

Whiria Tū Aka: Conceptualizing Dual Ethnic Identities, Complexities, and Intensities

Ashlea Gillon (Ngāti Awa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāiterangi)

Melinda Webber (Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Hau)

Abstract: The Indigenous ethnic grouping Māori did not exist prior to Pākehā arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand. Instead, Māori identified as members of hapū (kinship group, subtribe), and membership was always related to concepts inclusive of whakapapa (genealogy, ancestry, belonging, and self-identification). In addition, Māori often intermarried with members of other hapū and, therefore, have a long history of “mixedness.” In fact, re-tellings of whakapapa have always acknowledged and honored the mixedness that occurred as a result of unions between different hapū members. In these ways, Māori have always celebrated our complex mixed identity positionings. Since colonization, a new “mixedness” has occurred between Māori and Pākehā settlers in Aotearoa. This article interrogates Māori/Pākehā notions of “mixedness,” including being white coded, *kiri mā* (white skin), white Māori, socially assigned as Pākehā, or half-caste. It discusses the ways these labels affect how Māori/Pākehā engage in social and cultural settings that require different performances and enactments of “Māori-ness.” This article examines the complex identities and experiences of mixed Māori/Pākehā. Using Kaupapa Māori theory, methodology, and methods, this study identifies and re-presents conceptions of belonging and mixedness from a distinctly Māori worldview.

Keywords: Māori, identity, Indigeneity, mixed race, ethnicity

I te tīmatanga: In the Beginning

Early models of mixedness were stage based and Western in orientation, focusing on the difficulties people with mixed racial-ethnic heritage have as a result of their “marginal,” “inferior or despised,” and “isolated and rejected” status in society.¹ Most early research examined the challenges encountered in self-defining a mixed identity. Traditional work in this area predicted that this identity confusion would lead to negative psychological outcomes, such as lower self-esteem and a sense of guilt about developing a sense of self that does not embody all aspects of one’s identity.² The implication is that these challenges mostly lead to psychologically detrimental outcomes. Mixed

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¹ Park, “Human Migration and Marginal Man,” 881; Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 138.

² Benedetto and Olisky, “Role of the School Counselor,” 66–69; Herring, “Biracial Children,” 123–30; Herring, “Developing Biracial Ethnic Identity,” 29–38.

identities, however, like all identities, vary in fluid and complex ways.³ No one has fixed, unalterable, or singular identities. Rather, we make and remake ourselves in varying social settings according to our desires and aspirations.⁴

It is widely accepted that the construction of an ethnic identity is a dialectical process between an individual, their families, and others in their immediate social milieu. Individuals become aware of themselves as members in their social worlds and therefore form ideas about themselves that are consistent with the views of those around them.⁵ The idea of simple transmission of identity, however, particularly ethnic identity from parents to children, devoid of other contextual influences, is naive.

Early definitions of “ethnicity” within Aotearoa New Zealand centered on colonizing measures of blood quantum and quantification based on non-Māori perceptions of Māori-ness.⁶ These definitions have shifted over time to ethnicity classifications that are informed by self-identification and whakapapa.⁷ For Māori, self-identification and whakapapa reiterate the right to self-determination of our identities and their (potential) mixedness. This idea reinforces the importance of self-identification and agency, regardless of interpretations, social assignments, or racialized ascriptions of our identities and ethnicities.⁸

While ethnic identities have always been products of social and political struggle, heightened for a person of dual ethnicity, ethnic identity is about who we are, what we do, and how we interact.⁹ It can also shape where we live, who we interact with, and how we understand ourselves and others. It does these things in specific ways, based on our social and historical location. For mixed Māori/Pākehā this situation is doubly difficult because they must negotiate these complexities in multiple contexts: in Māori contexts; in Pākehā contexts; in contexts with other mixed Māori/Pākehā; and of course, in wider society. In addition, they must negotiate the psychological challenges of being members of two seemingly irreconcilable groupings as descendants of both the colonizers and the colonized. Aotearoa New Zealand is a country that is still grappling with the notion of mana ōrite (a partnership of interdependence, where the partners uphold the status and ability of each other to be self-determining) between Indigenous Māori and Pākehā.¹⁰ In reality, the ways Māori and Pākehā might uphold each other’s status continues to be defined by the majority partner. As a result, ethnic identity formation for mixed Māori/Pākehā is fluid, multiple, relational, socially constructed, sometimes difficult, and almost always cyclic; their identities, sense of connectedness, and right to belong are always under negotiation.

³ Gillon, Cormack, and Borell, “Oh You Don’t Look Māori,” 127–41.

⁴ Webber, *Walking the Space Between*, 100–5.

⁵ Isajiw, “Definition and Dimensions of Ethnicity,” 441–43; Katz, *Construction of Racial Identity*, 46.

⁶ Metge, *Rautahi*, 39–41.

⁷ Cormack, *Practice and Politics of Counting*, 14; Cormack and Robson, *Classification and Output*, 19.

⁸ Daniel et al., “Emerging Paradigms,” 6–65; Gillon, Cormack, and Borell, “Oh You Don’t Look Maori,” 127–41; Reid, “Ngā Mahi Whakahaehae,” 83–95; Robson and Reid, *Ethnicity Matters*, 5–8.

⁹ Kukutai, “Problem of Defining an Ethnic Group,” 86–108; Webber, *Walking the Space Between*, 13–20.

¹⁰ Berryman and Eley, “Student Belonging,” 985–1001.

More recent research has posited mixed identities as positive and adaptive, because they are said to allow mixed individuals to engage in a variety of cross-cultural engagements.¹¹ Studies have also shown that people with mixed identities can develop a more enhanced sense of self and identity, intergroup tolerance, and appreciation of minority group cultures than monoracial people.¹² In addition, Christine Kerwin, Joseph G. Ponterotto, Barbara L. Jackson, and Abigail Harris have argued that mixed individuals are often able to identify multiple aspects of a situation where other people see only one.¹³ They can be “celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of their in-between-ness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference.”¹⁴ In a field that has historically been fascinated with reporting the difficulties, challenges, and disadvantages of mixed identities, it is time to re-examine and re-story the mixed identity narrative.¹⁵ Being a product of mixedness has its advantages.

To navigate, negotiate, and present their multiple identities in a world that treats their two or more ethnic selves as distinct, mixed individuals must understand themselves in ways that enable them to transcend deficit discourses and instead adopt a worldview that makes sense of mixedness in positive and transforming ways. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, many mixed Māori/Pākehā must not only accept the difference between our dual identities but also challenge and defy the rigidness and separateness of those boundaries, instead creating and negotiating new definitions of mixedness that are inclusive and increase our sense of belonging. Ethnic identities are never “passed” across generations in a predictable, linear fashion but are instead always under negotiation and subject to context.¹⁶

This article, in line with perspectives from a Māori worldview and beliefs about whakapapa, takes a different look at the concept of mixedness. It conceptualizes mixedness as a strength, a social benefit, and an opportunity to develop the skills that enable people to become, be, and belong in and across multiple worlds. Using data from a range of qualitative mixedness studies in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, this article asserts that when people with both Māori and Pākehā heritage understand Māori worldviews concerning the beauty and benefits of multiple heritage lines, they can speak back to negative Western discourses and re-story their identity in positive and potentially transforming ways.

Māori Discourses of Identity and Mixedness

For Māori, collective and individual identity formation has been shaped by a multiplicity of factors arising from ever-changing cultural and sociopolitical factors. The term “Māori” itself continues to attract debate today because it is often used as a homogenizing term for all tribal groups and therefore obscures the distinguishing characteristics of each tribe. Until about 1885 the term

¹¹ For positive assessment, see Weisman, “An ‘Other’ Way of Life,” 152–63; for adaptive, see McIntosh, “Māori Identities,” 38–52.

¹² Thornton, “Hidden Agendas,” 101–20.

¹³ Kerwin, Ponterotto, Jackson, and Harris, “Racial Identity in Biracial Children,” 221–31.

¹⁴ Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Postcolonial World*, 158.

¹⁵ Gillon, Cormack, and Borell, “Oh You Don’t Look Maori,” 127–41.

¹⁶ Kukutai, “White Mothers, Brown Children,” 1150–61.

“Māori” was used to distinguish Māori as “normal or usual,” as opposed to the “different” Pākehā settlers.¹⁷ Instead, Māori have always described themselves according to hapū or iwi (tribal) membership rather than national membership. In essence, the terms “Māori” and “Pākehā” only came into being as identities in relation to each other.

Prior to the arrival of Pākehā, Māori identity was based on the concept of “whakapapa,” which connected the individual to a common ancestor via whānau (family), hapū, and iwi connections.¹⁸ Consequently, Māori theorists, such as Rose Pere, strongly resisted the grouping Māori, referring to it as an oversimplification of the diversity and the vivacity of iwi Māori.¹⁹ Her views aligned with those expressed by John Rangihau who also warned against establishing hard-and-fast rules about Māori institutions and concepts, instead arguing that one’s tribal affiliations and connections were more important. He stated that “there is no such thing as Māoritanga.... Each tribe has its own way of doing things. Each tribe has its own history. And it’s not a history that can be shared among others.... I can’t go around saying because I’m Māori that Māoritanga means this and all Māoris have to follow me.... You can only talk about your Tuhoetanga, your Arawatanga, your Waikatotanga. Not your Māoritanga.... They lose everything by losing their own tribal identity and histories and traditions.”²⁰

Angela Ballara similarly asserted that Māori identity is not singular or fixed, arguing that individuals and hapū often maintained multiple identities that were readily adaptable to changing political, social, and geographical conditions.²¹ Most important, Māori have always celebrated unions between iwi. In traditional Māori society, marriage between people from different iwi was sometimes used to form political alliances, unite resources, and make peace between tribes. While marriage bound the parties together, it was the children to come that would entrench the connection, as the children would have whakapapa connections to both sides. The children and their families became takawaenga, or mediators, and had an important role as living symbols of peace and relationship.²² Berys N. Heuer stated that “chiefs’ daughters might be married outside the hapū, or outside tribal limits, expressly to link units, and to ensure protection and assistance when needed.”²³ As a result, Māori identity has always been adaptable, dynamic, and subject to change. While contemporary mixed Māori/Pākehā identities still emphasize self-identification and fluidity, they have also long represented positive (trans)formation of identity—an addition, a union, and new bonds.

In nearly all views of Māori identity, whakapapa is generally agreed to be the key characteristic. Timoti Karetu describes whakapapa as the glue that connected individuals to a certain place or marae (ancestral meeting house), locating them within the broader network of kin relations.²⁴ Knowledge of whakapapa in turn creates a sense of tūrangawaewae (belonging). Witi T. Ihimaera also argues that whakapapa is not simply about having “Māori blood” but also about knowing that descent and having

¹⁷ Walker, “Maori Identity,” 35–52.

¹⁸ Broughton, “Being Maori,” 506–8.

¹⁹ Pere, “Te Wheke,” 6–19.

²⁰ Rangihau, “Being Maori,” 198.

²¹ Ballara, *Iwi*, 161–78.

²² Moko-Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 170.

²³ Heuer, “Maori Women in Traditional Family,” 453.

²⁴ Karetu, “Clue to Identity,” 112–17.

a meaningful relationship to it. Thus, it is not only the “blood lines and physical landscapes we live in, but also the emotional landscapes constructed by loving grandparents or whanau.”²⁵

Margaret Stewart-Harawira, however, points to the exclusionary effect of whakapapa as articulated by Karetu and Ihimaera. She asserts that having Māori descent, as distinct from an intimate knowledge of one’s whakapapa, is sufficient grounds on which to base Māori identity. As a result of colonization and urbanization, many people of Māori ancestry are unable to trace the genealogy of their forebears. Yet this lack of knowledge should not preclude an individual’s claim to a meaningful Māori identity.²⁶ Mason Durie similarly argues that “far from being members of a homogenous group, Māori individuals have a variety of cultural characteristics and live in a number of cultural and socio-economic realities. The relevance of so-called traditional values is not the same for all Māori nor can it be assumed that all Māori will wish to define their ethnic identity according to classical constructs. At the same time, they will describe themselves as Māori and will reject any notion that they are ‘less Māori’ than those who conform to a conventional image.”²⁷

Although ethnic identity is somewhat a matter of choice from a situational perspective, the reality is that possessing Māori ancestry or whakapapa is still perceived as a requisite to any claim to “being Māori.” It is as important to explore “Pākehā identity” as a person of mixed Māori/Pākehā descent as it is to define “Māori identity.” Defining Pākehā identity subsequently gives a reference point for discussing Māori identity, its origins, and its meaning in today’s society.

In line with this thinking, Hana O’Regan argues that it is possible to recognize and value mixed Māori/Pākehā ancestry while maintaining a strong sense of identity with both ethnic groups. “It is valid ... for modern day Kai Tahu to have just as strong a sense of identity derived from their Māori heritage as from their Pākehā whaler or sealer heritage,” she states.²⁸ Tahu Kukutai also argues that acknowledging one’s Pākehā identity “does not make one any ‘less Māori.’”²⁹ Moana Jackson challenged “the part-Māori syndrome,” which he suggested is an externally imposed concept. He instead argued that “Māori have always defined ‘Māoriness’ in terms of whakapapa or genealogy. When children are born with whakapapa, they are grandchildren or ‘mokopuna of the iwi.’ They are Māori.”³⁰ All three authors challenge the idea of a partial identity, instead arguing that one’s ethnic identity is always whole, intact, and complete.

Methodology and Method

In line with a Te Ao Māori worldview, a Kaupapa Māori research paradigm was used to undertake research with sixteen research participants (fourteen men and two women) across several qualitative studies, ages ranging from eighteen to forty-two. Kaupapa Māori theory has been summarized by Graham Hingangaroa Smith as a local theoretical positioning related to being Māori,

²⁵ Ihimaera, *Growing Up Maori*, 14.

²⁶ Stewart-Harawira, “Maori,” 27–34.

²⁷ Durie, *Nga Matatini Maori*, 464.

²⁸ O’Regan, *Ko Tahu, ko au*, 89.

²⁹ Kukutai, “Maori Identity,” 191.

³⁰ Jackson, “Part-Maori Syndrome,” 62.

which presupposes that the validity and legitimacy of Māori is taken for granted, the survival and revival of Māori language and culture is imperative, and the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well-being and over our own lives is vital to Māori survival.³¹ These features align with the strengths-based approach that was also taken in this study in that they speak to Māori aspirations, transformation, philosophies, processes, and values.

This research was further guided by purposefully posed critical questions that help to solidify the purpose and intent of the research and researchers: “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?.”³² These questions helped us to ensure that our research was Māori-centered, critical, transformational, and anti-colonial and took into account the complexity, self-determining, and diverse realities of being Māori.³³

Central to recruitment was self-identification, as this ensured that the participants were able to maintain agency and autonomy over their identification and the way they chose to identify or re-identify. Interviews were guided but not restricted by a semi-structured interview schedule that asked questions around mixedness and identity. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* as guided by the participants. The interview process was guided by respectful, cautious openness that allowed relationships to be built and comfortable conversation to flow.³⁴ Key to the success of this project was our insider position in this space as Māori/Pākehā, in that participants were able to ask us as many questions about having mixed ancestry and fluid identities as we did of them.

All data analyses were underpinned by Kaupapa Māori principles and our understandings of *whakapapa* and *mātauranga*. According to Leonie Pihama, Fiona Cram, and Sheila Walker, analyses grounded in Kaupapa Māori involve interpreting and understanding information in line with *tikanga* Māori, Māori knowledge, and understandings. They also argue that regardless of method, a Kaupapa Māori-informed approach requires researchers to view the wider cultural and societal contexts shaping the research material.³⁵ Through a thematic analysis process, we built up a body of evidence to inform our research findings.³⁶

Whiria Tū Aka: Weaving Threads Together

The complexities, intensities, and fluidity of Māori identities and shifting (re)conceptualizations of mixedness have been integral components of identification as Māori for generations. These were recurring themes in the conversations we had with the participants of our studies. Discussions focused on deep understanding of what it meant to be white coded, half-caste, *kiri mā*, or white Māori, or socially assigned as Pākehā and/or mixed Māori-Pākehā. While complex, with both positive and negative components, the participants’ stories illustrate a delicate weaving together

³¹ Smith, “Development of Kaupapa Māori,” 172–211.

³² Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 44.

³³ Eketone, “Theoretical Underpinnings,” 1–11; Webber, “Multiple Selves and Realities,” 1–8.

³⁴ Ormond, Cram, and Carter, “Researching Our Relations,” 174–92; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 118–22.

³⁵ Pihama, Cram, and Walker, “Creating Methodological Space,” 30–43.

³⁶ Braun and Clark, “Using Thematic Analysis,” 77–101.

of identities, of belonging, of connection, and of mixedness. The processes of weaving, un-weaving, and re-weaving themselves and their identities together were central to their journeys and form the conceptualization of Whiria Tū Aka, the underpinning metaphor of this article. Whiria Tū Aka means to weave together to make something strong, much like the weaving together of whakapapa from mixed backgrounds. Additional common themes across participants include (re)making ourselves, *takawaengatanga*, and belonging. These complex, interwoven notions and negotiations of mixedness are elaborated on through the stories shared in the following sections.



Figure 1: Whiria Tū Aka: (re)making ourselves, takawaengatanga, belonging

(Re)Making Ourselves

The necessity of (re)making ourselves was identified as an intricate part of mixed identity development. Notions of self-protection, safety, and responses to experiences, issues, and interactions that we perceive might be negative to maintaining our sense of equilibrium were important and influenced self-identification and feelings of belonging.³⁷ Weaving and un-weaving was a constant negotiation that centered on the ways that peoples of mixed identities re-story themselves. In some instances, this re-storying was in relation to how others perceived them. Tāne (male, aged thirty-five to forty-two) explored these notions in relation to how others identified him in various contexts and the

³⁷ Gillon, Cormack, and Borell, “Oh You Don’t Look Maori,” 127–41.

fluidity that came with these identifications. “It’s interesting cuz it depends what group you’re in, cuz some groups you are the most Pākehā out of the Māori that are there, and other groups you are the most horiest motherfucker, just by the nature of who else is there.”³⁸ *Hori* is a slang term used in Aotearoa. Its origin stems from non-Māori and their difficulties in pronouncing Māori names; however, in current Aotearoa, the colloquialism *hori* is a derogatory term used to describe Māori and something of bad quality. In his comment, Tāne used it to refer to the negative stereotypes about Māori that persist and had to be actively resisted, even in countries other than Aotearoa New Zealand. There has been some “re-claiming” of the word among Māori, in particularly around the 1970s and 1980s.

Notions of fluidity and context were prevalent in discussions around mixedness. For some participants context was recognized as a space for Indigeneity to be re-claimed against colonial oppression and assimilation.³⁹ Matt (male, aged twenty-five to thirty-five) also delved into notions of colonial guilt associated with identifying as Māori, and through reclamation and re-making himself, he felt empowered in his Māori identity. “I had to accept that I had denied my Māori-ness for too long. It had felt bad and I thought I wouldn’t do that again. That was empowering but that guilt is still there. I don’t ever want to be there again.”⁴⁰

For others these notions of (re)making themselves involved their whānau or children. (Re)making one’s self was considered purposeful, and for Ramona (female, aged twenty-five to thirty-five), the catalyst for her (re)making herself was having children.

I became disconnected emotionally from my hometown and from our way of life. Though I continued to observe the values and expectations of Māori culture, I have to say that at this point in my life my cultural identity became less important until I had my firstborn son. His birth ignited a new interest in the values taught me by my whānau as a young child. The father of my son was Māori and I knew that I’d chosen him because of this fact. Since this time, my identity has been cemented together by the memories and teachings of my tīpuna and by my hope for a good future for my children. My wish is that my sons be clear about who they are sooner than I was. Because of this I choose to define myself as Māori.... I had to listen to my tīpuna and whakapapa. Nobody was going to tell me what it was to be a Māori because that was for me to decide, and my whānau.⁴¹

Ramona’s experiences suggest that being both Māori and Pākehā can be perceived as an in-between space, which necessitates (re)making ourselves and mediating our identities and subsequently others as well. Like other participants, Ramona chose to capture and politicize her marginality, using her experiences of exclusion and/or peripheralization as a site of resistance and ultimately redefining her mixedness on her own terms.

³⁸ Tāne, interview by authors, 2016, Auckland.

³⁹ Gillon, Cormack, and Borell, “Oh You Don’t Look Maori,” 127–41.

⁴⁰ Matt, interview by author, 2006, Auckland.

⁴¹ Ramona, interview by author, 2006, Auckland.

Takawaengatanga: Binding Whakapapa

In Māori history, connections between two different iwi were often celebrated and the children of these unions were understood as takawaenga, mediators occupying an important role as living symbols of peace and relationships.⁴² This space of being a go-between, a mediator, or someone who navigates between identities offers great insight into the ways mixedness can be conceptualized and (re)understood. A person born of multiple whakapapa lines can capitalize on the best of all worlds, offering insights into all of those worlds.

Homi Bhabha's conception of "hybridity" is also useful in explaining the unique social construction and takawaenga positioning of Māori with mixed identities in Aotearoa New Zealand. He argued that "the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original movements from which the third emerges; rather hybridity ... is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation."⁴³ Tāne discussed some of these complexities, the third space, and the ways he experiences the best of both worlds through his takawaenga positioning.

What defines Māori these days?... I feel more connected now than I ever have, but yet still, probably as far away as I always have been. Fuckin' interesting though.... It's great, I think it's a blessing in a sense cuz you get the best of both worlds.... I'm trying to do my family tree.... I like being, I like knowing that my Pākehā side was over here since 1841, my Yugo, my Croatian, my Dalmatian side.... So, it's really cool cuz I found [it] back to like the 1700s. I think what's interesting is once you realize that you have this Māori identity, then sometimes you go to the nth degree to try and shun your Pākehā side. And I think why I'm more comfortable these days is because I embrace my Māori side, but I really embrace my Pākehā side now too. I love the fact that I'm part Irish, I love the fact that I'm part Croatian, I think that's awesome.⁴⁴

Acceptance of multiple identities can be understood as honoring one's whole self in ways that re-validate who we are and the position of takawaenga and duality we embody. Manawa (female, aged eighteen to twenty-five) acknowledged that she is "more Pākehā" and emphasized that having dual identities can be understood as respecting both whakapapa. "I feel like it's very hard, specially cuz even though I say I am Māori, there are other aspects of my identity ... like first and foremost I am more Pākehā than I am Māori. And I feel like sometimes if I label myself one way or the other, I feel like I'm

⁴² Moko-Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 169–70.

⁴³ Bhabha, "Third Space," 211.

⁴⁴ Tāne, interview.

kinda disrespecting my other half.”⁴⁵ Often there is an expectation for Indigenous peoples to choose or conform to one identity; however, as evident in Manawa’s experience, this is not an accurate description of who they are and what their mixed identities mean to them.

Multiple whakapapa lines are understood as positive and beneficial to both groups from a Te Ao Māori perspective. These benefits, at times, reflect societal norms. Tāne delved into some of the privileges, advantages, and positives that are associated with mixed ethnicity and identity, particularly around skin color and being *kiri mā*.

Well, I’m coming into my middle age, and if I can be a middle-aged white guy then structurally, I’m already in an advantageous point in society. Because I’m male, because I have Pākehā genes, and because I’m middle aged and I’m a house owner. Well, mortgage owner. So, I am predisposed to be structurally advantaged because of my whakapapa, because of my parents.... What was the question?

Researcher: Are there any advantages?

Aw yeah, nah, totally, fuck yeah. Life, it’s called life. I’m automatically in a more advantageous position. Automatically, and that’s a fucking indictment on humanity, automatically I’m advantaged.... It’s like everything is laid out before you, for you to take if you want.⁴⁶

The ability to occupy multiple spaces is a distinct advantage. Māori of mixed identities can utilize their position as *takawaenga* to re-story mixedness as an opportunity and social benefit. This ability to become and belong in and across multiple worlds shapes our experiences as Māori of mixed identities.

Nicola (female, aged twenty-five to thirty-five) discussed how she is able to move through both worlds and, in doing so, can break down barriers for other Māori in positive ways.

At work I think my dual heritage is a bit of a novelty actually. I’m palatable.... The benefit for me is that I can walk in both worlds. I know that I can fit in at a Pākehā gig. I know the behaviors and how to act accordingly, to be accepted and to fit in and be well received. I know how to appeal to those people, warm their hearts, and chuck in a couple of little cute quaint Māori things so they think “wow, she is a Māori.” In doing that it breaks down barriers. Regardless of the way that other people feel about it, maybe they will say, “we shouldn’t have to do that.” Maybe we shouldn’t have to do it but anything that’s going to break down the barrier and open people’s eyes to other cultures has got to be a good thing.⁴⁷

Māori of dual or mixed ethnicities demonstrate an understanding that our identity is as much about who we are as it is about how we interact in multiple settings. This social and historical locality to

⁴⁵ Manawa, interview by authors, 2016, Auckland.

⁴⁶ Tāne, interview.

⁴⁷ Nicola, interview by author, 2006, Auckland.

mixedness reinforces our understandings of how we seek to transcend deficit discourses and rigid boundaries of identity through re-shaping and re-making ourselves, our relationships, and our worldviews in ways that reflect our diverse lived realities. This position of takawaenga allows the traditional concepts of “mediator” and “connector” to be re-made into a contemporary role that allows us to re-negotiate who we are and how we interact in various settings to strengthen our cross-cultural relationality. We are able to re-think what belonging looks like to us through re-defining who we are, how we identify, and what our mixedness means to us.

Kia hono: Belonging

Many of the participant narratives challenge the rigid and definitive nature of identity boundaries. The narratives illustrate the ways mixed Māori (re)create and (re)negotiate our own definitions of identity and belonging in positive ways. This (pre-colonization/re)conceptualization of mixedness positions it as a strength, a space to explore the beauty and benefits of multiple whakapapa in ways that are transformative and that celebrate and acknowledge belonging. The honoring of who we are, as a whole people of diverse whakapapa, also honors our relationships with multiple peoples and worldviews. Ultimately this strengthening of relationships allows us to (re)create spaces of belonging. Within these discussions of mixed identities understandings of belonging were explored.

Ngairē (female, aged twenty-five to thirty-five) discussed her ethnicity and expressed that she finds connection and belonging by acknowledging her mixedness and the ways in which Te Tiriti o Waitangi influences her experiences. “I think the Treaty is pretty important to me and that being part Māori and part Pākehā and those combinations and the Croatian, all of that together is interesting to reconcile with the formation of this country and some of the legal stuff around that. So, part of being Māori for me is this political thing, it’s like recognizing, like recognizing and being there to say like, um, actually what about Māori.”⁴⁸ The ways in which belonging centers our responsibilities as Māori of mixed identities ensures that we are actively accepting and acknowledging our partnership and takawaenga roles. Acknowledging the multitude of ways we as mixed Māori experience our identities creates space for meaning and connection. Pania (female, aged eighteen to twenty-five) shared how she experiences her mixed identity and what connection and belonging mean to her. “Being Māori is about your whakapapa, it’s like where you come from and no matter how much or how little you are on the outside, on the inside it’s about just having that feeling and connection, yearning to learn more and wanting to be a part of the culture. So, being Māori to me is being part of whānau and family.”⁴⁹

Being a part of a whānau, a family, and belonging was discussed in numerous ways. The honoring of these connections illustrates the complexity of whānau, friends, and belonging for Māori of mixed identities. Ramona talked about her whānau and friends who have helped shape her sense of belonging.

It wasn’t until I began school at the age of five that I was taught the connection between who I was with my whānau, and what others called being a “Māori.” I didn’t even know that I was

⁴⁸ Ngairē, interview by authors, 2016, Auckland.

⁴⁹ Pania, interview by authors, 2016, Auckland.

Māori. I knew that I belonged to this big group of people who were my aunts, uncles, grandparents, mother, and brother, but I didn't realize that that was Māori. I found out that I was Māori at school because that's what they told me I was. When we talked as whānau, we didn't actually refer to ourselves as Māori. We just called ourselves whānau. I had lived in a rural community for all those years but I didn't make the connection between myself and this large group of people called "Māori."... Good friends who identify as Māori-European have helped shape my identity because I can share frustrations with them. We talk about our difficulties.⁵⁰

Acknowledging the influence of whānau and friends on our identities as mixed Māori recognizes both the ways we can (re)make ourselves and the space we occupy as takawaenga.

At times there can be an expectation to identify as others assign us, often not reflecting how we identify and understand our mixedness and belonging. Marama (female, aged thirty-five to forty-two) conversed about the complexity of her identity, choosing to identify and celebrate her whole identity. "I'm not being my whole true self, I think that there are parts of me that are some parts of me that I really, really like and treasure and I identify those as the parts that I might associate with being Māori. And I don't think that I should be censoring, like hiding part of myself, or ignoring part of myself to please others. I would like to become a whole person."⁵¹ Māori of mixed identities challenge and defy boundaries of separateness imposed on them. How we do this varies; however, ultimately, we (re)make ourselves, we acknowledge our takawaengatanga, and we belong in multiple worlds.

Te pū o te rākau: Discussion

The participants' narratives demonstrate nuanced understandings of the ways in which mixedness has been conceptualized from a traditional Māori view and re-conceptualized by colonial narratives of racialization. Through their stories, participants reiterated the importance of understanding how identities can be made, re-made, and un-made in ways that both challenge the rigid notions of separation and honor the realities of dual or multiple identities. This allows mixedness to be re-presented as inclusive, as a strength, and as an opportunity to not only honor identities wholly but also strengthen relationships across identity-scapes, often by being a mediator. Indigenous peoples can experience imposed essentialist notions of identity that are linked to authenticity.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that this approach to authenticity centers on "a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the west has that privilege."⁵² As discussed in the participants' narratives, however, understanding and (re)conceptualizing Māori mixed identities as complex and fluid rejects settler-colonial views of a homogenized Māori identity and instead honors the complexities and intensities of Māori mixed identities and Māori autonomy.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ramona, interview.

⁵¹ Marama, interview by authors, 2016, Auckland.

⁵² Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 77.

⁵³ Gillon, Cormack, and Borell, "Oh You Don't Look Maori," 127–41; McIntosh, "Māori Identities," 38–52.

Whiria Tū Aka highlights the importance of understanding mixed Māori identities from a Māori lens. A Te Ao Māori perspective allows us to re-write current narratives around mixedness and re-make ourselves. Re-visioning who we are and how we identify has always been a part of our history as Māori; we have seen this illustrated in hapū, iwi, and different ethnic connections and relationships.⁵⁴ These notions of identifying, de-identifying, and re-identifying highlight how Māori can re-claim mixedness and conceptualize identity as a balm, as a way of soothing our souls. The use of these whakaaro Māori reflect our ways of understanding mixedness and re-making ourselves.

Within this mixedness, the importance of takawaengatanga is illustrated. Takawaengatanga offers a culturally based framework for understanding the normality and value of mixed identities. In his discussion of dual identity and in-betweenness, Paul Meredith refers to “cultural schizophrenia,” in the sense not of having an identity crisis but, rather, of using the label as a means of acknowledging the dual identities he has and resisting the imposed reduction of himself into one or the other.⁵⁵ This notion also highlights the ability and privilege that peoples of mixed identities have to go back and forth, to make and re-make ourselves between the two, as illustrated in this article; cultural straddling is seen as a strength and a skill.

The third space or takawaenga positioning is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that brings about new possibility, belonging, and relationality. It is a space of re-making, interrogation, and self-definition; that is, it produces new forms of cultural meaning that blur the limitations of existing boundaries and call into question fixed articulations of mixed identity. Takawaengatanga is an intense, complex, space filled with potential—one where cultural meaning and representation is fluid, dynamic, and self-determined.⁵⁶

He whakaaro whakamutunga: Final Thoughts

The concept of a “takawaengatanga” is liberating in that it opens up a new way of thinking about mixed identities. It is emancipatory in that its existence releases mixed individuals from a sense of un-belonging, dislocation, and alienation and instead gives us a sense of participation and location within our multiple cultures of origin. The concept of “takawaenga” is not new nor has its importance attenuated in Te Ao Māori over time. Despite the pernicious and ongoing effects of colonization, Māori culture prevails in terms of how its value systems celebrate diverse identities, reconnects people despite seemingly irreconcilable histories, and affirms simultaneous belonging across multiple ethnic groupings. The concept of “takawaenga” provides a platform upon which Māori with mixed identities can immerse themselves in two different and sometimes opposing cultures. Takawaengatanga opens up a new category of cultural location where Māori with mixed identities can celebrate our mixed identities in relation to our circumstances.

⁵⁴ Moko-Mead, *Tikanga Māori*, 169–70.

⁵⁵ Meredith, “A Half-caste on the Half-caste,” 1.

⁵⁶ Bhabha, “Third Space,” 207–21.

Glossary

hapū	kinship group, clan, subtribe
hono	connect(ion), linking, join
iwi	extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, tribal affiliations
Kai Tahu	an iwi or tribal/kin group
Kaupapa Māori	Māori epistemology, Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori principles, Māori agenda, a Māori way of approaching research
kiri mā	white skin
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
Māoritanga	Māori culture, practices, beliefs, way of life, “Māoriness”
marae	ancestral meeting house, significant space for Māori
mātauranga	knowledge, understanding, science
mokopuna	grandchild, grandchildren, descendants
Pākehā	New Zealand European
takawaenga	go-between, mediator, peacemaker
takawaengatanga	mediating, peacemaking, connecting
Te Ao Māori	Māori world
Te Pū o te Rākau	story, main point
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Te Reo Māori version of the Treaty signed between Māori and the Crown
Tikanga Māori	customs, protocol, ways of doing, correct Māori way of doing
tipuna	ancestors, elders, older relations
tūrangawaewae	standing place, where one has the right to stand and belong
whakaaro	thoughts, knowledge, insight
whakaaro whakamutunga	concluding thoughts, finishing thoughts
whakapapa	genealogy, ancestry, lineage, descent
whānau	extended family group
Whiria Tū Aka	to weave together and make stronger

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