


## Article

# White Pop, Shiny Armour and a Sling and Stone: Indigenous Expressions of Contemporary Congregational Song Exploring Christian-Māori Identity

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**Abstract:** It has taken many years for different styles of music to be utilised within Pentecostal churches as acceptable forms of worship. These shifts in musical sensibilities, which draw upon elements of pop, rock and hip hop, have allowed for a contemporisation of music that functions as worship within these settings, and although still debated within and across some denominations, there is a growing acceptance amongst Western churches of these styles. Whilst these developments have taken place over the past few decades, there is an ongoing resistance by Pentecostal churches to embrace Indigenous musical expressions of worship, which are usually treated as token recognitions of minority groups, and at worst, demonised as irredeemable musical forms. This article draws upon interview data with Christian-Māori leaders from New Zealand and focus group participants of a diaspora Māori church in southwest Sydney, Australia, who considered their views as Christian musicians and ministers. These perspectives seek to challenge the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations within a church setting and create a more inclusive philosophy and practice towards being ‘one in Christ’ with the role of music as worship acting as a case study throughout. It also considers how Indigenous forms of worship impact cultural identity, where Christian worship drawing upon Māori language and music forms has led to deeper connections to congregants’ cultural backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Pentecostal worship music; Indigenous worship; contemporary Christian music; congregational song; Indigenous Christianity; Māori music; Christian music



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## 1. Introduction

Since the mid 1950s, there have been a range of influences and societal shifts that have deeply impacted the ways in which Pentecostal worship music has engaged with popular culture. From the introduction of electric guitars and drums into worship services to the utilisation of contemporary musical styles such as rock, pop and hip hop, Christian music has been challenged both musically and philosophically concerning its purpose, target audience and usage within and without the four walls of the Church (Jennings 2014, pp. 211–26; Lindenbaum 2012; Mosher 2008). While these developments have led to significant changes within Christian music in the West, they often ignore Indigenous expressions of contemporary Christian-Indigenous identity. This article considers interview perspectives from Christian leaders in Aotearoa/New Zealand<sup>1</sup> and Māori diaspora church-based participants that were collated as part of my doctoral studies (2012–2015). These groups explored how they perceived their Christianity within their contexts, and what it means to express Christian-Māori identity through music both inside and outside of their congregations. A key consideration of this paper is the need for ‘raw’ or ‘spirit and truth’ worship, which is not fuelled by the (potential) commercial interests of mass Christian

<sup>1</sup> Aotearoa is the Māori word for New Zealand, meaning the land of the long white cloud, and gives credence first to Māori perceptions of the world, and then to the European naming of the islands. See Smith (1999) and Smith (2005) for more on Indigenous naming of the world and its importance in Indigenous research.

music producers, but rather seeks to express Christian identity through the eyes of (in this case, Māori) Christians both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Unlikely Roots: Theological Considerations, Pentecostalism and Early Rock ‘n’ Roll*

Many arguments have been levelled against the merging of contemporary forms of Christian music (hereafter referred to as contemporary congregational songs (CCS<sup>2</sup>)), alongside secular musical styles, with some scholars arguing that no style is neutral, and therefore impacts the way the given style can or cannot act to facilitate Christian worship (Dawn 1999; Lucarini 2010; Godwin 1995 in Thornton 2015), especially where the “attitudes, behaviours and thoughts” of the music seep into “the subculture that embraces it” (Defleur and Dennis 1996, cited in Gormly 2003, p. 255). While CCS has accepted some forms of merging contemporary styles such as rock, pop and hip hop with worship music (Lim and Ruth 2017; Thornton 2015), interviewees that took part in this research made clear that for indigenous musical styles such as *haka* (postured war dance) and *waiata* (monophonic chant), mergings can often be perceived at best as inappropriate for Christian worship and at worst, influenced by the demonic.

Meaningful theological considerations around the role and purpose of contemporary worship music led to the incorporation of more modern musical genres, such as pop and rock, into congregational music. These practices emerged from considerations around “relevance regarding contemporary concerns and issues in the lives of worshippers” (Lim and Ruth 2017, p. 2), including the use of modern (not archaic) language and genuine commitment to authenticity to the lives of these worshippers—“whatever worship is, it must be ‘true to us’” (ibid, p. 18). Other theological considerations include “strategic targeting” (ibid, p. 2), or trying to determine which styles of music “produce the greatest numbers in worship?” (ibid, p. 20), and how to utilise worship music as a means of reaching those outside of the church (ibid).

A unique concept to Pentecostal/charismatic music practice, and least initially, was “ushering people into the presence of God through music” (New Heart Music Ministries 2016, cited in Lim and Ruth 2017, p. 83). This idea of the power of music to convey the presence and power of God is a frequent identifier of the Spirit’s activity amongst Christians who utilise these styles of music in congregational settings, including those interviewed below. Thematically, it has been identified that such songs have historically focussed on desiring God, though often do not address issues of sin, failure, repentance or “complaints or distress with God” (ibid, p. 95), perhaps because such themes would not engender strategic targeting considerations discussed above, or that they do not reflect the theological foci of congregations that utilise such music in a corporate sense. As will be seen below, however, Christian-Māori artists do address these issues through their use of worship music.

Merging Christian congregation songs with more modern styles is influenced by the commercial pressures that emerge alongside the hedonistic pursuits that can often be a part of music making, and the “celebrity cult of power” status often afforded to prominent artists (Romanowski 2000, p. 106, cited in Gormly 2003, p. 256). At the same time, authors such as Riches (2010) advocate that Christian worship contains “eternal truths that must be stewarded in the midst of the changing ‘contemporary’” (ibid, p. 89). This position focuses less upon musical styles and gives more consideration to the relationship between musical styles utilised in church contexts and how they resonate with believers’ daily lives and usual musical practices (Porter 2013). Other arguments within this domain include how the morality of composers and songwriters impact certain styles’ useability within church contexts, and the veneration of Western art music and its perceived moral superiority over other forms of non-art music within congregational settings (Thornton 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See Thornton (2016) for justification of this naming for the genre.

Hillsong Music Australia is often cited as one of the most pertinent music producers in the CCS scene (Evans 2006; Thornton 2016), with its stylistic tendencies often drawing upon surrounding musical styles, all the while being one of the most influential forces upon Pentecostalism and its music making practices (see Thornton 2016, p. 167)<sup>3</sup>.

What is less discussed, however, is Pentecostalism's influence upon the development of rock 'n' roll when the latter was in its nascent stages. Many of the most prominent rock 'n' roll and soul artists—including Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Tina Turner and James Brown—grew up in Pentecostal churches or were at least influenced by Pentecostal music and its visceral affects upon worshippers' bodies and psyches (Mosher 2008). These artists "grew up in Pentecostal churches and brought the open emotionalism and exuberant style of their faith experience into their performances and recordings" (ibid, p. 95), which could be considered similar to the "whole lotta shakin'" (ibid, p. 212) that became a feature of early rock performances. It is not unusual for Pentecostal Christian worship musicians to "'baptise' popular music forms for use in church" (ibid). This act of 'baptising' music has led to a "dramatic growth of contemporary Christian music" (Gormly 2003, p. 251), which has, in turn, allowed Christians "effective entry into the national discourse . . . [and] to resist against a dominant secular society by taking possession of a cultural form and redefining it as their own" (ibid). This redefining of styles creates a place of standing within the surrounding cultural milieu. This act is considered counter-cultural and, for those who operate within it, evangelistic, as it seeks to engage those from outside the church in musical forms, they are familiar with, and insodoing, promoting Christian values and Christian messages of faith to society at large (Gormly 2003; Porter 2013; Evans 2006).

## 2.2. Contemporary Christian Music, Indigeneity and Voice

The use of contemporary styles within CCS is an active process of changing the symbolic value of contemporary musical styles, in an attempt to resist dominant cultural values that hegemonise how these styles should be utilised (Gormly 2003). Despite a recognition of the connection between Pentecostalism and the roots of rock 'n' roll—the merging of the 'sacred' and 'profane' for use in Christian worship—this practice of 'baptising' Indigenous forms of music can be vehemently resisted by Pentecostal musical and theological practice. What is considered 'acceptable' or 'redeemable' within this baptismal font is often limited to styles that have been associated with White music and musicians, despite the presence of a few non-White musicians mentioned above and the persistent influence of Negro spirituals and other Black musical styles upon the development of rock 'n' roll (Mosher 2008)<sup>4</sup>. The presence of Indigenous expressions of Christian worship within modern Christian music practice challenges the normativity and ready acceptance of the "spatial conditions for the construction of whiteness" (Delaney 2002, p. 7) within this musical scene. However, these expressions are often demonised by those outside of the culture, as will be discussed shortly by research participants. Although it would be simpler to enforce a kind of "integration-assimilation" (Mosher 2008, p. 7) upon Indigenous groups and their cultural-worship expressions—especially considering their small populations when compared to their dominant White counterparts in most White Anglophonic churches—there is a clear recognition that Indigenous peoples from one part of the world have "more in common" (ibid, p. 8) with other Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world, despite geographical distance. The histories of colonialism, dispossession and displacement effectively form a 'glocal' (global–local) subgroup within church congregations, whose concerns,

<sup>3</sup> Although this tension deserves a greater debate, and has been argued in much more depth than presented here, this article focuses on Indigenous identity expression within CCS. More information on the so called 'worship wars' related to musical styles and appropriateness within church contexts can be found in Lucarini (2010), Blachard and Lucarini (2006), Thornton (2015), and Dawn (1999), amongst others.

<sup>4</sup> Black Gospel music is a readily accepted form of worship within congregational settings, yet even this style suffered from the demonisation of White church culture in its early stages according to Mosher. The utilisation of Gospel music tends to be most prevalent amongst Black churches due to a variety of factors, including shared life experiences of struggle which tend to be more prolific in the subject matter of Black gospel songs (Banjo and Williams 2011). Using Black Gospel songs as worship is a markedly different practice to that of 'baptising' secular forms for use as church music, which is under consideration here.

if ever voiced, are often considered a minority to be appeased or dissuaded of their place of standing, as the implications upon church practice and culture would be too inconvenient to outwork. Conversely, these shared experiences by minority groups can offer “new possibilities for cross-cultural engagement through performance” (Magowan 2007, p. 461), potentially capturing expressions of Indigenous epistemological and ontological realities through Indigenous musical forms that marry Christian concepts of worship with important Indigenous concepts, such as relationship to land and how appropriate (and heightened) emotional catharsis can take place within specific musical forms.

Edwards highlights how words like ‘multiracial’ and ‘multicultural’ are used to describe the demographic makeup of churches, though in practice, this often looks like tokenistic gestures afforded to smaller groups, such as flags placed around an auditorium or translations offered from English to the relevant language(s) (Edwards 2008, p. 5). Perhaps more substantial multiculturalism within church contexts would impact upon factors such as “the theological orientation, worship service structure, sermon presentation, and leadership structure” (ibid), though these are often left untouched by Indigenous/non-White populations in ways that fundamentally influence the culture of a congregation. These practices impact churches’ ability to be places where Indigenous identities can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance and calls into question what Paul’s words about being one body in Christ<sup>5</sup> truly means. Some churches may focus on recategorising congregants’ sense of identity, promoting religious identity while “deemphasizing racial differences” (Becker 1998; Marti 2005; Stanczak 2006 cited in Edwards 2008, p. 7). This often does little more than reinforce Christian-White (dominant) identity, rather than Christian-Indigenous identity. These practices can lead to people feeling “disconnected from the church. They leave the church for these reasons” (Christerson et al. 2005, cited in Edwards 2008).

A repeated concern of the research participants, especially those in Aotearoa/New Zealand, is that the practice of ‘baptising’ White styles of music was done within their (mostly Pentecostal) church contexts without much criticism or scepticism, and yet attempting to do this with Indigenous (read: Māori) musical styles was perceived as dangerous and, at worst, demonic. This process of racialising and then demonising music inherently places the values of “‘White’ people above those of colour” (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, p. 393), and sends a clear message to Indigenous peoples: your practices and, thus, identity are not welcome in the place that affirms that we are ‘one in Christ’. These actions perpetuate the presence of Whiteness within church contexts, albeit under the banner of ‘spirit and truth’ worship. If space is afforded to Christian-Indigenous forms of music making to be considered as worship in multicultural congregations, this could act to validate and legitimise Christian-Indigenous forms of identity expression without having to conform to the dominant (White) cultural ethos that pervades Westernised church settings. Gormly (2003) considers how the assumption of cultural space by minority groups can challenge dominant cultural norms:

Musical artists lower the barriers, then occupy the cultural territory by co-opting the language or musical form for their own purposes . . . The appropriator has embraced the language or symbols as his or her own, taking them from their originators and often facilitating the fixing of new meanings to the symbols. It is this way that a group can move into and occupy a social space from which they were formerly shut out. This is especially true when occupying the cultural territory of the mainstream. (p. 261)

Christian-Māori musicians such as Cindy Raukere (1999, 2011), Luke Kaa-Morgan (1999) and Steve Apirana (1989, 1992) actively engage in this space, alongside non-Indigenous musicians such as David and Dale Garrett (Garrett and Garrett 1999). This new social space weaves together the potency of indigenous traditional forms of practice and reappropriates them within Christian spirituality, abstaining from syncretism whilst engaging in Christian spirituality in a culturally enriched manner.

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 3:28 (ESV): “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.

I now turn to the voices of the research participants alongside relevant literature that resonates with these perspectives, highlighting the import of Indigenous artists assuming this cultural space within the world of CCS.

### 3. Data Analysis and Discussion: Perspectives from Practitioners

The following interview data highlights some of the most pertinent concerns raised by Christian-Māori musicians and church congregants who took part in this research. The perspectives presented in this paper do not assume to be representative of Christian-Māori spirituality overall, but a clear and consistent message was present amongst these worship leaders who practice across Aotearoa/New Zealand and in a Māori diaspora (Sydney) church congregation. While this section provides only a cross-section of some of these concerns, the issues discussed are, I believe, those that the Church<sup>6</sup> as an institution that claims to be multicultural ought to pay attention to, as they reflect the experiences of those that love the Church, though are not shy in highlighting cultural preference that often assume the garb of ‘Christian culture’. This practice unwittingly suppresses and ignores the needs of Indigenous congregants, especially within Pentecostal worship practices.

The perspectives shared below promote a Christian-Māori-centric practice of worship that resists “hegemonic control, empire building and colonization” (Jagessar and Burns 2007, p. 40), as well as inculturation practices that inadvertently or intentionally promote the colonizing culture’s ontologies and epistemologies (ibid). A part of this resistance to dominant control is the practice of research participants, particularly those in the Sydney diaspora group, negotiating their “*in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha 1994, p. 38, emphasis original, cited in Pui-Lan 2015, p. 9), and what this space means for the intersection of their collective spirituality and cultural identity, and how this is expressed in their music making practices.

Participants were selected to take part in this ethnographic study on the basis of *whakawhānaungatanga*—the establishing and maintaining of kinship ties—that is explained more clearly by Said (2018, pp. 10–13) and Said (2017, pp. 70–120). This process is based upon relationships formed with potential research participants, who then refer other contacts in their networks and are connected in their own web of relationships. While this may be perceived as reinforcing similar views shared amongst participants, the below data highlight similar though heterogenous concerns. It is also the case that leaders within such communities act as referents and therefore greatly influenced the agenda and flow of the research as it emerged, which was a key element of promoting the self-determination of research participants throughout this process (Said 2018). As such, findings are not claimed to be representative of those outside of the research group, yet highlight concerns that are, I believe, pertinent considerations of the multicultural Church.

Interview perspectives are quoted at length below, in an attempt to allow the voice of these participants to emerge more fully. This is not from a lack of academic rigour or diligence but rather is in keeping with a Māori-Indigenous approach towards storytelling (cf. Bishop 1996, 2005), which is a culturally valid and legitimising means of allowing a diversity of truths to emerge (Smith 1999).

#### 3.1. Unearthing the Sounds of the Nations

Cindy Ruakere is a Christian-Māori singer, songwriter and itinerant minister who has been exploring her Māori/Pākehā (White European) identity through more than 15 years of ministry. She considers how practicing expressions of Christian-Indigenous worship are fraught with challenges due to dominant church culture. Cindy’s passion is to see the unique cultural expressions of each people group emerge, a term she coined as ‘your sound’, which she seeks to provoke in the conferences she conducts:

I was in Norway. I went and spoke at a school of worship, and there was a guy from the Ukraine there. And so I asked the question, “What is your sound?” [ . . . ]

<sup>6</sup> Capitalised to signify the ecumenical global institution of faith, rather than the local building or congregation.



And this one guy, he produced this album that his church had just released. He goes, “This is my sound.” It was all Hillsong songs that had been translated into Russian, and on the front cover there was a Darlene Zschech lookalike doing this [hands raised, worship posture] and a Reuben Morgan lookalike guy with a guitar. He said, “This is our sound.” I said, “No, it’s not your sound.” He said, “Yes, it is.” I said, “No, this is somebody else’s sound” . . . it’s like, a clone is never as good as the original? But I couldn’t convince him that that wasn’t his sound. I was trying to say no . . . cause even, like, “What’s the sound of the Ukraine? What’s the sound that God wants to pull up from there?”

There is a clear recognition that while Hillsong has and continues to produce music that is powerful and spirituality edifying, the way that their music has been received and treated by congregations around the world challenges expressions of worship that are markedly different from it, especially in terms of Indigenous modes of expression. Cindy goes on to describe the process of engaging one of her workshop attendees in seeking out what ‘her sound’ is:

I remember . . . there was this girl . . . and she goes, “I don’t know what our sound is”. So I kept sort of pursuing it and, “What’s part of your folklore?” . . . So, we just started doing that and I . . . we started doing this . . . thing and it ended up in this whole sort of amazing, you know . . . experience, or experiment, and it’s like she got it for the first time? It was more than songs coming out of America or Australia. She got it. I mean I’m not saying she carried on with it, but it was just enough to awaken, at least, to awaken people to think deeper than the surface, and that’s the trouble with Christian praise and worship.

For Cindy, diversity in the expression of worship is integral to forming a space where Māori, amongst other Indigenous peoples, are free to express their spirituality ‘in spirit and truth’, without trying to imitate or be dictated to by the dominant culture. This practice, at least for Cindy, captures part of what it means to be ‘one in Christ’ in a musical sense: being Christians that are willing to learn of the ‘other’—their brothers and sisters in the faith from ethnic minority groups—and allow them to express their cultural identity in ways that glorify God, even if this mode of expression is foreign to someone from the dominant culture. Rather than creating space for ethnocentrism to emerge among minority groups, Cindy exhorts all church members to explore those cultural expressions that are unique to them, so that a deeper understanding and in turn participation with those of shared Christian faith deepens the unity of the Church globally. Such ‘unity in diversity’ has the potential to manifest itself through different languages, musical styles and cultural traditions within a church setting.

Several events took place that showed Cindy a connection between the sound of particular Indigenous instruments and the effect they have on both Māori and non-Māori congregants:

I was given a traditional Māori instrument: it was a *pūtātara*, which is a conch shell. One Sunday at church, while I was leading worship, I actually played this conch shell, and a *haka* broke out in the church which was extraordinary, because you’ve got to remember, it was still very much White middle class. And it was extraordinary. Afterwards, I had someone come up to me and say, “I don’t know if that was God.” I said to them, “I don’t know if it was God either!” Because I didn’t know. I mean I had no . . . I’d never seen it happen before, so I had no grid for it.

And then it carried on and then, a little while later, this same person gave me a bone flute called a *koāuau* . . . and I played it this one Sunday at church, and intercession broke out in the church. I knew that somehow there was this correlation between the sound and the response . . . I started to realise . . . that God wanted to speak into the sound that He’d placed within the land.

The use of Indigenous instrumentation can have a powerful effect upon congregants, which challenges the dominance of rock- and pop-based styles within Pentecostal settings as those that are ‘appropriate’ forms of worship. In this sense, Cindy, as an Indigenous musician, is reinterpreting the symbols of these traditional instruments and reappropriating them for use within church settings (i.e., ‘baptising’ them), and, if the response of the congregation is anything to go by, is being used to promote positive Christian expressions of spirituality.

### 3.2. Reducing and Expanding Worship

Cindy further considers what happens when these forms of worship are muted, and the affect this has on how God might communicate with His people:

[The Bible] doesn’t say, you know, in Revelation that let Hillsong or Integrity or Bethel<sup>7</sup> . . . it says let every tribe and tongue, you know, like praise is going to come out of every tribe and tongue. And we’ve reduced worship down to White pop. How have we done that? It’s like we’ve tried to box . . . in something that’s so beautiful and should be so expansive, that we’ve narrowed it down to this tiny little grid of “it sounds like this”.

And I think that we’ve limited God moving on our music, dumbing it down, praise and worship, White pop, what a travesty! Really, and there needs to be a revolution, I think.

A key aspect of allowing Indigenous expressions to become normal in Christian praise and worship practice is the utilisation of Indigenous and other languages and musical styles within Western church settings. Cindy went on to make reference to the work of Walter Brueggemann’s *The Message of the Psalms* (Brueggemann 1984), which explores in detail how the Jewish book of psalms shows such a wide array of emotions that is typically absent when considering the subject matter of CCS. Brueggemann’s work divides the psalms into three general categories: psalms of orientation, where the children of Israel are confident in and experiencing their identity as God’s chosen people and living in His promises (inheriting the promised land); psalms of disorientation, where God’s presence seems absent and His promises distant (typified by exile); and psalms of reorientation, where there is a restoration and renewed commitment to keeping covenant (return from exile). Cindy maintains that Christian song ought to explore these different “seasons” in a more candid fashion, so as to experience Christian spirituality more fully in all stages of life:

And I think that that has to be part of our story as Indigenous people or Māori or whatever, that allow that story to come out, I think. That, you know, like the joys and the triumphs, that was part of our dilemma I think, back in the ‘80s and ‘90s, Charismatic churches, it was all about triumphism. Well, it’s not! . . . It’s not black and white . . . I think that we’ve missed out on so much because life is seasons, and yet we’ve . . . God put the seasons in place to help us navigate our own winters and springs and summers and autumns. And that has to be in yourself.

This sense of false triumphalism distorts the experiences of grief, pain, loss and sorrow, which so heavily feature throughout the Jewish psalms, let alone other Biblical passages that address these. This lack of emotional diversity, Cindy argues, does little to engage especially Indigenous peoples in acts of worship that are heartfelt, and promotes a spirituality that lacks integrity and honesty.

Bradford Haami, a Māori journalist and film producer, highlighted how traditional Māori forms align more closely with the structure and subject matter of the Old Testament psalms than contemporary Pentecostal music practice:

The book of psalms, to me, is pretty much the same as the ancient Māori chants, when you look at the compositions. They . . . have verses, there’s usually one

<sup>7</sup> Three prominent CCS music producers, based in Australia (Hillsong) and America (Integrity and Bethel).

storyline going through the whole thing. There's never much repetition, because it's part of a whole story . . . you're not restricted by having to repeat choruses or, you know, verse one, verse two, repeat verse one, then go to the chorus . . . But it comes down to deep poetry, you see . . . And psalms also, sometimes there's a three-way conversation going on in there, between the writer, like King David, God and the Holy Spirit have all got lines in there, you know, so you got this three-way conversation. Well, see, our ancestors wrote some of these songs, their *waiata aroha* (song of love), these were three-way conversations between the writer, her dead husband and the spirit world . . . They had conversations in the songs.

According to Brad, Māori traditional musical styles have compositional synergies with the Jewish psalms. Combined with the wide-ranging subject matter that is a feature of these Māori songs<sup>8</sup>, these forms of Indigenous expression have the potential to deepen the practices and subject matter of contemporary congregation song, if they are given regard as legitimate forms of worship within congregational settings.

The interviewees had strong convictions of what happens when these forms of worship are practiced, especially within congregations that have strong Indigenous representation. Cindy highlighted this using the Old Testament story of David and Goliath, where David was made to put on King Saul's armour in an attempt to defeat the giant who was intimidating Israel's army (1 Samuel 17). The king's armour did not fit David, so he fought his adversary with a sling and stone, slaying the giant with one hit. For Cindy, this is a lesson in how modern Christian worship music can draw from traditional non-Western musical practices:

It's like we've been embarrassed of the thing that God's given to us, a sling and stone, when we want the shiny armour, you know, the beautiful shield and the shiny sharp sword. And yet that couldn't defeat . . . the giant . . . The army and all their glory, was still intimidated and terrified by one man and his words. Not even anything he did, it was just his words, but it took a man who knew his weapons very well, but they were earthy, and they were, you know, mocked because they're like kids toys really, a sling and stone. Yet that was the very thing that took down that giant . . . That it doesn't look flash, it's pretty raw, but it gets the job done (laughs).

The 'shiny armour' mentioned here refers to heavily produced CCS that seeks near perfection in pitch and arrangements. Whilst Cindy did not state that this music is detrimental to the Church, she did make the point that many glocal congregations seek to imitate these music producers, which effectively stifle their own unique sounds, which could offer a more authentic form of worship. If such congregations were more attuned to producing their own music, they would not be imitating anyone, but rather reflecting the spiritual and cultural realities of their local contexts. Cindy refers to this localised sound as the 'sound of the land'—something that is well-known and 'pretty raw'. Cindy's albums show that, for her, this means drawing upon traditional Māori instruments, such as *kōauau* (bone flutes), *pūrerehua* (bullroarers) and others, alongside traditional musical forms such as *haka* (postured war dance) and *waiata* (monophonic chant). These instruments and cultural forms are merged with contemporary styles, such as rock and pop, alongside subject matter that includes Scriptures from the Bible and other spiritual themes (Raukore 1999, 2011). Cindy further describes the need for such Indigenous expressions through the analogy of an orchestra:

In each nation, God has placed something unique and beautiful. And you think about an orchestra, that it can all be caught up in the most prominent instruments, and yet it can be the tiny little thing that makes it the glorious sound that it is. So, a little country . . . could have something that's unique, that finishes the whole

<sup>8</sup> See Jones and Ngata ([1929] 2004); McLean and Orbell (1975) and McLean (1996) for examples of traditional Māori songs.



piece. And yet we keep trampling the small and the unique for the bigger, and I'm sick of it. I think God is too [laughs].

Rather than seeking to imitate Christian music producers who have influence globally, Cindy implores the Church to see which sounds are inherently part of the cultural practices of congregants and draw upon these as a means of spiritual worship—'in spirit and truth'.

### 3.3. A Case Study: Haka in Church

One of the most vigorous and well-known expressions of Māori culture is *haka*<sup>9</sup>. Interviewees shared how this one Māori expression has been repeatedly demonised, potentially because of its aggressive nature and the facial distortions and protruding eye movements (*pukana*) that characterise this cultural expression. For all its perceived aggression, interviewees highlighted how, when used in Christian contexts, it had very beneficial effects upon congregants, including the creation of a sense of belonging and identification for Māori congregants. Luke Kaa-Morgan, singer/songwriter and Baptist church minister, reflects on how *haka* has impacted his congregation:

We do *haka*, few and far between, but when we do it, all those songs, it's very sort of anchoring. So if there was a *haka*, they'd get up and join that ... All of a sudden, you've given them place and space in a moment that mostly is a bit unfamiliar to them? It's nice to see those things happen.

For some Māori, Western church culture is 'unfamiliar' for various reasons—they may not regularly attend services, or more usually, services are usually dictated by Eurocentric cultural norms, which do not necessarily resonate or find meaning with Māori congregants.

Rather than being a force of aggression and anger, as it is often perceived by non-Māori, *haka* is described by interviewees as a means of ministry and healing for Christian-Māori who practice it. Ben Wakefield, who is a non-Māori (*Pākehā*) church minister based in Whakatane, considered how *haka* has been used for ministering to young people at a camp:

During a worship night, in the middle, there was a *haka* that we had prepared for our guest speaker and we did the *haka*. And then a group of people from Luke [Kaa-Morgan]'s church had a *haka* performed during the worship service and really, really ... singing was going on, so I think it just gave it a lot of space for that. Also, in a camp which deals with a lot of healing of hurt for teenagers, the guys got up and did a *haka*, almost as an apology to any females that had been abused.

The potency of *haka* has the potential to be a conduit of identification and even spiritual healing for those that practice it, if practiced with the intentions of bringing on these affects. Stories of a similar nature were shared by Māori evangelist and Director of Island Breeze New Zealand<sup>10</sup> Ray Totorewa, who saw how *haka* broke suicidal practices of a native tribe by enacting Jesus' crucifixion in *haka* form<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.4. Worship or Tokenism?

There is a tendency to fall into tokenism when attempting to utilise traditional Indigenous forms of cultural expression within church contexts. Ruia Aperahama, a prominent Māori musician of the Ratana faith<sup>12</sup>, speaks about his own understanding of Māori culture, the church, and tokenism:

<sup>9</sup> When the word *haka* is mentioned, many people may reflect on the one performed before a rugby league or union game, typically *Ka mate*. This is one of many *haka*, the form being used in a range of settings: funerals, family gatherings, sporting matches, and to celebrate birthdays amongst others. See Kāretu (1993) and McLean (1996) for more information on *haka* as a genre of Māori music.

<sup>10</sup> As of the time of the interview, March 2013. This ministry seeks to "Make God known through His inherent gifts and expressions within the nations". The New Zealand site is no longer accessible, but the Australian equivalent is available at <https://www.islandbreeze.com.au/>.

<sup>11</sup> Contact the author for further information.

<sup>12</sup> A following named after a Māori prophet whose ministry witnessed miraculous signs and wonders, including the restoration of sight to Ruia's (previously blind) grandmother. See Morrison et al. (2012) for more information on the Ratana movement.

You can go through all the different [church] movements, even the Apostolics. And they'll just play the old, "Okay, you Māoris. You fellas just come out when we need you and do your haka *pōwhiri* (welcome *haka*) tourism stuff and then go back again and shut up" . . . That's what most churches will do to Māori participation inside the church . . . rather than seeing that there's an opportunity to embrace God and Christ's passion, you know, in our own unique ways. "Oh no, you can't do that".

As explored above, *haka* has great potential to bring healing and inclusion to those that have been ostracised and their cultural expressions suppressed by the Church. Simultaneously, and dangerously, a very real threat to this healing and integration can be the well-intentioned but ultimately tokenistic use of Māori cultural practices within such contexts. Brad explains this in further detail:

I won't do a *haka* in a church, because at the end, the leaders are, "Come on Brad, let's do a *haka*, you know, let's do a *haka* in the service." But I really have to think, "Okay, scripturally and also, being driven by the Holy Spirit, what is this?" Because my view on *haka* and *waiata* (song)<sup>13</sup> and all that is that these things have power, but only in the right context. If you do it outside of that context, it'll become just entertainment and it will become . . . a tokenistic thing.

The effects of tokenism are such that they would weaken the potency of *haka*, if conducted only to entertain or give lip service to Māori culture within a church context. Brad goes on to describe how *haka* can be done in a culturally appropriate and respectful way:

The *haka* has to have some reason and be in context. To me, a *haka* should be done in prayer as part of intercession, because that's where it fits. It should also be to proclaim, because the power of the *haka* is to proclaim a message or to proclaim a word, and the actions should really push the word.

An appropriate treatment of *haka* means that one is very conscious of its context and purpose within the church service. Brad perceives its use as most appropriate for proclamation and intercession, as the focus on the words in a *haka* is a strong feature. It is interesting to note Brad's perspectives here, and the aforementioned experience of Cindy who, after playing a conch shell, saw *haka* happen within the congregation.

Seeking to understand the difference between tokenism and worship, I asked Brad what the line is between these two concepts in a church service, and whether providing interpretations of Te Reo (the Māori language) is helpful to encourage authentic worship in non-Western cultural expressions for non-speakers:

To me, I'm more interested in open worship, where people are free to do what they want. And it doesn't matter if a *haka* comes out and it doesn't need to be explained; it just ends up being these people's particular way of worshipping God at that given moment, you know, and it's driven by the Spirit. And then someone else starts singing an Irish song or some other song that everyone knows. You know, there are points in worship where people don't actually understand what's being said but they have to trust that those people there know what they're saying.

There is a focus on heartfelt worship being 'driven by the Spirit' (that is, prompted by what is believed to be the Holy Spirit) but not restricted to 'White pop', as is the usual expression of contemporary congregational songs. This is not confined to Indigenous congregants, but it is hoped that all participants are able to express their Christian spirituality in church contexts that are open enough to receive them as worship and not as a performative reference to culture.

When asked about how to promote authentic and culturally integrated forms of worship rather than tokenistic references to culture, Ray stated:

<sup>13</sup> Literally 'song', but usually refers to traditional monophonic chant. See McLean and Orbell (1975) for examples of different kinds of *waiata*.

[Indigenous forms of worship] may not mean a lot to the majority, ay? ... You're speaking another language, you don't know the language, you can't understand the fullness and the depth of a particular word, but it does for those who represent that culture.

We have to look at a default setting and we have to change that, because if we don't, we're always going to go back to the factory setting ... [this] default page ... excludes all this room for creativity, and expressions, and really ... that is a lot of work right there. That is a lot of work. But if we don't look at that as a church or individual, then we will attempt at doing things with good intentions and good hearts and that, but when the going gets tough, or we're finding ourselves a little bit insecure about this particular thing and we don't understand, then unfortunately we are gonna to go back to this default setting.

This 'default setting' has been shown to reflect the dominant culture, in this case White Pentecostal worship practices. If Indigenous peoples are given a place of standing (*tūranga waewae*) within these contexts, Ray maintains that this can impact all members of a congregation:

So the beauty of having the expressions of worship, the language, the cultures are very ... that whole diversity thing is ... you know ... we can't have unity without diversity. You need diversity to come to a sense of unity. Without no diversity, then that word doesn't really mean much. It becomes uniformity or, you know, sameness ... But diversity causes you to walk in unity to go on, and you understand it, yeah. Ah! That's why, bro, I'm really passionate about, you know, just understanding the God in you, and the God in your culture. You know, teach me something (laughs) about Him. So when I go to these other different cultures, you know, I'm ... what is it that God has left behind, as opposed to (laughs) which demon [are we] hunting out there? And I think if we go in with that attitude, oh, we'll be blessed and we'll be blown away by how good and how big He is, ay?

For Ray, tokenism occurs where expressions of worship are not sought as forming the fabric of the culture of the church—that is, not part of 'spirit and truth' worship. When churches seek to engage with God and Christian faith through such practices, and not use different cultural expressions as a musical 'item' or 'event' to entertain a crowd, tokenism diminishes in place of spiritual worship, which potentially explores forms that are uncommon to a Western church context.

The Sydney-based focus group also gave an example of how the use of *haka* has created this sense of expression and *tūranga waewae* for the Māori congregants of the church. It must be stated, however, that at the time of writing my thesis, the majority of congregants were Māori, and did not form an ethnic minority within the church. It is still important to consider, however, that the unique expression of *haka* has been utilised effectively within an Australian diaspora context and does resonate with a sense of identity for the Māori congregants of the church. This concept is described by Rommen (2007) as "the multiple poetics of conviction" (p. 67)—the church unashamedly marries their Christian spirituality, expressed through citing at length biblical passages through *haka* (such as Psalm 24 and Ephesians 6, see Said 2012 and Calvary Life Outreach 2017), at once expanding typical musical forms of contemporary worship (*haka*'s supposed 'aggression') through legitimising this Māori mode of expression as appropriate for use within congregational contexts. As such, when *haka* are performed within their local church or abroad (as has been the case in years passed), such worship practices form "the sites around which identifications are being articulated" (Rommen 2007, p. 67). These 'sites' are those that "embody and incarnate the faith" (Gittins 2004, p. 50), and extend what is understood as "acceptable and theologically meaningful expressions of Christianity" (ibid); in other words, processes and manifestations of inculturation. The effectiveness of this kind of inculturation is explored in the diaspora participants' words below, highlighting that rather

than simply Christianising Maori forms of musical and cultural expression, there are deep resonances with this kind of Māori worship practice, which “produce[s] transformed lives” (ibid, p. 68).

The focus group questioned if and how Māori music draws Māori into church, and what musical elements appeal to Māori, resonating with the theological imperatives discussed in the above literature review (see Section 2.1, The Māori diaspora participants revealed several fascinating insights:

Beverly: I don’t know. It’s probably the beat, the strum, the sound. Like I said, when my husband was saved . . . it was just with Mark . . . he had these songs like Psalm 91<sup>14</sup> . . . So my husband, like I said, Logan<sup>15</sup> liked Māoridom, so to speak. So when he heard that, he was like, “What’s that sound?” And then when he heard the *haka*, he was like . . . he likes *haka*. It doesn’t matter what it was, so long as it was *haka*.

And he wasn’t saved<sup>16</sup>, but he used to come down and listen to the kids, and he used to go, “Hmmm . . . ” Then he’d sit alongside of them and he’d learn it. And I think it was, it’s just something about the culture, in it, that can draw people, I think, you know. And even here, in Australia here, people hear it, and they’ll go, “Oh Māori, Māori church” . . . We’ve been to a few Fijian churches, and when they get up and do that lupe<sup>17</sup> but in a godly . . . oh, it’s beautiful! It’s beautiful! [ . . . ] When Māori people get up and do their songs, and the Fijian people get up and do their songs, it’s just something about their culture that just grabs the people. I think it’s something they’ve known all their life.

Beverly’s insights reveal that the cultural practices of Māori and other diaspora groups have a strong appeal within a church setting because these musical practices are inherently familiar, and perhaps foster a sense of belonging—‘something they’ve known all their life’. The practice of indigenous worship in this setting, then, acts “as a tool of evangelism” (Tamanabae cited in Webb 2015, p. 88) as well as a community resource that preserves language and powerful cultural symbolisms for congregants who for the most part are not fluent in their heritage tongue. For these reasons, the practice of *haka* and other Māori musical styles as worship can be even more reinforcing and affirming for Māori congregants than those who are fluent in the language, creating a place of cultural standing that ties in biblical perspectives (see also Webb 2015, p. 90). Papua New Guinean worship leader Meakoro describes how when merging gospel music and Papua New Guinean indigenous music, “I think [we were] somewhere along the line . . . we tapped into that [cultural] dimension” (ibid) that resonates with other indigenous congregants.

Alternatively, practicing Christian spirituality within this diaspora context has led to some Māori participants wanting to connect with their culture in a deeper way. This resonates with Klaver’s (2015) notion of how worship practices are “constitutive . . . for religious experience and the construction of meaning” (p. 100) and “generate new meanings by the constitutive power of social practices” (ibid, p. 101). Apart from the communication of Christian theology and Biblical passages, the enactment of *haka* and other Māori forms, shared within a Christian framework, have been shown to excite a deeper exploration of one’s cultural identity. Dona, one of the senior pastors of the diaspora church, described her experience as one in which affirmation of her Christian identity led to a deeper awareness of cultural identity:

<sup>14</sup> A song based on Psalm 91 in English and Māori, which features on the author’s first release entitled *Whakanuia*. This is available by contacting the author or searching the title on iTunes and Spotify.

<sup>15</sup> Named changed as this member of the church was not present in the focus group, and therefore did not offer consent for his real name to be used.

<sup>16</sup> i.e., had not yet converted to Christianity

<sup>17</sup> This should read *meke*, which is a Fijian traditional performance based on narratives describing a journey, or history of a particular place (e.g., villages / elders). It can also be performed as a war dance, similar to *haka*.

**Dona:** Really, I didn't really know who I was, and it wasn't until I felt the love of God that I knew He just truly loved me. It didn't matter whether I had a father or not. I think that really helped me to accept things a lot better for me.

**Jioji:** Even from a cultural point?

**Dona:** Yeah.

**Jioji:** That's very powerful . . . So again, going back to this whole notion that cultural heart connects to your spiritual heart, but your spiritual heart greatly then helps with your cultural heart.

**Dona:** Most definitely.

Enacting these indigenous practices “facilitates reflections on one's life while simultaneously making the enactment of one's life possible” (Klaver 2015, p. 108)—the possibility of practicing one's cultural identity through the gate of Christian spirituality, infused with Māori practices and ontologies. At another point in the focus group discussion, the group were asked if one's spiritual connection to their Christian faith helped tie together the other “legs”, or components, of one's identity, including their cultural identity. Beverly responded by saying:

Absolutely. I think you'll find everyone Māori in this church would say the same thing.

Beyond being a source of healing and identification for Māori, Aotearoa/New Zealand interviewee Ray describes how these forms of cultural expression, when practiced with an intention to genuinely create a space of standing for minority groups within church settings, can actually have reconciliatory affects:

'Missionary' and 'a Christian' are bad words around here. That's because of the story and the history of the place in New Zealand, and I'm both, (laughs) you know? And people want to come to New Zealand to reach out to the Māoris and do all that sort of stuff. So I say, “Well, you know, for a start, you take four steps back (laughs) and come in with this kind of posture: Let your hands talk, you know? . . . You come, you learn, you listen, you do. And if they say something, they will say something, but you are part of . . . that's a part of restoring that . . . you know, ay? You're just walking the restoration by not saying anything and here, though . . . In other different countries, oh, they want the knowledge, they want you to say something, they want to hear your beliefs. Here, not so much. Or they have heard, but they've also seen . . . The seen made more of an impact, you know, back then.

Shannon: Yes, of course it did. It always does.

Ray: Ay? Always does. So how to restore that? Do the exact same thing! (Laughs). Do what you're saying.

[ . . . ]

Ray: All our *kaumātuas* (elders) that have passed on, and that were always, have just wanted room at the cross, ay? “Just shift over, can you just shift over bro?”

The challenge for the Church, then, is to live up to the call of Galatians 3:28—if we are all one in Christ, is this being expressed in the way worship unfolds as we gather together? What does it mean to be one in Christ, and yet express Christian worship in 'spirit and truth', making 'room at the cross' for our brothers and sisters of all tribes and tongues? It is hoped that these perspectives foster deeper reflections upon what these realities might look like within glocal church settings, and how a more integrated approach to multicultural worship might be manifested therein.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper advocated for the potency and importance of congregations intentionally seeking to engage Indigenous modes of expression within what constitutes 'worship' in



their local contexts. Rather than seeking to emulate top Christian music producers, Indigenous ‘spirit and truth’ worship can draw upon musical styles that have been described as ‘raw’ and something that is instinctively ‘known’ by Indigenous Christians, though with little room to express these ontological realities alongside dominant contemporary congregational song practices. These Indigenous expressions have been shown to be a source of identification, healing and even reconciliation for Indigenous congregants, as these expressions validate and legitimise their cultural identities in ways that are not apparent in non-Indigenous modes of expression. Christian-Māori voices in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia emphasise this approach to Christian worship, that can potentially unify believers and encourage them to learn from each other and grow together in a shared and mutual faith. These forms of worship, when shared in congregations, can affirm and resonate with congregants of many backgrounds and, by extension, the larger Christian church as an expression of love and unity in the midst of diversity.

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