<sup>112</sup> Estelle interview.

seemingly even-handedness in the *1955 Adoption Act*, did not translate into even treatment, or equal outcomes, for Māori adoptees but only temporarily masked the intrinsic racism in New Zealand society. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the mask was starting to slip as the Māori renaissance started to shake-up the old notion of New Zealand having the best race relations in the world.

Adopted people were often required to cope with their own grief and loss around adoption without professional or familial supports. On the contrary, adopted people often received subtle messages that their place within the adoption triad was to support others in their roles. Māori adoptees in this research described that they were not always able to articulate their own needs or even their own cultural identity. While Mere, Lucia, and Estelle all have Pākehā birth mothers, the binary positioning of Māori and Pākehā discourages ethnic plurality. In contemporary New Zealand society, therefore, many Māori feel judged about their level of 'Māoriness', and search for ways to support their identification as Māori. The most conclusive way to do this is through knowledge of whakapapa. For some Māori adoptees tracing their whakapapa is not possible. They continue to navigate the in-between spaces, while looking for their place to belong.

The following chapter concludes by bringing together both the legacies of closed stranger adoption and the future possibilities for, not only Māori who were captured in the process, but for all New Zealanders as we face what it may mean to live in a fairer and just society.



## Conclusion

### Legacies and Futures

#### Kō tēnei te wā o te pakanga roa

On 7 March 2016, the New Zealand Human Rights Tribunal found that six provisions in the *Adoption Act 1955* are discriminatory on the grounds of sex, marital status (on two grounds – where prospective adoptive parents are to be legally married, and the marriage is to be between a man and woman), disability, and age, and the *Adult Adoption Information Act 1985* is discriminatory on the grounds of age (adopted people seeking information must be twenty years of age or older). Such provisions contravene both the *Human Rights Act 1993* and *Bill of Rights Act 1990*. However, the Human Rights Tribunal did not find that provisions in the *Adoption Act* discriminated on the grounds of race. Rather they found that there was insufficient evidence of discriminatory practices based on race submitted for review.<sup>1</sup> The findings do, however, intensify the pressure on government to take serious steps in addressing adoption law in New Zealand. As far back as 2000, the New Zealand Law Commission completed a comprehensive review of adoption law recommending ninety-six changes, yet to date, no changes have been made.<sup>2</sup> Rather, successive governments have side-stepped the adoption issue, despite criticism by New Zealand’s Human Rights Commission, the Law Commission and the Children’s Commissioner. Further, six separate government, and two parliamentary, committees have recommended comprehensive reform as the 1955 Act, as it stands, is inconsistent with New Zealand’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>3</sup>

On 15 July 2016, my name was added, along with others, to the Adoption, Fostering and Wards of State claim filed with the Waitangi Tribunal. The claim specifically addresses Māori who were prejudicially affected by removal from their families, and placement in

<sup>1</sup> Adoption Action Inc., “*Adoption News and Views March 2016*.”, 3-4. <http://adoptionaction.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ANV-2016-01.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Law Commission’s Recommendations for the legislative reform of the Adoption Act 1955: contained in its report ‘Adoption and its Alternatives’, <http://adoptionaction.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The-Law-Commissions-Recommendations-for-the-legislative-reform-of-the-Adoption-Act-1955.pdf>

Law Commission. *Adoption: Options for Reform. A discussion Paper*, October 1999, Preliminary Paper 38, Wellington: New Zealand Law Commission, 1999.

<http://www.lawcom.govt.nz/sites/default/files/projectAvailableFormats/NZLC%20PP38.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Adoption Action Inc., “*Adoption News and Views March 2016*.”, 3-4.

families, or institutions, outside of their whānau, hapū, and iwi, where they had no, or limited access, to their kin networks and support, land, marae, waterways, culture, and language. Oftentimes, adoptees had no access to the name of their whānau Māori, or knowledge of their whakapapa. There was no ongoing monitoring of the day to day care of those who were adopted and fostered, which resulted in the abuse of many children. In some homes, children were deprived and disadvantaged as Māori. Some Māori adoptees never knew they were Māori until adulthood. Others, unable to trace their whakapapa, remain disconnected from their whānau, hapū, iwi, as a result.

On 24 November 2016, Radio New Zealand ran a story on the New Zealand government's apparent "killing" of a report by the Human Rights Commission on the abuse of up to 100,000 children who were placed into state care from the 1950s to the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> The vast majority of those children were Māori. Judge Carolyn Henwood was the chair of the Confidential Listening and Assistance Service (CLAS) panel that heard the testimonies of over 1,100 individuals who were abused while in state care. Rosslyn Noonan, New Zealand's Human Rights Chief Commissioner at the time, is publicly on record as saying that the report was never published as Attorney General Chris Finlayson, and Crown Law, "shut the report down".<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Noonan states that while the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) was somewhat nervous about the review and subsequent report, it remained cooperative and engaged in the process "very openly and constructively".<sup>6</sup> However, Finlayson is adamant that the Ministry of Social Development does, and should continue to, deal with any claims of abuse, therefore making an independent inquiry, and the report by Henwood, redundant. Both Noonan and Henwood believe an independent inquiry is necessary. Henwood explains:

[t]he department is the perpetrator and also the person who is trying to put it right. Some people are very anti the department because of all the harm and the way they've been dealt with over the years. So I don't think it's satisfactory and it's still not satisfactory. I think something independent is needed.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Govt accused of killing off critical HRC report into abuse", 24 November 2016, Morning Report, *Radio New Zealand*. [http://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/player?audio\\_id=201825111](http://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/player?audio_id=201825111) (accessed March 20, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Smale, "Justice delayed, Justice denied" *Radio New Zealand*, December 09, 2016: 8/26 <http://www.radionz.co.nz/stories/201825742/justice-delayed-justice-denied> (accessed February 05, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Smale, "Justice delayed, Justice denied" 8/26.

<sup>7</sup> Smale, "Justice delayed, Justice denied" 12/26.

On 13 February 2017, perhaps in response to the growing public awareness and media coverage, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, supported by the Race Relations Commissioner, Susan Devoy, launched a campaign calling for a comprehensive inquiry into the abuse of children while under state care.<sup>8</sup> To date an open letter to New Zealand's Prime Minister, seeking an independent inquiry, has gained public support with prominent public intellectuals and senior public servants (past and present) among the signatories.

It is clear from these recent events that the voices of people who as children had fundamental decisions made by the State about their lives – of where they would live, who would be their caregivers, what culture they would grow up in – are now starting to be heard, and to be heard publicly. It is when personal stories become public issues that there is the opportunity of an historical turning point. Conversely, it is a time when witnessing the testimonies presented is not simply a personal act, but also a contribution to the collective, national process of confronting the past. This thesis is part of that process and groundswell. By bringing together the testimonies of those with personal experience of closed stranger adoption in relation to Māori, and by bearing witness to them as well as contextualising them historically, this thesis not only provides a place for participants to share their life histories. It also aligns itself with the increasing call for inquiries, reforms and recognition of the deep pain of disconnection from whānau, hapū, iwi which many Māori have suffered through child welfare agencies – either as adopted people, or Wards of the State. It is time for New Zealand to hear the first-hand testimonies and painful truths of a collective group, of which Māori adopted people are a part.

In Australia, the *Bringing Them Home Report*, the result of the National Inquiry into the state-sanctioned removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, brought the personal experiences of families torn apart by separation to light as individual stories were viewed collectively. The findings from *Bringing Them Home* circulated widely in the media, becoming a public issue which could no longer be ignored. Many of Australia's prominent public intellectuals, artists and critics pushed further discussion. White Australians were caught, as historian Anna Haebich has put it, “between knowing and not knowing” about a practice which was so widespread, it had become “unremarkable”, but

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<sup>8</sup> Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. “Commission calls for inquiry into state care abuse.” New Zealand February 13, 2017. <http://www.asiapacificforum.net/news/commission-calls-inquiry-state-care-abuse/> (accessed March 20, 2017).

which was subsequently denied and forgotten.<sup>9</sup> Until people were able to hear the first-hand testimonies and the painful truths they carried, the phenomena which became known as the “stolen generations”, had up until that point “failed to attract public attention or inquiry, unless it impacted in some way on the self-interest of local communities”.<sup>10</sup> The *Bringing Them Home* inquiry and report, and the public commentary and debate about the issues and historical legacies it raised, irrevocably changed the socio-political and cultural landscape of settler Australia’s relationship with Indigenous Australia. By capturing “the attention of ‘ordinary Australians’”, the report forged a way for settler Australians to actively participate in the process of reconciliation.<sup>11</sup> A nation’s collective understanding of itself was irreversibly changed. But proper restitution remains unfinished business, and it remains questionable if policies and practices relating to the out-of-home care for Indigenous children has changed in any meaningful way. For instance, there are currently more Aboriginal children in care in Australia today, than during the era of the Stolen Generations.<sup>12</sup> Further, in 2016 a Royal Commission was established to investigate the abuse and torture of Northern Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in youth detention facilities.<sup>13</sup>

In New Zealand, as in Australia, Indigenous children were removed from their homes in disproportionately high numbers, for reasons decided by those with State power and authority, although these New Zealand histories are only slowly becoming public knowledge. Children were removed from their families, and put into homes, whether through adoption, fostering, or institutionalisation, where oftentimes, they were the victims of abuse. In terms of the adoption of Māori children, I have argued throughout this thesis that Māori children were not taken to be placed for adoption (finding homes for Māori children was difficult enough). Rather, Māori children, who were relinquished for adoption

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<sup>9</sup> Anna Haebich, “Between knowing and not knowing: Public knowledge of the Stolen Generations.” *Aboriginal History*, 25, (2001): 81.

<sup>10</sup> Haebich, “Between knowing and not knowing”, 81.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly Jean Butler, *Witnessing Australian Stories* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Bonnie Malkin, “More Aboriginal children put into care now than during ‘Stolen Generations’,” *The Telegraph*, January. 03, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/4092776/More-Aboriginal-children-put-into-care-now-than-during-Stolen-Generations.html> (accessed December 04, 2016); Johnathan Green, “Wards of the state: the foster care crisis”, *Background Briefing*, ABC Radio National, (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), 17 November 2013. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2013-11-17/5086254> (accessed December 04, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> “Royal commission into Northern Territory youth detention continues.” *ABC News*. October 12, 2016. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-12/youth-justice-royal-commission-nt-day-two-live-blog/7923652> (accessed March 20, 2017).

were not placed with their Māori kin. Māori homes were routinely judged as lesser and not as good as Pākehā homes. In short, Māori people themselves, were judged as lesser. This points to a key argument in my work: that racism and race played a major role in the treatment of Māori children and their Māori kin under the closed stranger adoption system. Indeed, this thesis is, in many ways, as much about race relations in New Zealand, as it is about adoption – I maintain that the two are inextricably linked. Throughout this thesis I have repeatedly drawn attention to New Zealand’s legislative sleight of hand and state-sanctioned illusions, and to the interconnections of violence, sex, and race which underpinned the process and practice of closed stranger adoption in New Zealand, especially in the context of the cross-cultural adoption of Māori children into Pākehā homes. Such concerns clearly parallel the history of colonisation. In fact, New Zealand’s distinct processes and practices of colonisation are reproduced in the cross-cultural closed adoption of Māori children. Colonisation and closed adoption both deployed state-sanctioned power to impose one reality upon another through policies of assimilation which manipulated identities, required the erasure of self to fit prescribed roles, while infantilising ‘the other’.<sup>14</sup> In short, colonisation and adoption were and remain both violent and traumatic acts and processes. Further, adopted people and the colonised are both required to be grateful for their experiences and treatment, while they seek to mitigate and repair the long-term, ongoing intergenerational effects of the traumas they endured. However, for Māori people in New Zealand, and Māori adopted people in particular, the discourse of gratitude threatens the wider public acknowledgement of past injustices. Settler New Zealanders may not want to view, or remember, uncomfortable histories. As Anna Haebich explains:

The content and form of collective recall are highly political and contested. What is remembered, and how it is remembered, depend on which groups are doing the remembering and this differs across people, class and gender.<sup>15</sup>

Individual and group memories are shaped by their own inter-subjectivity and as such are shaped by the relationships of power present in society.<sup>16</sup> It will always remain the

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<sup>14</sup> For example, people do not talk about adopted adults. Adopted people remain stuck in a moment of time as the ‘adopted child’.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000), 565.

<sup>16</sup> Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 565.

dominant forces in society who control what is remembered and what is forgotten at a national level.

Racism in New Zealand continues at a structural level which allows individuals ‘off the hook’, as they look at themselves through society’s mask of ‘easy egalitarianism’, and, while ‘not perfect, but better than most’ other countries. As a society, New Zealand needs to take the mask off, and to stop trying to cover up, or re-arrange it, when it slips. As New Zealanders, we need to be mature enough, and to trust each other enough, to face ourselves unmasked in the mirror. We need to investigate, and own, the past abuses in the welfare and justice systems, and the inherent racism which resulted in many more Māori being victims of those abuses. Furthermore, New Zealand must stop holding itself up as the gold standard when it comes to issues of race. In speaking of criminal law, criminologist, Elizabeth Stanley states, “New Zealand is a very contradictory place. While we have restorative elements it’s an intensely punitive place”.<sup>17</sup> In terms of race relations, New Zealand is also a very contradictory and punitive place. We must face up to the legislative sleight of hand and the illusions of racial equality. “One law for all” does not take into account which ‘one’ the law benefits and which ‘one’ it marginalises. While Māori are undoubtedly proud New Zealanders committed to full social and political participation, the rhetoric of “we are all one people, New Zealanders first”, is an argument often used against Māori when Māori values are not palatable, or immediately advantages to ‘mainstream’ concerns. Yet Māori people, time and time again, have proven that as a collective group we prosper when Māori have autonomy over our own affairs and Māori values and concerns are consistently and equally incorporated into the social fabric of the nation. Māori well-being and prosperity add to New Zealand’s well-being and prosperity – in this way we are all New Zealanders.

Writing this conclusion has been difficult. Looking back over, and reflecting, on interviews, the countless conversations with adopted people and other Māori who have first-hand experiences of ‘the system’, my own life and the lives of family members and loved ones, leaves me with a heavy heart. The feeling of drowning in all the sorrow and grief, the old feeling that adopted people often have of total annihilation returns. Of being on your own. Abandoned. Of having to own this piece of work – and realising this piece of work is a

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<sup>17</sup> Smale, “*Justice delayed, Justice denied?*” 04/26.

part of me. In nearing completion, this thesis is reaching its time of birth. Yet for many adopted people, birth and loss are closely aligned. “Adoption is created through loss without loss there is no adoption”.<sup>18</sup> I have been – and continue to be – faced with the painful fragments of lives which I cannot ignore. I had hoped to tie the fragments together, to bring some cohesion, some repair. But there is no repair for the magnitude of abuse so many of us have endured. There are too many nuances, complications, exceptions to the rule (whatever the rule is), to make tidy historical bundles of chaotic experiences. Adoption was, and remains, a traumatic and chaotic life event. As Rachel Buchanan concedes, “for some chaotic events, a historian might have to be content with a slightly ‘hazy idea’ of how an event or place fits into a bigger picture”.<sup>19</sup> The testimonies presented in this thesis, of sexual and physical violence, deceptions and secrecy, the silencing of realities, and the ensuing loss of birth-rights, names, and histories, strangely coalesce with narratives of gratitude, hope, love, care, and forgiveness. The complexities, and contradictions, of real lives merge in to some unexpected places. While closed adoption has been damaging for all involved, for Māori adoptees, and their descendants, the damage has been particularly insidious as the inability to trace whakapapa links has for many resulted in the inability to participate fully as Māori in many situations.

If New Zealand, as a nation, is committed to ideals of dignity and mana, then we must look thoroughly at, and acknowledge, harmful practices of the past.<sup>20</sup> Closed stranger adoption is just one such practice. The recent events referred to at the opening of this conclusion provide an opportunity for all New Zealanders “to take stock of the nation and consider the legacies of the past and the possibilities of the future”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan, “*Lifelong Issues in Adoption*.”

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<sup>19</sup> Rachel Buchanan, “Orimupiko 22 and the Haze of History.” *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 16 (2013): 76.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Devoy, “Dame Susan Devoy: State child care may explain why so many Maori are in prison.” March 02, 2017. [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11809895](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11809895) (accessed March 13, 2017).

“If we want our welfare and justice system to have dignity and mana: then we must look at it thoroughly and investigate those things that went on in the past”.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, *Witnessing Australian Stories*, 42.

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