The koru model: The stages of biculturation for foreign-trained social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Barbara Staniforth and Helene Connor (Te Atiawa and Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāti Rahiri and Ngāti Te Whiti)
Waipapa Taumata Rau-University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: This article reports on a project which explored the process of "biculturation" (settling into a country with a bicultural mandate for social work practice) for 20 foreign-trained social workers who moved to Aotearoa New Zealand. This article details the particular theme of stages that the participants navigated in new terrain working within a bicultural framework with Māori.

METHODS: Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 20 foreign-trained social workers who had moved to Aotearoa New Zealand to practise social work. A thematic analysis was undertaken with the use of NVivo software.

FINDINGS: Participants reported negotiating phases consistent with the international literature on acculturation. Particular challenges were noted regarding coming to terms with the impact of colonisation and the difference between bicultural and multicultural approaches.

CONCLUSION: These stages have been represented by the various phases of growth of the fronds of a ponga tree described as the *koru model*. The stages described should be of use to social workers (or other professionals) who have shifted from one country to another, or are thinking about such a move. This is especially relevant when moving to a country where an indigenous group has experienced the negative impact and trauma of colonisation. The information will also be of use to social work agencies, employers, professional associations and regulatory bodies in understanding the process of acculturation for transnational social workers.

Keywords: Transnational social work; acculturation; indigenous; Māori, biculturalism; biculturation

Introduction

Like many professions, social work has experienced the impact of globalisation. This is demonstrated by social work being a profession very much "on the move", with various authors exploring the impact of an increasing transnational social work workforce (Bartley et al., 2011; Bartley & Beddoe, 2018; Hanna & Lyons, 2017;

Modderman et al., 2020; Pullen-Sansfaçon et al., 2012). Many studies have explored the process of settlement or acculturation for migrants into new countries (Zapf, 1991). This usually involves some kind of transition into the new society, and often this has been described as occurring in stages or phases (Berry & Hou, 2016). For some societies, however, immigrants do not need to acculturate to just one society. For

CORRESPONDENCE TO:
Barbara Staniforth
b.staniforth@auckland.ac.nz

countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand, acculturation involves a process that we refer to as "biculturation". Aotearoa New Zealand defines itself as bicultural, demonstrating a commitment to te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) that was signed by the Crown and Māori chiefs in 1840. The Social Work Registration Board (SWRB) honours this commitment by requiring that all registered social workers demonstrate competence to work with Māori via knowledge, skills, values and practice consistent with te ao Māori (the Māori world).

This article describes findings from a research project which asked foreign-trained social workers who moved to Aotearoa New Zealand, and engaged in social work practice, about their experiences of biculturation. One of the questions that was asked concerned whether participants recognised stages that they had gone through in this process. We begin the article by situating ourselves in the research and then presenting a brief description of the context of social work practice in Aotearoa. We then present literature and previous research which explore the process of acculturation which occurs for people when they move to a new country. A description of the current research project, which explored the experiences of biculturation for a group of 20 social workers who had been trained overseas and then moved to Aotearoa New Zealand, is provided alongside findings which demonstrate, for the participants, an evolutionary pattern of biculturalism.

The findings are presented utilising the koru model which we have developed. A discussion follows on how awareness of the biculturation process may be useful for social workers, and social work agencies (with consideration of applicability to other professions) in their transition and in their work with Māori whānau (families). While this study was undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand, we believe that the findings will be useful for social workers who engage

in crossing borders to provide them with some possible transitional stages they may experience, as well as for agencies or employers regarding consideration of what may facilitate transitions.

Who we are and the social work context of Aotearoa

We are both are senior lecturers at the University of Auckland. Helene Connor is of Māori descent (Te Atiawa and Ngāti Ruanui iwi, Naāti Rahiri and Ngāti Te Whiti hapu) and is the Head of School, Te Puna Wananga. Barbara Staniforth works within the social work programme and moved to Aotearoa New Zealand 25 years ago from Canada.

Although Aotearoa New Zealand has a multicultural population, it promotes a policy of biculturalism. The prevailing view among Māori has been that multiculturalism bypasses biculturalism and indigenous rights. Within a multicultural society, Māori status as *tangata whenua,* or first peoples, is not acknowledged and repositions Māori as both "othered" and marginalised as a minority. Conversely, biculturalism reaffirms Māori as a Treaty of Waitangi partner, yet also makes space for other ethnicities, once the bicultural foundation is recognised and accepted (Napan et al., 2019).

All registered social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand must demonstrate competence to work with Māori (SWRB, 2020a). Social workers who have undertaken their training in Aotearoa New Zealand are seen to have demonstrated this competency, as all social work programmes are accredited by the SWRB. Currently, graduates from local social work programmes are eligible for registration after completing 2000 hours of supervised practice, but foreign-trained social workers, who have been in Aotearoa New Zealand for less than six months, must first go through a competency assessment process which includes assessment of all competencies except competency to work with Māori and other ethnic and cultural

groups in Aotearoa New Zealand. These competencies are tested after the social worker has been in the country for over six months and has demonstrated a programme of learning in relation to working with Māori and other groups (SWRB, 2020b).

At the time of writing, there were 952, or about 10%, of the registered social workers practising in Aotearoa New Zealand who had trained overseas (SWRB register as at July 30, 2021).

Literature and previous research

A number of different themes emerged in a review of the literature. This section will outline some of the theoretical information regarding the process of transition into a new culture, colonisation and acculturation, social work migration and possibilities for aiding processes of biculturation that have been previously explored.

Theory on immigration transitions

Researchers have explored processes and/or stages that people go through when moving from one country to another. One of the first was Oberg (1960) who described four stages: *Honeymoon* (0–2 months); *Culture Shock* (3–9 months); *Adjustment* (9–48 months); and *Mastery* (48 months+). Known for use of a U-shaped view of cultural adjustment, Zapf (1991) outlined several other theorists who, between 1954 and 1985, described staged processes that usually followed a similar trajectory: 1) arrival; 2) crisis/culture shock; 3) adjustment; and 4) adaptation/acculturation.

Berry's early work on immigration (1990) focussed on people's adaptation to a new culture and posited that people tended to fall into one of four categories of acculturation, which he defined as related to "the set of cultural and psychological changes that follow the contact between two cultural groups and their members" (Berry & Hou, 2016, p. 254). Berry initially described a set of four different acculturation strategies

which he believed represented the different ways people settled into their new country, based on the balance of a group's sense of belonging to their original society and to the one to which they have moved. These include *integration* (high sense of belonging to both their country of origin and to the new country); *assimilation* (high sense of belonging to the new country and a low sense of belonging to the country of origin); *separation* (low sense of belonging for the new country and high for the country of origin); and *marginalisation* (low sense of belonging for both new country and country of origin) (Berry, 1990). While the theory was originally proposed to be reflexive, with both cultures impacting upon one another, the literature has so far mostly revolved around the experience of the immigrating population. While Berry's theories have evolved, there have been critiques that this theory presents a deficit view of immigrants over difficulties experienced – that it problematises individuals who do not meet a cultural norm and that a liberal, multicultural view may ignore the oppression that a more critical consideration may expose (Sakamoto, 2007).

In countries that have been colonised, indigenous populations have traditionally needed to acculturate as they have been overwhelmed by the arrival of the colonisers whose ideals, values and cultural practices eventually developed into the "norms" of those societies. In many cases, those ideals were imposed, but Māori also saw the future advantages for their children in being able to mix in the Western culture (e.g., being able to speak, read and write in English) and were sometimes active in encouraging some of this integration (see Hoskins et al., 2020). Dudgeon et al. (2016) asserted that "the existing literature thus far has predominantly mirrored the dominant group's interpretation of the acculturation experience of Indigenous peoples" (p. 121), and described how indigenous people have been "studied by" non-indigenous scholars, with an assumption often made by

those researchers that assimilation into the colonisers' ways of being was the desirable goal, as the settler ways of being were seen to be "superior" (p. 120).

Ward and Mak (2016) have described the acculturation research in relation to new immigrants in Aotearoa New Zealand. They asserted that "[r]esearch in New Zealand has consistently shown that integration is preferred not only by immigrants, but also is most highly recommended for immigrants by Māori and New Zealand Europeans" (p. 318). Research has also occurred into the re-integration of Māori into their own culture. Ward and Mak (2016) described the research of Rata et al. (2014) who interviewed young Māori students and their families who were involved in a cultural re-integration programme at a state high school. They set out the importance of consideration of "colonial histories and indigenous aspirations" (Ward & Mak, 2016, p. 319), which is consistent with the concerns expressed by Sakamoto (2007) in relation to oppression. They developed a model of indigenous identity development which uses ideas from the Māori creation story and the cultural process of pōwhiri (welcoming and joining with visitors).

Social work

There is a growing body of literature which concerns the acculturation experiences of social workers as they move from their home countries to new countries to practise. The process of *professional acculturation* has been explored by various authors. Pullen-Sansfaçon et al. (2012) defined professional acculturation as the process that occurs when "individuals who have been qualified according to their profession's standards in one country, subsequently move to a new country and undergo resultant adaptations in personal, professional, social, and cultural identity" (p. 38). They developed a theoretical framework for describing the process of professional acculturation that occurs when social workers cross borders: professional identity occurs through

the process and aftermath of migration where "life adjustments as well as work adjustments co-exist, overlap, and mutually influence the ever evolving professional self" and that "personal and professional identity are interdependent and shaped by the context and the relationships within the environment" (p. 44).

A number of studies have arisen from an Aotearoa New Zealand three-stage study (Crossing Borders) focusing on the experiences of registered foreign-trained social workers. Bartley et al. (2011) reported on demographic characteristics of 238 foreign-trained social workers relative to country of origin (England 27%; South Africa 14.5%) and place of employment (District Health Board 42%; Statutory child protection 33%). Beddoe et al. (2012) reported on the second phase of focus group outcomes ($N = 18$) and third phase survey ($N = 294$) from this study. They found that participants would have liked a stronger induction process and better connections to the profession. The majority of participants felt that their overseas qualifications had prepared them well for practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, and many reported that they had skills (such as conducting therapy) that were underutilised in their new country.

Fouché et al. (2014) reported on the experience of "enduring professional dislocation" described by the participants. There was a sense for many that the profession was not held in high esteem in the eyes of the public or other professionals, compared with their country of origin. "While warmly welcomed and occasionally given a superficial introduction to Māori culture, many found there was no induction process that helped participants comprehend cultural, social and political aspects of New Zealand social work" (p. 2018).

Modderman et al. (2020) reported on a study of English and Irish social workers who emigrated to practise in child welfare in Australia. The article explored the knowledge regarding Australian First

Nations people held by the social workers at two points in time. The research found that the social workers held little knowledge and that this was particularly evident in relation to child-rearing practices. They recommended the practices of cultural humility and critical self-reflection in the process of developing awareness.

Bicultural context

From the Crossing Borders study mentioned previously, Fouché et al. (2015) explored issues for transnational social workers in relation to the cultural dimensions of the transition. They stated that "[t]he cultural specificity of practising social work makes the transferability of learned skills less straightforward than other skilled professions in a foreign context" (p. 108) and that this involves an awareness of history and the evolution of social policy and practice. Many of their respondents reported a sense of culture shock after arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand. This was magnified in a bicultural practice environment. Some found it perplexing when, having come from very multicultural environments, where they felt confident practising with very diverse cultures, that they were required to prove their competence to work with Māori. Some of the participants indicated that they had not found their training to work with Māori to be particularly helpful and, while others did find their training experiences useful, they found that it was difficult to locate. The authors concluded that "a focused cultural transitioning intervention would help to clarify expectations and the responsibility of the various parties to improve the migrant social work experience" (p. 116) and that multiple forms of support should be enlisted to facilitate their transition.

Walsh-Tapiata et al. (2018) set out an important transitional Māori framework, calling upon the pōwhiri. They describe elements of the pōwhiri process and likened them to stages that newly arrived social workers go through while negotiating their new practice environments. For Māori, the pōwhiri process is an integral part of establishing relationships and trust between parties. The article provides micro and macro practice examples for different parts of the pōwhiri. Social workers often feel a degree of trepidation when entering a new space or practice. "While pōwhiri might confront newcomers as foreign at first, there is also a trust in the relationship that will ensure that all ultimately benefit from this process as each comes to know and understand each other" (p. 159). Several useful points are made about the responsibilities of the host country towards arriving social workers:

> As practitioners, managers, educators, professional bodies and the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), we all share in the reciprocal responsibility of ensuring that our manuhiri (visitors) have ample opportunity to seek out cultural encounters on the path to ethically ground their practice. (p. 166)

Peter et al. (2020) conducted focus groups with migrant social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2017. They conceptualised the process of acculturation as moving between territories. While not specifically focused on biculturalism, they found that some of their participants had felt challenged by bicultural expectations and were surprised by there being little online to teach them about social work practice with Māori.

The literature to date has explored the ideas of acculturation, social work migration and the bicultural practice environment. While some findings have involved discussion around the implications of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural status, no research to date has looked at this aspect exclusively – as the current study does.

Methodology

As researchers, we have both been influenced by poststructural and feminist ways of viewing the world. For Connor,

there is also a kaupapa (approaches, principles) Māori thread that runs through her way of seeing the world. This research has been framed by these ontologies and adopts a critical realist perspective that contends that, while there is some knowledge that is "real", how we see and interact with these realities determines our perspectives. Critical realism also adopts an emancipatory axiology which is consistent with wanting this research to contribute to change or amelioration of the experiences of transnational social workers, and better service for Māori (Haigh et al., 2019).

The research was given approval by the University of Auckland's Human Participants Ethics Committee and all participants provided written consent to being part of the research. A qualitative, semi-structured interview process was chosen to obtain rich data about participants' experiences.

An invitation for foreign-trained social workers was emailed to the national membership of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) as well as being posted on the SWRB webpage. Participants were required to have been in the country for at least two years so that they could look back on some of their experiences of the transitions. A total of 20 social workers agreed to take part in the study and they were interviewed by one of the authors, either in person (7), via phone (2) or Zoom/Skype (11) through 2017 and 2018.

We have de-aggregated the sample for reasons of confidentiality and we have used pseudonyms in reporting of the data. There were 20 participants in total –15 identified as women, and five as men. Six people were aged between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, 10 between 51 and 60 and one person was over 61. Participants came from eight different countries, with six from the UK, four from South Africa, three from each of Australia and Canada, and then one from each of East Europe, Germany,

the Philippines and the Netherlands. Three participants had been in Aotearoa between two and five years, six between 6 and 10 years, six between 11 and 20 years and one more than 21 years.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed and participants were given the opportunity to make emendations. Some participants also provided additional information via email following the interviews.

All information was then analysed thematically through NVivo, following the initial stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model for thematic analysis. The information was initially coded in nodes (19) with five themes then developed, including: *how participants learned*, *stages that they went through*, *things that helped and hindered* the journey (including suggestions), issues to do with *biculturalism and multiculturalism* and interest in *learning the Māori language*. Further sub-themes were analysed within each node. This article deals with the node regarding stages or transitions for social workers on their bicultural journey. These themes have been represented through stages and we have used the metaphor of the fern frond (koru) unfolding to represent these stages.

Findings

One of the interview questions asked participants if they could identify stages that they had gone through on their bicultural journey. Most participants were able to identify stages, and some themes emerged in people's journeys. We have identified four stages that describe the journeys of biculturation of our participants. These stages are: *newly arrived*, *early growth*, *unfolding knowledge*, and *full frond*. The silver fern, a type of ponga tree, grows from a stage of a tightly coiled spirals (koru) that unfurl over time to full fronds. The koru symbol has particular significance in Māori culture and is variously thought to represent birth, regeneration, new life, growth and movement (Houlahan, 2018).

First stage of the koru model – newly arrived

We conceptualised the first phase as newly arrived, symbolised by the koru in a tightly coiled spiral (Figure 1). We see this early phase as being characterised by not knowing, disillusionment and confusion. The literature review revealed a number of authors who had conceptualised stages that people went through in moving into a new culture. While some of those stages described an initial honeymoon phase (Oberg, 1960), this phase was either very short lived or not apparent for participants who were immediately exposed to the need to practise from a bicultural stance. Some participants had done some initial research before immigrating, but most arrived with very little knowledge of te ao Māori. They had perhaps anticipated the need to integrate into Aotearoa New Zealand society without realising the bicultural layer that was required of social workers.

Figure 1 First stage of the Koru Model – newly arrived Original illustration by Simon Nash (used with permission)

A few of the participants described a sense of shock in the first months. Jessica, who worked for a district health board, recounted, "I think in the beginning it was really overwhelming for me. I didn't know where to start." Similarly, Eleanor, who worked in a non-government organisation, described her experience as "desperation because I didn't know where to go or where to get this education about biculturalism or how to approach it or who would help me".

Tony described a sense of disillusionment that occurred after his arrival:

> I had an outsider's view of New Zealand, which I guess is the PR image of New Zealand that everything is great and fantastic and wonderful…and so coming to a realisation of the role of Europeans and colonialism it was a shock to me, it was a shock.

Kelly moved into a social work education setting where she experienced significant tension between Māori and non-Māori staff. "I was quite shocked when I came here…about pretty much the hatred between groups and the function between groups because that was the whole reason I left [my home country]."

Some of the participants described confusion between ideas of biculturalism and multiculturalism, with particular concern that the idea of "Māori for Māori by Māori" was replicating apartheid or segregation. For Milly, a woman of colour, who had come from a very multicultural society, this was particularly difficult:

> I was brought up at a time where all the propaganda around South Africa and understanding what segregation meant from that. I'm also very clear about my black history, so I understand about segregation…So was it segregation? So in those first two years I absolutely had no idea what biculturalism meant.

Milly also described the difficulty in trying to talk about it with people. She experienced

that, generally, Māori colleagues would become defensive when she tried to find out more about why the need for biculturalism, and non-Māori, who wanted to stay Eurocentric, did not want to talk about it either. "So you are kind of in a muddle and in shock."

Juliette also described a struggle with understanding biculturalism:

> Now looking back it was a very underdeveloped, and could be viewed as a racist view, "like everyone treats everyone the same and give everyone equal opportunities" and all of those kinds of things…I did not get it, I did not understand why you would single out Māori and then everyone else.

Jeff described having a basic understanding of biculturalism, but then experienced de-skilling, "I then went through a period of not knowing, it was a bit like I thought I had to re-train and that the work pre-NZ did not count."

James, a social work educator, described his attempts at trying to learn more about biculturalism in the early stages, "I remember when I first came, I tried reading Michael King's history and I tried to do things, but it felt like I was almost an imposter to students."

Second stage of the koru model – early growth

The second phase is perceived as early growth, symbolised by the koru starting to open (Figure 2). In this stage, people are becoming more aware of the need to learn about biculturalism and there is sometimes a sense that it is something that they *have* to do. There can be a sense of fear about practice with Māori and a sense of discomfort around making mistakes. For some participants who came from the UK, there was also a sense of guilt or shame from being associated with the coloniser. Many of the participants had engaged in some form of training about biculturalism by this time.

Figure 2 Second stage of the Koru Model – early growth
Original illustration by Simon Nash (used with permission)

Adam, from the UK, became aware of some of the messages that needed to change for his bicultural journey:

> I did come from a nation where during the 1960s…the view was the British were going to civilise natives around the world and bring them the Christian message and what a wonderful great empire we had. And I can't help but think some of those ideas stuck and…I had to challenge and it was an arrogance I think in those early days, I didn't understand.

Tony, also from the UK, described a similar reckoning that occurred for him in the early stages:

> It was also a bit about reflecting and coming to terms with how my history and my background in terms of being from the UK…there is a role there that England played in those early years [of] colonialism, and having to come to terms with that history, which was something we are not really taught in the UK. We are not told about that stuff. So it is a bit

of an awakening and a bit of reflection and a bit of soul searching around that and that is sort of ongoing.

Katriana developed greater awareness regarding some of the dynamics she encountered in Aotearoa New Zealand society:

…there was a stage of frustration…I find racism in New Zealand being covert. Racism drives me insane and I keep saying I would rather deal with overt racists because they are upfront so you can confront them, than with those people who keep talking "I am not racist, but"…and who keep backstabbing and undermining any project that aims to uplift Māori.

Leanna described a shift that occurred for her in "the second part" of the process through beginning her work with Māori:

I felt scared, I felt I am not confident to work with Māori, I felt that yeah weak, I don't know, maybe it is because of the confidence…But then with [agency] I don't have choice once [the case] is allocated to you, you have to work [with Māori]. So that fear and feeling scared it was just a thought, so when I started working with them, they are the same as us.

As with Leanna, Marlene defined stage two as "working closely with colleagues and developing relationships with Māori people".

Bella, who worked in mental health, was moved along her journey due to professional requirements. "Then I went through a stage of 'I HAVE to learn it' where there were demands made by outside organisations such as ANZASW to demonstrate bicultural awareness and practice."

Third stage of the koru model – unfolding knowledge

We see the third phase of the koru model as unfolding knowledge, symbolised by the fronds of the fern unfurling (Figure 3).
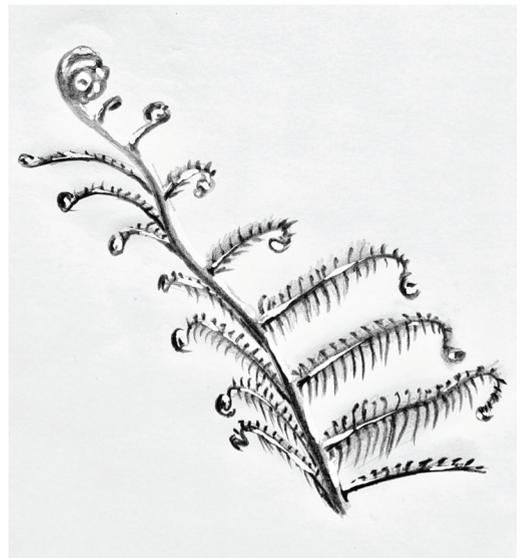

Figure 3 Third stage of the Koru Model – unfolding knowledge
Original illustration by Simon Nash (used with permission)

Participants described a stage where they started to settle into their new lives and became more open to learning, experienced a bit more confidence and started integrating their education into their practice. They began to form connections and relationships with Māori. Some participants also described a growing sense of connection to spiritual aspects of te ao Māori.

Pamela relayed her experience of taking what she was learning to heart and trying to implement it sincerely in her practice, only to be challenged by non-Māori practitioners. "And I would go 'well I have been taught this is the culture here' and it was like 'what right do you have to tell me what my culture is?', you know, which is interesting and challenging at the time." She described that Māori colleagues had no issue with this, "the people whose culture it was were saying 'we want people to know this, we want you to understand and respect it and so don't feel like you are not allowed to'".

Anita described the significance of working alongside Māori colleagues on her journey: "I reckon the best has been working

alongside other Māori practitioners, you know, running groups, doing assessments, working with Māori patients and clients." She also made clear the power of relationship in her journey, "I think being connected to those people actually pushed me much further down than any training did." James also described the power of relationship as a reflexive process, "I have felt more confident and had a relationship with people and that welcome has been more forthcoming or I have been more willing to engage with it."

Eleanor discussed having a Māori colleague who had initially seemed reluctant to engage with her. The relationship evolved over time to the point that they could then:

> …discuss how we feel and making it a space where we can put our ideas, but also kind of challenge each other's ideas… we can respect each other's ideas and thoughts, even though he might not agree with what I think, but at least I put it out there.

Kathleen was able to identify a shift through her process and described going "from basic knowledge (the protocols, the Treaty, and what happens at the marae [Māori community meeting place]), picking up on some te reo (language), towards a heart connection/whanaungatanga (relationship connection) due to specific heart or aroha (love) experiences".

Fenella described moving from a sense of needing to almost over-prepare, through a sense of anxiety in relation to encounters with Māori, to becoming more confident. "So I guess the longer I have worked with Māori, the more confident I become that actually, you know, I don't really have to think about what could all go wrong." Similarly, Marlene felt that she had a stage of "overcoming 'fear' of being disrespectful – needed to gain confidence – stage in the journey had been to ask more questions and meet more Māori people".

Fourth stage of the koru model – full frond

The fourth stage of the koru model is likened to an established full frond, contributing to the growth of the ponga tree with a place in the forest (Figure 4). In this stage, participants describe starting to feel more confident and are more grounded in understanding who they are within the process of becoming bicultural. They move into a stage of really *wanting* to know more and describe it as a stage of exploration, consolidation and growth.

A few participants were able to situate themselves in Aotearoa New Zealand and feel their feet more grounded in their own identities and cultures. They described feeling less defensive and accepting of recognising where they "sat" in the particular cultural landscape. Nadia described being able to step away from some of the anger she perceived was being directed towards her:

Figure 4 Fourth stage of the Koru Model – full frond
Original illustration by Simon Nash (used with permission)

I learned sometimes it was an uncomfortable place for me to be and often it was going to be an uncomfortable place and in some ways I was used to that uncomfortable place…So that was ok and [in] that uncomfortable place I was often seen as who I am, you know, privileged and the anger and the experiences that I hadn't experienced were almost played out on me at times.

Nadia went on to state that "I am a signifier of what has happened to that family… whether it be a social worker coming in or somebody they had to deal with…and I have to acknowledge that in my practice."

For Veronica, there was an acceptance that she may never feel completely comfortable. "I don't feel particularly absolute[ly] comfortable with Māori people…and there's a way now of communicating which is much more relaxed because we are who we are."

Kathleen articulated a very meaningful process where she went to "a deeper connection and appreciation, and it is not something that is political for me, but more like a spiritual journey or awareness". She went on to describe the whole process in saying that "there is continuous growth from distance and ignorance to feeling really welcome, feeling really connected and actually being part of the land".

For some it felt like a process of "coming home" again. Pamela described a situation where she was returning to work following the death of a family member. She had contacted one of her Māori colleagues when she returned and asked if they could meet up. The next day she arrived for their meeting and found that

> She had brought the kaumatua and kuia [Māori elders]…her team leader who was there and a couple of other people within the team within the kaupapa Māori team and they had put aside that time to just make sure I was safe coming back and at that point I thought "this is where I belong".

Many participants described coming to a place of once again "not knowing", but that this was ok. Kelly discussed the importance of understanding herself and what she brought and the recognition that she "[would] never understand the ins and outs of certain processes because they are not mine and I can't own them just because someone talked to me about it". Like the old adage about wisdom, she recognised that "first you don't know [anything] and then you get all the knowledge and then the understanding that you know nothing".

For Katriana there was also a sense of realising her limits and her place:

> So the next stage is probably accepting it as it is, you know, ok this is what it is and what is the social edge so that I can undertake in my position or in my power to make this country more bicultural…. Like it is always navigating, you know, always navigating being Pākehā and being an immigrant. When I wave a Māori flag it is not my place to wave a Māori flag actually, my place is to be an ally and to really stand behind my mates when they wave their flag.

Bella described being "more of a critical friend in terms of recognising my privilege and wanting to use it for good".

Nearly every participant articulated that there was really no end to their process and that they saw it as being a lifelong one. Not all participants had reached the later parts of this. For most, there was a sense of hope, with Jules stating, "I feel quite confident but there's a lot more that I can do. Very open to learning more."

Discussion

While much has been written about acculturation or integration into new societies, very little has been explored regarding when there are two main cultures. The participants in this study did generally follow similar trajectories

as described by Oberg (1960) and others, but with less of a pronounced honeymoon period. Most participants entered a state of overwhelmingness or shock, which later moved towards exploration, growth, confidence and consolidation.

For many participants there was a parallel process that occurred with respect to exploration of who they were and what was significant about their own culture (often most visible when leaving behind the dominant culture in a new environment). They then moved to consideration of who they were within the new cultures, that they had moved towards.

Some participants experienced "push-back" from other non-Māori social workers when they tried to follow Māori protocols, or encouraged others to do so. This requires consideration of the racism that exists in the host society. Generally, people want to try to "fit in" to their new work environments. This can be difficult when there is a stated message that all social workers need to be bicultural, but in reality this might not be seen in practice, and might, in some cases, be actively rejected.

For participants who had come from the UK, there was an added layer of needing to reconceptualise the "stories" they had been told about colonisation growing up in their home countries, and then reconciling how they negotiated that identity in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially working with Māori. For participants who had come from minority cultures in other countries, and had been involved in struggles for equality there, the concept of biculturalism and/or Māori wanting to consolidate their own culture and resources was sometimes confusing and seen as moving backwards towards apartheid or segregation. There is a big difference in Aotearoa New Zealand in that it is Māori seeking to control their own self-determination (rangatiratanga), with a view that they will be in a much better position to meet their own needs than being told by others what is needed.

It is often difficult for non-Māori social workers, who are eager to learn and to help, to be told that a client requests to work with a Māori social worker or to learn that they might not be welcomed with open arms into a Māori whānau (family). Jones (2012) described that there may be an experience of "outrage and hurt when the colonised are seen to turn away from the colonisers' best intentions" (p. 102). For white or European migrants, concepts of "white fragility" may also have been present at various stages of their journey and need to be confronted or explored in order to work well within Aotearoa New Zealand. The bicultural journey means moving away from personalising, through a sense of rejection or defensiveness, to acceptance and the need to walk beside or behind, as allies. Asking Māori how social workers can support their self-determination is part of that process. Like many colonised countries, such as Canada and Australia, social work in Aotearoa New Zealand has often contributed to, and is often still seen to contribute to, the detriment of indigenous people (Māori Perspective Advisory Committee, 1988). Social workers who come into such situations need to learn to tread carefully and respectfully.

These journeys take time to complete. The SWRB requires that all schools of social work prepare students to work with Māori, in either two-year qualifying Master's programmes, or four-year Bachelor's programmes. Foreign-trained social workers need to be present in Aotearoa New Zealand for at least six months before they can apply for full registration (SWRB, 2020b). While this recognises the need for some time to acclimatise and learn, for most foreign-trained social workers in this study, their biculturation process was closest to overwhelmingness and shock at the six-month period. This needs to be taken into account, and employers need to be prepared to support their social workers in a myriad of ways over several years.

While this study looked only at the transitions of social workers into Aotearoa New Zealand, it is likely that the results and considerations would be applicable to many transnational social workers as they settle. In Staniforth and Connor (2021) we have explored what participants from this study felt helped and hindered their transition into biculturalism, but we believe that there is benefit in better understanding the transitions within the process.

Limitations

As a qualitative study with only 20 participants, the information is limited to these participants and cannot be generalised to a greater population. Furthermore, as participants who self-selected into the research, they likely represent social workers who have a strong interest in biculturalism. As the participants had been in Aotearoa New Zealand for varying amounts of time, they may have not yet entered certain phases of biculturation, as it is often an ongoing and lifelong process. The researchers represent both Māori and non-Māori populations and participants may have felt differing degrees of comfort in responding to each of us as interviewers. All participants have come from their own unique cultural locations and each of these will also have likely contributed to their experiences of biculturation.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of some of the literature surrounding stages of acculturation for people moving from one country to another as well as some of the key literature to date regarding the incidence and experience of transnational social work. The results from a qualitative study of 20 social workers were explored with a particular focus on investigating the stages that participants felt they had gone through on their bicultural journeys. While the stages which emerged were similar in many ways to those described previously, the dynamics

of working with indigenous Māori who had experienced oppression both by British and European people who had immigrated in the late 1800s and early 1900s, coupled with social work's contribution to the colonisation process, added different dimensions. Most social workers undertook a process of self-exploration to situate themselves in their new roles and lives. For most, it had not been an easy transition, but it had been, and continues to be, a powerful and important one.

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