

Tikanga Maori Formation Assessment: Creative Project Reflection

Ko wai ahau?

Upon receiving the kaupapa for this assessment, specifically that this work was to express faith through a Māori or indigenous lens, I immediately excluded myself from this piece of work; feeling as though I have nothing to contribute as the kaupapa highlighted the insecurity I feel as a Pākehā within a tikanga Māori context. However, a significant part of my journey in faith and God's calling over the last few years has been to recognise the bicultural context of Aotearoa and understand my responsibilities as a Pākehā and a Christian within it. God has been, over time, revealing something of His own heart; reconciliation, empowerment, identity, unity amidst diversity and the celebration of culture - that together, Māori and Pākehā may glorify God all the more fully.

Within this bicultural context, I am aware of my children. While I am Pākehā, and have been raised in a Pākehā world, my children are not, and I am aware of my responsibility in not only raising them to be secure in their identity in Christ, but to appreciate their Pākehā identity while also being connected, secure and proud in their Māori identity.

As I have attempted to better understand both Māori and Pākehā identity in Aotearoa, the literature and research is limited and outdated, and what is available is disheartening. I have found tools designed to measure Māori identity in simplistic, exclusive and appalling ways (for example an authentic Māori must be able to 'name a traditional canoe', use Māori as their 'home language half or more of the time', 'have a 'happy-go-lucky attitude to time and money' and 'refuse to worry about the future or plan too far ahead') meanwhile Pākehā identity seems to be one of either shame or entitlement. Furthermore, those of 'hybrid' or mixed Māori/Pākehā identity (such as my children) research suggests will be further marginalised as they struggle to articulate an ethnic identity and will experience two-fold racism; "Pākehā racism towards them as Māori; Māori racism towards them as (perceived) Pākehā; and the suspicion or distrust of individuals towards them as dual heritage".¹ In addition, when seeking a Christian perspective, I have frequently heard from well meaning, but often uninformed, Christians that there is only one culture - a Kingdom culture. Reading others' experiences, they too speak of how when they became Christians, they felt the need for their ethnicity to be left in the past as they become a 'new creation in Christ'.

Fortunately, as I begin to seek God on this matter I see that He is our hope and answer. I still have much to seek and learn, but I find that God created humans in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:27 & Genesis 5:1), that diversity and unity are exemplified in Himself within the Trinity, that Jesus' mission, sacrifice and family is for all people, that God recognises and restores language with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4-11), and His vision for is for all nations, tribes, peoples and languages to be present around His throne (Revelation 7:9). I take great

¹Melinda Webber, *The Space between: Identity and Māori/Pākehā* (Wellington, N.Z: NZCER Press, 2008), 23 & 28.

hope and reassurance that our identity can be formed by God, not without culture, but within the midst of it.

The painting of 'Ko wai ahau?' or 'Who am I?' is intended to be a summary of this journey in faith and a challenge to the audience, Pākehā, Māori and Christians alike, to consider how they define identity for themselves and others.

The watercolour image is of my daughter; chosen due to her white skin, blue eyes, blonde hair and that one day, if she marries or chooses to change her surname, there will be nothing outwardly visible or concrete to display her Māori identity.

Her serious expression is to challenge the viewer that while for now she is innocent and only knows how to be herself, it is the assumptions of the person looking at her that have the power to dictate her identity for her. Similarly, the surrounding grey blotches represent the mess that is 'identity' in Aotearoa and how these issues of identity surround and impose on her.

The impact of 'Ko wai ahau?', written by my 5 year old son, reminds us that sadly our tamariki are having to navigate these questions from a young age.

Over top, the surrounding text are statements of truth concerning her Māori, Pākehā and Christian identity; mixed within each other, and all of which can be held in tension with each other and fully experienced. They are what I hope to raise her to stand strong and secure in.

He tamāhine ahau, (I am a daughter).

He taonga ahau, (I am a treasure).

He tangata whenua ahau, (I am a person of the land).

Nāna ahau i hanga kia rite ki a Ia, (Genesis 1:27 - He has made me like himself (image of god)).

He Pākehā ahau, (I am Pākehā).

He tuahine ahau, (I am a sister).

Nō Ngāti Hine ahau, (I am from Ngāti Hine).

He tamāhine ahau nā te Atua, (John 1:12 - I am a daughter from God).

He tangata Tiriti ahau, (I am a person of the Treaty (of Waitangi)).

He kākano ahau, (I am a seed (sown from Rangiātea)).

He taupuhi ahau, (John 15:16 - I am chosen).

He mokopuna ahau, (I am a grandchild).

Kua karangatia ahau, (Romans 8:28 - I have been called).

He Māori ahau, (I am Māori).

I hangā ahau e te Atua, (Ephesians 2:10 - I was created by God).

He uri ahau, (I am a descendant).

Kua mōhiotia ahau e te Atua, (Jeremiah 1:5 - I am known by God).

He tauwhiro tangā ahau, (I am compassion (also her middle name)).

“He mea whakawehi, he mea whakamīharo tōku hanganga” (Waiata 139:14), “I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).