

JANE FREEMAN

## Indigeneity and Me

Kia Ora Koutou Katoa  
Ko Freeman Taku Tipuna whanau  
Ko Winifred Miller Raua Ko Elma Elizabeth Hotham Taku  
Tipuna kuia  
Ko Spencer Freeman Raua Ko Edmund Charles Thornton  
Taku Tipuna Koroa  
Ko Evelyn Thornton Taku Matua Wahine  
Ko John Stephen Freeman Taku Matua Tane  
Ko Ngati pakeha Taku hapu  
Ko Te Mata Taku Maunga  
Ko Tuki Tuki Taku Awa  
Ko Ngati Kahungungu Taku Iwi  
Ko Haumoana Taku Rohe  
Ko Jane Freeman Taku ingoa  
Toku Rua Aku Tamariki  
Ko Marcus Raua Allan Freeman  
Tena Koutou Tena Koutou Tena Koutou Katoa

I utilise the culturally appropriate Pepeha/introduction (Reed, 1960) process to acknowledge who I am where I came from and where I am going

The purpose of this paper is to present my views on the notion of indigeneity, I will undertake this journey utilising the writing technique of self-interview (Dicky, 1984) and reflective writing to philosophically discuss my own definition of indigeneity whereas I will ask myself questions and reflectively respond to these, exploring similarities and differences within relevant literature aligned with the notion of indigeneity and examining my observations in practice regarding the term indigeneity concluding with an exploration of the relevance of my positioning in an Aotearoa New Zealand context and how this classifies my practice as indigenous.

**How is the term indigeneity defined and what is my own definition of indigeneity?**

According to Thatcher (1957) the word indigeneity is defined as *"The fact of originating or occurring naturally in a particular place"*, this word is closely aligned with the term indigenous which is described by the Cambridge University Press (2011) as *"naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place"* My own definition of indigeneity is a statement that I wrote many years ago that acknowledges this concept of resilience *"The evolution of mankind has been based on suffering, both human and animal alike. From Neanderthal vs Cro-Magnon, to crucifixion, to the Holocaust, to war, to religious struggles, to slavery, to medical research etcetera; Whilst we may not always agree with the sufferings of those gone before, had these not occurred, the human resilience factor may have ceased to exist"* (Freeman, 2018). I also believe as a practitioner that an important part of indigeneity is to look towards the past to shape the future.

**What are some of the observations in practice that I have made in regards to the term indigeneity?**

What I have noticed throughout the last ten years in my work in the social services is that the term indigeneity appears to have many negative associations aligned with it when discussed with arising manifestations of trauma, as a practitioner I believe this negativity is due to the term indigeneity being directly associated with colonisation, a concept that is further explored by Stewart, Moodley & Hyatt (2016) who state *"The concepts of indigeneity, trauma, resistance, and renewal must be considered in terms of relationship to both historical and contemporary forms of colonisation"* Pihama, Smith, Evans-Campbell, Kohu-Morgan, Cameron, Mataki, Te Nana, Skipper and Southey (2017) *"While trauma is an experience that can impact on all people, Maori experience trauma in distinct ways that are linked to the experience of colonisation, racism and discrimination, negative stereotyping and subsequent unequal rates of violence, poverty, and ill health"*.

However, one other component that I have also observed in regards to the term indigeneity is that whilst there may be many negative correlations that are associated with the

term, there is also incongruence surrounding the term with a positive element surrounding indigeneity and that is the concept of resilience, a concept that is reflected in the following quote: *"Some people weave burlap into the fabric of our lives, and some weave gold thread. Both contribute to make the whole picture beautiful and unique"* (Unknown, in Stephens & Gray, 2009)

### **What is my positioning in regards to the term indigeneity as a social work practitioner?**

In regards to human indigeneity I believe as a practitioner there is an evolution that has taken place with my own indigeneity, beginning with an understanding that if the term indigeneity is rearranged slightly and a T is added, what I am then left with is the term identity which is defined as *"the distinguishing characteristics of a person"* (Geddes & Grosset, 2007). This evolution I believe began long before I was even born, the strands and transitions of ancestors that were here before me and contributed to the evolution of my indigeneity, distinguishing characteristics and practice; the belief that a child is born already filled with the contributions of those who were here before is expressed in the following statement *"If (the child) was never born as an empty vessel (as assumed in western psychology) that's actually the difference, with an empty vessel and all that's been put into it, like education, like life experience and when that child is born, it's already half full because, Nga taonga o Nga tupuna...it already exists, actually exists prior to birth and so when they're born they don't come as an empty vessel anyway"* (Milne in Eruera & Ruwhiu, 2015). I did not originate or occur naturally in a particular place, I have originated as part of the strands, transitions and contributions of many other people, both kin and non-kin; the journeys of many other people contributing to who I am as a person intertwined with who I am as a social work practitioner; this is my indigeneity and my identity, a process that has evolved like a rock becoming smoother over the centuries by the movement of water.

### **In regards to the concept of colonisation and indigeneity, where do I stand as a practitioner?**

As a social work practitioner, I feel it is fair to say that from the first encounter between European man James Cook in

seventeen sixty-nine (1769) and Maori (Tidwell & Zellen, 2015) there has been conflict within Aotearoa New Zealand, with war, destruction, loss, misunderstandings, and compromise that appeared to benefit one culture over the other; and now some three hundred and seventy-five (375) years later, there is still conflict within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Over those 375 years, there have also been many cultures that have made a journey, with the notion of making a new a better life in Aotearoa New Zealand, each with different purposes, reasons, ideologies, contributions and different positioning's aligned with indigeneity attached to them. And each with a different impact on Aotearoa, for example socially, economically or statistically and each contributing to making Aotearoa New Zealand the unique multi-cultural landscape it is today, as a social work practitioner it is very important for me to consider this aspect when working with families, as many of those I am working with are migrants, the migration journey to another destination in search of a better life is very traumatic and has many loses aligned with it, often impacting upon indigenous inheritance and culture; as a practitioner it is important for me to be able to consider what stage of the migration journey the people I am working with are at, to ensure they have access to the right supports and resources.

### **Why is it so important to have an understanding of the impacts of colonisation as a practitioner?**

Unfortunately, the residual conflict between Maori and European as a result of colonisation still exists in Aotearoa New Zealand today, I feel this is reflected in the following quote "*Their identities have been colonised in a process that still exists for them today*" (Ryde, 2009) this concept also now extends to include the multi-cultural dynamic of Aotearoa New Zealand and can impact on my social work practice in many ways, including seeing first-hand what disconnection from cultural roots can look like and the holistic manifestations that can take place as a result such as neglect and abuse and unhealthy coping strategies accompanied by generational dysfunction as one culture strives to regain a part of themselves that they feel was lost. This can also impact my social work practice where I have to understand the origin of many of these holistic manifestations of behaviour such as anger, frustration, violence, family dysfunction, self-harm, psychological and physical disorders and within my practice whilst it is important

for me to understand why these components manifest in Maori today due to a historical conflict, it is also important for me to also understand that currently as Aotearoa New Zealand has become multi-cultural, these holistic manifestations are also apparent in people of migrant cultures who have left their country of origin and moved to Aotearoa New Zealand in the hope of establishing a better life for themselves.

### **In what ways does the aftermath of colonisation impact my practice?**

The residual conflict of colonisation can also impact my social work practice through judgment/discrimination based on appearance, both on the part of the client and the practitioner, making judgment based on how the person looks, gender, whether they are white or colored, how they are dressed, what their history is. All of these components can negatively impact my social work practice through hindering the rapport building process, I often struggle with fellow practitioners who choose not to allow themselves to see a human being in front of them. Judging by way of thinking or stereotyping for example 'oh this person is Maori, no wonder they need to use a social service' or 'oh she is white that means she has a lot of money'

The residual conflict from colonisation also now extends to our multicultural makeup as a nation with cultural stereotyping having a large impact on my social work practice, where once again people are judged solely on appearance or where they come from. As a practitioner who has three principles within my practice of being non-judgemental, trauma-informed and strength based (Parekh & Childs, 2016; Evans & Coccoma, 2014; Cowger, Anderson & Snively, 2006); I often experience conflict with fellow social work practitioners. Practitioners don't always consider there is a story; there is a reason why people have migrated all the way to Aotearoa New Zealand. One important factor in my own social work practice is that *'there are no excuses for behavior, but there is always a reason'* (Freeman, 2018), there is a reason why people exist in a cycle of poverty or violence or addiction or dysfunction and looking beyond the manifesting surface behaviour and appearance of the person in front of a practitioner and looking deeper to explore the reasons for the behaviour or the cycle of dysfunction is vital for successful rapport building and effective social work practice. Having understanding of how the history of Aotearoa New Zealand as a colonised country can

affect the beliefs, thoughts and emotions of people can also impact my social work practice in a positive way whereas this is about the impact of trauma of people and the ways this can manifest in people and knowing what this looks like can actually support the rapport building process, providing openings to explore avenues and resources for people to begin a journey to wellbeing, I also feel that the fact that Maori and Pakeha have managed to survive ongoing conflict for over three hundred years, certainly speaks to that human resilience factor, a factor that should be encouraged to continue.

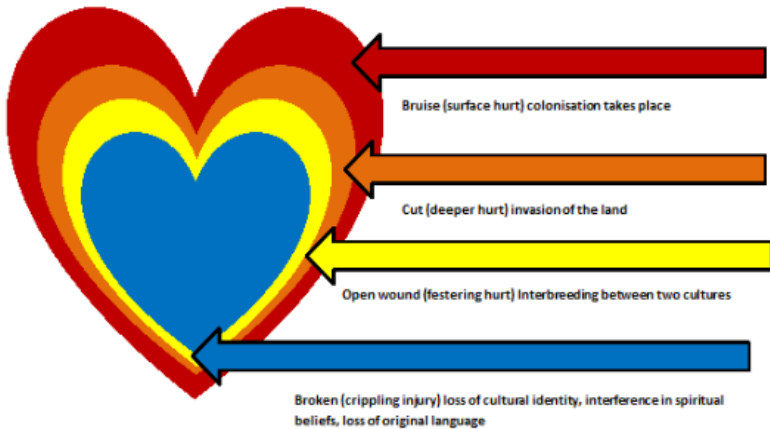
### **What is the relevance of the trauma aspect aligned with colonisation and indigeneity to my practice?**

A few years ago in 2010 when I was completing my social work degree, I embarked upon a presentation regarding the bi-cultural components involving the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand, a presentation that was not well received by my lecturer at the time whose expertise was in Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi; I feel that being of Pakeha culture, with some Irish blood thrown in for good measure on my mother's side with Maori lineage through my father's side, aligned with a unique encounter involving an out of body experience during the birth of my first child, where I stood with my ancestors in a state of limbo; provides me with a unique perspective of what a traumatic experience colonisation/migration was for both cultures and this positioning still stands today in regards to my indigeneity and practice; after some ten years of an ongoing evolution of my social work practice.

When I made that somewhat controversial presentation in 2010, I utilised a trauma model entitled layers of the heart, figure one (Gnad, 2010) to support my emphasise of the bi-cultural impact that the colonisation process had upon Maori as well as the impact the migration journey had on the English people seeking a home in a foreign country. Iwi/tribes (Reed, 1960) in Aotearoa were unprepared for the massive impact that colonisation would have on their culture, identities, language, and way of life, there were certainly those of English descent who participated in the colonisation process and blatant stealing of land out of a sense of greed and being dissatisfied within themselves; however there were also those of English descent who didn't come to Aotearoa New Zealand to create

havoc or to destroy the lives of the already existing culture, their arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand did not have a political agenda or malicious intent, they came seeking a better life and a better future, they too lost many things in a migration journey, they lost relationships, a sense of stability and in many centuries to come the English would lose their original language as Aotearoa New Zealand once again became part of a colonisation process through the Americanising of its culture (Smith, 2005).

**Layers of the heart model – Gnad (2010): Figure one**



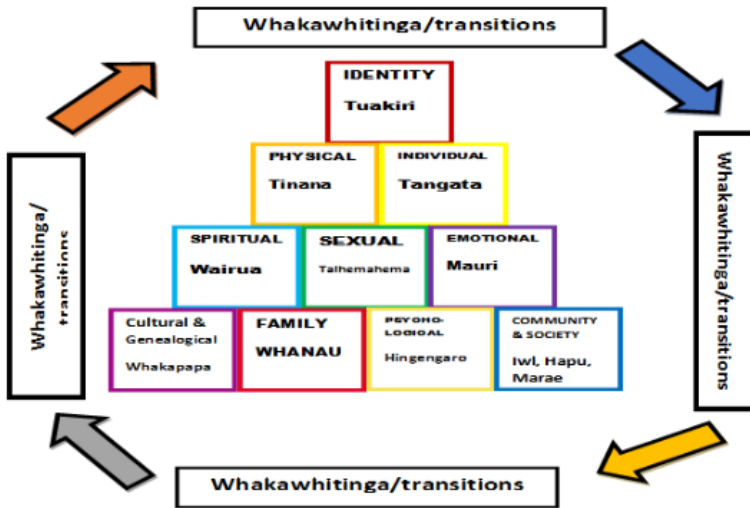
During the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand, it was evident that both Maori and English had much to offer one another, however they both felt the direct threat to one another's humanity. For example in her fictionally story-lined but meticulously researched *Clan of the Cave Bear* books (Auel, 2002) discusses the relationships between Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal beings, these relationships are almost identical to those portrayed by Maori and English whereas each saw the other as a direct to their humanity. This is further deepened within these books through the description of the reaction of both cultures to interbreeding and the treatment of cross cultured children that were born as a consequence; with these

children often being treated with despise. As a social work practitioner, having an understanding of the impacts that colonisation has had on Aotearoa New Zealand and the subsequent behavioural manifestations that exist in our society today is vital in finding and nurturing the human resilience factor that exists for each client that crosses my path. Throughout my practice I have heard many things that directly link back to the effects of colonisation, cross-cultured children expressing not feeling “Maori enough” or “Pakeha enough” to fit in with the expectations of society and heads of Whanau/family (Reed, 1960) reporting that they are in this state of dysfunction because they were colonised, a notion supported by the following statement similar to the one quoted previously by Ryde (2009) “*they have been colonised in a process that still affects them today*” (Bonnett, 2017).

However within the chaos of trauma and dysfunction, particularly if we look to the past to shape the future “*titiro whakamuri, kia koke whakamua/look to the past to move forward*” (Forster, Palmer and Barnett, 2016); there is a glimmer of the human resilience factor, a factor that craves positive change, that has a deeper desire to break the cycles of dysfunction, that wants to hold onto cultural values and sense of belonging, a notion that needs guidance and the right supports in place to make it happen, this is where my practice Whenu and Whakawhitinga/strands and transitions, figure 2 (Freeman, 2018) is applied.



Whenu and Whakawhitinga/strand and transitions model, figure 2



**What are some of the models of practice and other practitioners that have contributed to my positioning of the term indigeneity?**

This really is a difficult question, there have been so many contributing factors to the evolution of my practice; however, when reading relevant literature in preparation for this philosophical exploration of my indigeneity as aligned with my practice identity there were three practitioners that stood out. Firstly Durie (2003) describes the concept of indigeneity as *“there is no simple definition of indigenous peoples, two important characteristics are an ancient relationship with some geographical place and an ethnic distinctiveness from others now living alongside them”* in contrast, this statement is something that I can certainly relate to as a practitioner, when I was a child I knew that I had a connection to the geography aligned with our family farm in Haumoana, Hawkes Bay, as a child I did not have full understanding of that connection. As an adult I had a unique experience during childbirth where I had an out of body experience and in a moment in time in a space of limbo, I was given a gift by those who had gone before me; where I stood in

a moment of suspended time with my ancestors, developing an understanding of those ancient relationships and the importance of the geography, even though I could never return to that place physically, that ancient spiritual relationship remains. I'm not sure that I necessarily agree with Durie's positioning of ethnic distinctiveness as in my experience a concept such as this causes people to focus on their differences, rather than their humanistic similarities.

Secondly, I found myself somewhat drawn to the practice of human rights activist Andre Malraux, particularly in regards to his level of human resilience factor and being able to turn his negative past as a thief into something positive as a human rights activist and advocate (Zabus, 2015). Andre Malraux describes the notion of indigeneity in terms of post-colonialism by focussing on the term culture "*culture is the sum of all the forms of art, of love, and of thought, which, in the course or centuries, have enabled man to be less enslaved*" (Malraux, 2009). I felt drawn to this quote as part of the practice of Andre Malraux as it speaks to my definition of indigeneity as a practitioner in the following ways the reference to in the course or centuries reminds me of my belief that all practices evolve over time and the description of men being less enslaved aligns with my definition of indigeneity as it speaks to my view regarding the human resilience factor. For men to become less enslaved over course or centuries means that there has been an evolution of practice, an evolution to find a solution that allows human beings to be less enslaved and in turn promotes human resilience.

Thirdly the practice of Taina Pohatu (2003) where he takes indigeneity to the next level in practice, with the application of a principled approach entitled Nga Takepu/many principles, focussing on six main principles within a bi-cultural approach Te Whakakoharangatiratanga/respectful relationships, Ahurutanga/safe space, Kaitiakitanga/responsible trusteeship and guardianship, Tino Rangatiratanga/absolute integrity, Taukumkume/positive and negative tensions and Mauri Ora/wellbeing. When I first learned about these principles in two thousand and nine (2009), I was beginning to explore my deeper Maori connections and fully acknowledge the ancestors and other human strands and transitions that contributed to my indigeneity and practice identity. In contrast, what really drew me to these principles and still does, is the capacity for a global application on a multi-cultural level; whilst these principles are documented in a bi-

cultural format, they can be related to from a multi-cultural perspective and unlike Durie's (2003) ethnic distinctiveness, Pohatu's (2003) Nga Takepu principles creates the space for cultures to explore, examine and learn about their similarities within a principled framework, thus adding another layer to the human resilience factor; when human beings come together and focus on their similarities whether they are colonised or coloniser, they establish a common ground and begin to work together.

**To conclude, how is my practice indigenous within an Aotearoa New Zealand context?**

The relevance of having an understanding within my practice of the trauma associated with the term indigeneity, the trauma associated with colonisation, the trauma of my unique experiences and the countless contributing strands to my indigeneity and practice identity enables me to carry out my practice principles of Non-judgemental, trauma-informed and strength based on a daily basis when working alongside fellow human beings, the relevance of having understanding allows me to be able to look deeper, beyond the surface behaviour to the deeper meaning behind it. As a practitioner with a bi-cultural practice that has evolved, over a decade of my physical practice of social work and the even longer evolution of the contributing strands and transitions of those people who walked this earth before me, I feel that I can honestly say that my practice is indigenous, because it was a gift from those who have gone before me and was then contributed to through my own personal life experiences, mostly those that were painful in some way because they provided valuable lessons, my indigeneity is my practice identity and my practice identity is my indigeneity; these two components of my practice cannot be separated and in all honesty I wouldn't know how to exist without that practice identity and the knowledge that my practice will always continue to evolve through new learning and self-reflection, there will always be ongoing strands, transitions and contributions.

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