

# protracted ambivalence

The decolonisation and indigenising of  
contemporary branding in Aotearoa

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A thesis

submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Masters of Design Innovation

Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington  
School of Design

2022

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*Note about the title:*

The term ‘protracted ambivalence’ was used by Shand (2002) to describe the appropriation of the koru:

*“In this way, the koru on the tail of an Air New Zealand plane is a figure of protracted ambivalence.”*

# abstract

Most New Zealanders are unaware, ignorant, or dismissive of why and how colonisation continues to happen today, and what the effects on society are (Kiddle, 2020). Decolonising design means recovering Indigenous wisdom from the onslaught of imperialism and outmoded colonial beliefs.

Whilst there has been an influx in decolonisation material within the past five years as Aotearoa begins to face it’s colonial past, and the negative impacts of colonialism, it can be hard to actualise this information. This research recognises the similarities within design colonisation and contemporary branding through the experiences of designers from different experience levels within the design industry, from

recent graduates to multinational designers. These experiences of design practitioners produce a framework that acts as a foundation to decolonise brand design in the future.

This research speaks to cultural appropriation and calls for ways indigenise branding within Aotearoa. Through kaupapa Māori, this research challenges mainstream ways of knowing and being and centralises the needs and interests of Māori for every decision. The findings of this research will help new designers understand the implications of the colonised state of branding and, as a result, will influence how they work for a more inclusive, fair and restorative future.

## Keywords:

decolonisation, branding, Māori, colonisation, indigenising, tikanga, kaupapa, Indigenous.

whakamihi /

## acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the contributions of my research participants. Thank you all for sharing your experiences with me, and know that they are all appreciated for your contributions to not only this research but the evolution of design as a practice.

I want to acknowledge the reassurance and guidance of my supervisors, Sarah Maxey and Dylan Horrocks. Thank you for keeping me in check throughout the entirety of this research.

Thank you to Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington for granting me the 2020 Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori) Masters by Thesis Scholarship, which motivated me further to complete this research.

To my whānau and friends, thank you for all the help and motivation to continue these past years. I hope I can do the same for you when the time comes.

Lastly, thank you to my Parents, Merrin and Mike. For all the wholehearted support throughout the years of study and beyond. I am forever grateful for the opportunities you have provided me, which allowed me to discover and reconnect with parts of our family histories.

Tight lines.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Maxey', written in a cursive style.

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## whakahihikotanga / motivations

This research has been an eye-opening journey for me, piecing together my whakapapa which I am grateful to have discovered. I have always been intrigued about my family history but have never had the confidence to explore my whakapapa until now. This thesis is not only an exploration of existing knowledge; it identifies the need for further research.

It also acts as an awakening for me, as it will forever inform how I conduct my practice as a brand designer. Hopefully, it will reassure many other designers in similar positions who never felt worthy enough to explore the traditional roots of their heritage and give them the confidence to express it through their branding projects.

# pepeha

ko **maungatautari**  
te maunga

ko **waitako** te awa

ko **tainui** te waka

ko **ngāti raukawa**  
te iwi

ko **ngāti tukorehe**  
te hapū

ko **ruapeka** te marae



**tahi.**  
**introduction**

## thesis statement

Eurocentric ideology has over-run the modern branding era. Western culture has colonised design, causing Māori culture to become suppressed. Most New Zealanders are unaware or dismissive of why colonisation continues to happen and how drastic its effects are on society today (Kiddle, 2020). Colonisation is the experience of Indigenous peoples’ oppression, in addition to the embedding of Western ideology into society.

## context

The British failed to honour the terms of Te Tiriti o Waitangi\* and began colonising New Zealand by emigrating here under the British flag, engaging in an onslaught of imperialism and oppression. European settlers quickly sought to colonise tangata whenua and establish control over the existing Māori culture, viewing their worldviews as superior to Māori. As Khandwala (2019) expresses, the term ‘decolonisation’ is used to describe the withdrawal from a former colony. However, that term has now come to represent and acknowledge that society has been built on the colonisation of other nations and that we exist within a system of privilege and oppression.

Khandwala (2019) believes decolonising design means eliminating the false categorising of craft within design to recognise all culturally important forms of making. Classifying Indigenous craft as different from modern design deems the histories and practices of design from many cultures inferior. A Eurocentric education focused on the market allied to a failed industry is one of the main factors

that perpetuate the colonisation of design (Oliveira, 2020). Those designers who advocate for decolonisation still act through the institutions that embody and uphold the principles of modernity. In its simplest form, the decolonisation of New Zealand is the reclaiming of Indigenous peoples’ right to govern themselves in their own lands once again (Kiddle, 2020). Recognising that capitalism is an instrument of colonisation is an essential first step. Therefore Khandwala (2019) believes that it is virtually impossible to decolonise in the current Western society. We need to reimagine beyond the current system that we exist in, using speculative design and design fiction.

\*Te Tiriti o Waitangi or the Treaty of Waitangi, is an agreement signed in 1840 between the British Empire and Māori. The Treaty of Waitangi is a national dual planning system where Māori and Pākehā were put at the centre of decision-making (Glynn, 1998).

## research objectives

Through the multi-generational expression of experiences from various design practitioners within the industry, this thesis aims to understand and analyse the past and present landscape of brand design in hopes of diverging from colonial ways of thinking. This thesis seeks to understand and overcome the colonised rupture that contemporary branding has become not only within New Zealand but globally. As such, this thesis aims to provide a framework for decolonising brand design for the future of Aotearoa. This framework aims to provide a respectful and fair methodology that designers can use to engage correctly in Te Ao Māori and recognises when the designer needs to disengage or seek alternate assistance for a project. This research aims to interrogate the existing landscape of contemporary brand design and analyse ways of decolonising branding by posing the question:

*How might New Zealand contribute to the decolonisation of brand design and diverge from Western-era design thinking?*

## chapter summaries

This research includes five chapters that contribute to the ongoing conversation about decolonisation. The next chapter aims to analyse existing literature and knowledge within the industry to situate this study in the broader design framework. The literature review highlights the pieces of knowledge essential for decolonising brand design and acknowledges gaps in knowledge. This research aims to fill those gaps in research and pose as a revolutionary framework tool that guides future generations of designers.

The third chapter of this thesis details the methodological research approach and discusses how each methodology is used and relevant to the research topic. This section provides insight into the data collection and analysis process and outlines the rationale behind this research.

The discussion chapter discusses the findings of various kōrero with cultural practitioners within the branding industry. This discussion analyses these experiences and pairs them with similarities from the literature review and case studies. The themes presented within this chapter inform the creation of a framework that provides a speculative guide to how New Zealanders might contribute to the decolonisation of brand design.

The conclusion of this thesis will explore and summarise the key findings from this research and highlight the direction where this research can be taken further. The conclusion will guide those who wish to begin decolonising branding within Aotearoa and correctly engage in Ao Māori from a branding perspective. The contribution to existing knowledge and value of these findings will be discussed, succeeding the discussion of findings. This section will also identify the limitations and future research directions, followed by the concluding statements of this research.

**rua.**  
**literature review**

## introduction

This analysis aims to objectively examine existing literature and design precedents to situate the study within the broader framework of design and understand how the research engages in Māoritanga. This literature and precedent review will attempt to understand how New Zealand might contribute to the decolonisation of brand design and transition from Eurocentric and Western design thinking. Analysing existing literature and researching the extensive history of the colonisation of New Zealand and its effects helps us to overcome the colonised rupture that branding has become and establishes a method for diverging from colonised ideologies in the future. This analysis will critically evaluate previous research and identify the avenues that need further investigation. It aims to understand colonisation within Aotearoa and situate this within the design industry. This analysis will also gain insight into how New Zealand can contribute to the decolonisation of brand design and investigates past examples of colonised design.

## history of colonisation

Most New Zealanders are unaware, ignorant, or dismissive of why and how colonisation continues to happen today, and what the effects on society are (Kiddle, 2020). The term ‘decolonisation’ is used to describe the withdrawal from a former colony. However, the term has since evolved and has now come to represent and acknowledge that society has been built on the colonisation of other nations and that we exist within a system of privilege and oppression (Khandwala, 2019). Colonisation is the action or process of settling

among and establishing control over Indigenous people of the land. Colonisation is the experience of Indigenous peoples’ oppression, in addition to embedding Western ideology into an existing society. The colonisation of New Zealand was a brutal process deep-seated in mistrust. Jackson (2021) states that prior to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori hapū and iwi had their own systems of government that were Mokopuna-centric. A constitutional system that placed the needs of whānau at the centre of decisions and actions that would affect their well-being and interest. Te Tiriti o Waitangi promised Māori the right to maintain their sovereignty and freedom to self-determine their futures through these systems (Jackson, 2021).

However, one of the problems the original drafters of the te reo text faced was that ‘sovereignty’ had no direct translation in te reo Māori. In the te reo text, Māori were promised the unqualified exercise of chieftainship over their lands and property (Waitangi Tribunal, 2016). Article 2 uses the word ‘rangatiratanga’ and pledges to uphold the authority that Māori have over their lands. The Queen guaranteed Māori the undisturbed possession of their lands and fisheries and exclusive rights to the land if Māori were to sell. The translators of the English text used ‘kawanatanga’, a transliteration of the word ‘governance’ (Waitangi Tribunal, 2016). As the Waitangi Tribunal (2016) states, Māori were under the impression they were allowing British ‘kawanatanga’, the right of governance. Whereas in the English text, Māori unknowingly ceded sovereignty. Britain went into the treaty negotiation intending to acquire sovereignty yet explained it to Māori as “the right to control



British subjects and thereby protect Māori”, and that rangatira would retain tino rangatiratanga, their self-determination.

The Treaty of Waitangi was supposed to be a national dual planning system where Māori and Pākehā were put at the centre of decision-making for the future of New Zealand (Glynn, 1998). Furthermore, Jackson (1988) claims that the treaty was also signed under the pretence that it would protect Māori rights and “*provide ultimate protection for their way of life, their institutions, and their culture: they were mechanisms to protect their taonga*”. However, the British failed to honour the terms of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and began to colonise New Zealand by emigrating here under the British flag, “*but they were not willing to accept the burden of the bargain from which they had gained so much*” (Temme, 1990). Fast-forward 139 years after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the loss of Te Reo Māori was so great that it was speculated to fall victim to language death (Walker, 1990). Languages die because they are no longer spoken; they do not die naturally and do not fade away without external influence. Other languages kill languages, and this can be attributed to the harsh effects that colonisation had on Aotearoa, New Zealand (Bell, 1991). Ka’ai-Mahuta (2011) states that “*from its inception, the New Zealand Government has continually passed legislation that has been detrimental to the Māori language and furthered the government’s agenda of cultural assimilation and language domination*”. The mechanism of the government’s agenda is responsible for the loss of te reo Māori through generations (Ka’ai-Mahuta, 2011). According to McCarthy (1997) “*Māori have a long*

*history of experiencing assimilative policies and practices which have been detrimental to the overall well-being of Māori, as evidenced in the language, culture and identity losses of many*”. However, in many cases, Māori have been negatively affected indirectly, due to a Eurocentric-based education system; through assimilation, cultural invasion, cultural subordination, and language domination (Ka’ai-Mahuta, 2011).

### colonised research

Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) is considered a seminal text that critiques Eurocentric concepts or research to articulate a new research agenda from an Indigenous position. It identifies research classification as a weapon used to subjugate the minds of Indigenous people and that the suspicion of research in Indigenous communities was argued to be a form of colonisation that sought to remove agency from Indigenous people. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) dives into what the term “Indigenous” truly means in today’s society—arguing that the term addresses the shared experience of colonisation and the ongoing struggle for self-determination, tino rangatiratanga. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) also argues that “*Colonisation is a process of dispossession and control*” and now requires us to think differently about how related research can adapt. It is no longer sufficient for design institutes to include a greater diversity of perspectives. These institutes’ responsibility is to transfigure design education’s structure through programmatic information, which identifies alternative possibilities to the now (Abdulla et al., 2019). Actively engaging in this space by thinking and rethinking how we design can help us realise that the standards we

have been taught are not universal and don’t apply to every aspect of design. Smith’s (1999) first edition of *Decolonizing Methodologies* discusses the concept that what we design has been taught to us as ‘universal’ and free from politics. However, every design has a purpose and a political agenda. Every design choice has the potential to persuade, exclude or oppress. Ahmed Ansari (Schultz et al., 2018) agrees as they state that decolonising design is primarily a political project, as all designs are influenced by politics, even when they claim to be politically neutral. Abdulla et al. (2019) believes that design institutes corrupt our education from the beginning, teaching us how design should be rather than supporting unique creative thoughts. Students shouldn’t be shunned by the education institutes for original creative ideas just because they don’t adhere to the colonial rules society has set. These original thoughts should be embraced and not viewed as other, or different.

### link to design

The most influential factor on contemporary design is undoubtedly colonialism, particularly the imperialistic rule of European nations that infiltrated the rest of the world. We share this planet, co-inhabited by many cultures that each orient themselves differently within and towards their environments in different ways with different civilisational histories (Abdulla et al. 2019). Abdulla et al. (2019) claims that these different ways of being are undermined by a globalised system of power that aims to eradicate the ontological and epistemological difference and advance the visions of a privileged few at the expense of others. To date, mainstream design has been

dominated by a singular view, with alternative ways being sidelined and viewed as less important. This narrowness of deficiency is a critical reflection of the limitations of the institutions within which design is studied and practised. Abdulla et al. (2019) believes that a sharper lens is needed to “*bear on non-Western ways of thinking and on the way that various societal issues are designed today*”. What does this mean for design? Decolonising design means eliminating the classification of Indigenous knowledge as different from modern design, as this deems the histories and practices of design from many cultures inferior (Khandwala, 2019). Simba Ncube, a graphic design student at Central Saint Martins in London, is frequently labelled as a “black designer”, and claims that “*while identity and solace can be found in the worlds, they still ‘other’ the practitioner and therefore their work*” (Khandwala, 2019). When Western ideologies are put at the centre of design, it forces anything else to be seen as ‘different’ or inferior (Khandwala, 2019). Ncube speaks with Khandwala (2019) and states that “*when a homogenous group decides what’s “good” it’s detrimental to the profession, and results in the majority of people striving towards a similar style*”.

Schultz et al. (2018) mentions the risk of ‘decolonising design’ becoming reduced to a hollow gesture and just another design descriptor. Abdulla states that our job is to make sure that people know what the term ‘decolonising design’ truly is: “*a subversion and transformation of Eurocentric thinking about knowledge; a knowledge produced with and from rather than about*” (Schultz et al., 2018, p. 89). Reflective of this colonist ideology was the banning of

te reo Māori in New Zealand schools. This led to widespread prohibition of te reo Māori as children were forbidden to speak te reo Māori in the classroom or on the playground (Walker, 1990). According to Darder (1991), the suppression of te reo Māori was a form of psychological violence. Language is the sustenance of a culture, it provides forms of empowerment and is not solely a form of communication, but it helps transmit values and the beliefs of that culture (Pere, 1997). The act of decolonising design is the idea of looking at the history of design and understanding how and why it started and the social forces that shaped the discipline as we know it today (Khandwala & Dolat, 2020). Khandwala (& Dolat, 2020) claims that “*within design schools, we value minimalist, modernist aesthetics over anything seen as garish or kitsch*”, and that a lot of design created by other cultures is dismissed as craft or labelled as something that is ‘not tasteful’. Colonialism has shaped design in a white supremacist way, dominating design practice and how we view it. Decolonising is identifying where these colonial attitudes manifest within design practice—then thinking about how we can extract these attitudes from our understanding of design (Khandwala & Dolat, 2020). Khandwala (& Dolat, 2020) urges us to understand how we can unlearn what we learnt in design schools because a lot of it is harmful to the discipline of design.

*“We’re taught that as designers, we know best, more so than the client. But of course, we are, we study this for years, and this god complex proves harmful to design, which stems from the colonial history of Western colonialism. Where Britain would overrule countries because they thought that their way was*

*better and that they knew best, it’s reflected in design. It is a very colonialist attitude to think you can go into a place and tell people how to live and improve their societies”* (Khandwala & Dolat, 2020).

Dolat and Khandwala (2020) speak on the effects that colonisation can have on a culture that’s forcibly suppressed and deems the existing social structures, religion and ways of living of that culture inferior to their own. To decolonise design means to unwrap and understand where these specific design tastes come from, unpacking the harmful attitudes that designers tend to have, and unlearning that a lot of what we’ve been taught is ‘good’ design or ‘timeless’ design (Khandwala & Dolat, 2020). Colonialism has shaped how we guide design, and to think about this we must think about the root of how design began (Khandwala & Dolat, 2020). It’s not as essential to defend the ahistorical truth of the decolonisation of design but more to design meaningful material-symbolic change that is not prejudiced nor disabled by the colonial designs of academy (Schultz et al., 2018).

**application to branding**

Air New Zealand is an example of a company with a history of exploiting Māori culture for its own benefit. Air New Zealand inherited its original logo in 1965 from its predecessor, Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL).



Figure 1.1  
Railways Studios  
advertisement for TEAL, 2016.

This design featured a geometric-styled bird in-flight. This was until 1973 when Air New Zealand developed their logo that incorporated a koru design and the lettering “Air New Zealand” (Figure 1.2). This design has gone through adaptations throughout the years, whilst the koru remained sacrosanct.



2012 was the most recent and prominent rebranding, making the Air New Zealand logo more stylish and elegant. Figure 1.3 shows the koru was moved behind the lettering, and the A was slightly enlarged, which, when viewed as a whole, gave the logo the appearance of an aircraft side-on.



The now-ubiquitous koru logo uses elements of Māori design as if it held no intrinsic meaning of its own. When placed on the tail of an aircraft, this symbol is seen worldwide and carries the weight of a nation with it (Figure 1.4). In an interview conducted by Shand (2002), Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, a trenchant critic of cultural appropriation, states: “*[the koru] becomes a plastic symbol. And, admittedly, we look at the Air New Zealand tail and think “there is a koru”*” (Shand, 2002). However, in the mid-1990s, when Air New Zealand went through a rebranding, the decision was made not to trademark the koru symbol in an attempt

to maintain the goodwill of New Zealanders. The symbol used on the tail of every aircraft, on staff uniforms and used on multiple forms of advertisement remains a figure of protracted ambivalence, because of its considerable commercial value to the airline (Shand, 2002).

Yet, in 2019, Air NZ applied to trademark their in-flight Magazine logo Kia Ora. Many perceived this as an “insult” to Māori culture, as te reo Māori is a national treasure and not something to be profited from (Radio New Zealand, 2019). As a national airline, they’re seizing national icons to promote their brand and claiming exclusive property rights on Indigenous culture. Furthermore, the cultural appropriation of the koru dislocates it from its initial cultural context. It has been explained as symbolising birth, regeneration, new life, growth and movement. Yet, in doing so, those specific meanings are erased, and the cultural significance of its design starts to fade; and is now regarded as a form of modernism and traditional Māori art. This is often referred to as Modernist Appropriation\* (Tate, n.d.).



Figure 1.2  
(Top Left): Air New Zealand Logo, 2002.  
Figure 1.3  
(Middle): Air New Zealand Logo, 2019.  
Figure 1.4  
(Bottom): Air New Zealand At Rest, 2010.

\*“Modernist Appropriation art raises questions of originality, authenticity and authorship; and belongs to the modernist tradition of art that questions the nature or definition of art itself”.



After constant backlash from Māori, Air New Zealand dropped the trademark attempt. The airline claims to have set out to trademark its logo expressly for its Kia Ora magazine rather than the words themselves. It sparked a vital conversation between Māori and intellectual property laws. Air New Zealand dropped the claim after Māori iwi leaders urged the airline to protect taonga Māori. Pania Tyson-Nathan, Chief executive of New Zealand Māori Tourism, commended Air New Zealand on listening to Māori voices that expressed concerns over the trademark logo issue (The New Zealand Herald, 2019).

kiwiana

Another example of the collective appropriation of Māori culture is known as ‘Kiwiana’. Visual aspects of Māori culture have been appropriated as a form of advertisement for businesses to attract a greater audience. Kiwiana reflects New Zealand’s vernacular culture as the visual interpretation includes items of widespread cultural significance that are deemed uniquely New Zealand (Bell, 1996). Bell (2004) defines Kiwiana as positive symbols of Aotearoa. Wolfe and Barnett (2001) argue that it not only provides an aesthetic but enhances themes of nationhood for Pākehā and differentiates them within an increasingly globalised world. However, not everyone thinks of Kiwiana as pivotal for Māori culture. A more recent incident of Kiwiana appropriation is Tasti Bar’s TV advert that aired in 2013. An advert that Dr Karaitiana Taiuru (2020b) claims promotes racism and discrimination against Māori through iconic kiwi and Māori icons. The advertisement promotes satirical and inappropriate

use of Māori religious icons and racial stereotypes of Māori and perpetuates a racist approach that mocks Māori culture (Taiuru, 2020b). During the opening scenes of the advert, a Tiki, the fertility deity, is pictured driving a car (Figure 1.5). The satirical use of Māori religious icons in any other instance would not have been accepted on TV.

Shown in Figure 1.6, the car drives past a mountain, believed to be Mt. Taranaki, covered in kiwifruit and depicted as a pavlova. Taiuru (2020b) says this “degrades the mana of Taranaki”. The Waitangi Tribunal - 143 describes the sacredness of Mt. Taranaki and discusses the reversion of the name from Egmont to Taranaki. The advert implies that Māori are cannibals, as Captain James Cook can be seen being roasted over a spit surrounded by Māori. This negatively portrayed Māori as cannibals and mocked

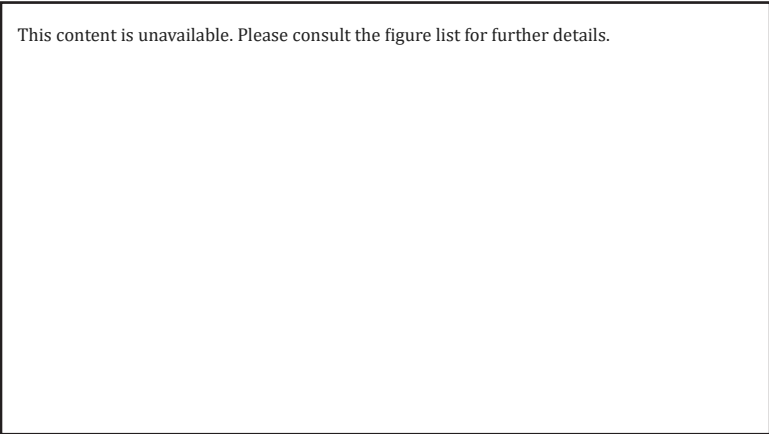
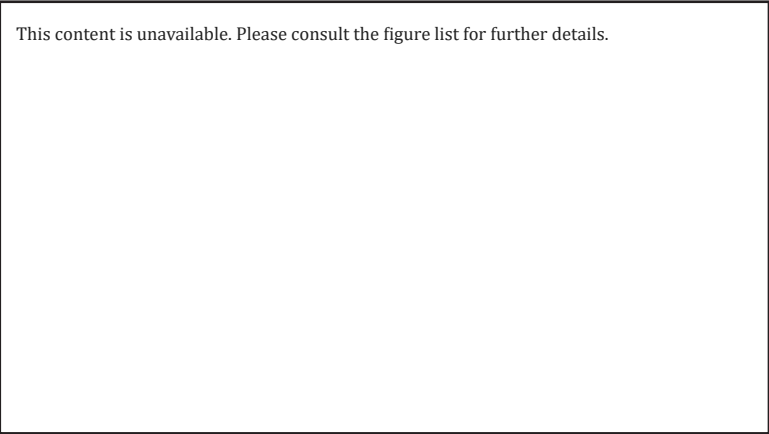


Figure 1.5

(Top): Still from Tasti NZ, Tasti - Ad Kitchen (0:01).

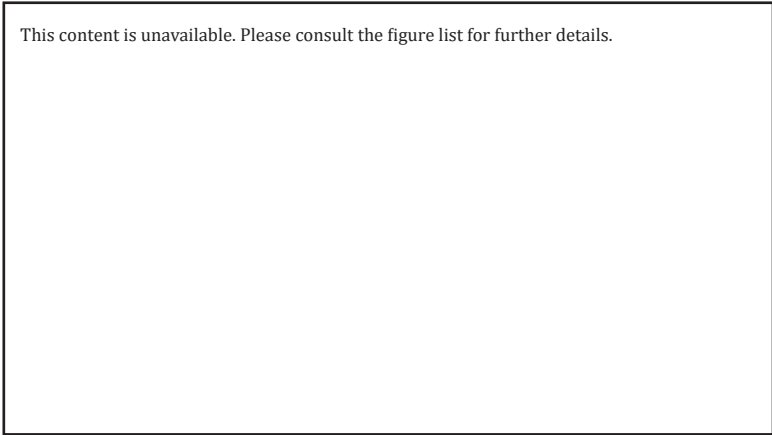
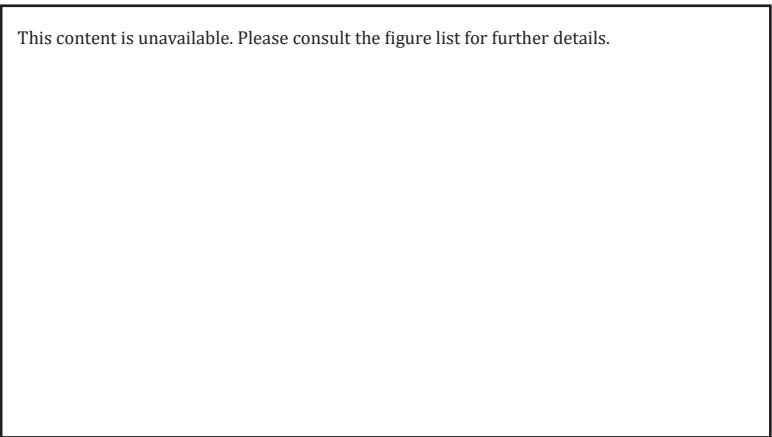
Figure 1.6

(Bottom): Still from Tasti NZ, Tasti - Ad Kitchen (0:20).

them for events that historically never happened (Taiuru, 2020a). In an interview with Te Ao Māori News, Taiuru (2020a) reminds us that Captain Cook was killed in Hawaii and that Māori had nothing to do with his death. Taiuru outlines that these inaccuracies “*preserve incorrect racial stereotypes of Māori*”.

Although cannibalism did occur within pre-colonial Māori, it was always surrounded by strict customs and religious rites. This image perpetuates the racist attitude that Māori were cannibals and ate Pākehā. These Māori surrounding the campfire are pictured playing guitar and builds on the racist stereotype that Māori are overweight (Taiuru, 2020b). A common stereotype of Māori culture within cartoons and illustrations is the assumption that all Māori are overweight and wear traditional piu piu (Diamond, 2018). Towards the end of the advert, a horse can be seen riding a whale fleeing from a Japanese whaler. The advert credits refer to this as “Whale Rider”, reminiscent of the 2002 movie (Tasti NZ, 2013). This movie was based on traditions and local ancestors, and in the advert. Ngati Porou primary ancestor Paikea, is depicted as a horse, and if the advert holds true to traditional stories, the ancestor Kae is depicted as the horse riding upon Tutunui the whale, which is a very hurtful and disrespectful insult to Māori and iwi that identify with Paikea and Kae (Taiuru, 2020b). In traditional stories, the whale is known as Tutunui. A strong, powerful, and clever navigator whom Taiuru (2020) protests would not beach himself running cowardly from a whaling ship as shown in the advert.

In 2013, Tasti reached out to New Zealanders online asking for their favourite Kiwiana icons



to be included in the advert, failing to recognise that back at that time, Māori were severely under-represented on the internet and within the digital space and were heavily subject to the digital divide\* (Taiuru, 2020a). Additionally, Taiuru (2020b) added that Māori tend to prefer face-to-face communication (Kanohi ki te kanohi) as it “*allows one to hear, feel and smell the relationship between the conversers in a fast-growing digital age, with increasing disconnection*” (Ngata, 2017).

In an interview with Te Ao Māori News, Taiuru (2020a) claimed that it is crucial to keep this conversation alive; otherwise, we will have successive generations of misunderstandings and hurt. “*People are a lot more conscious of what is offensive, and we can’t keep sweeping these things under the rug anymore, we need to address them, and this advert is just one good example of that*”.

Figure 1.7

(Top): Still from Tasti NZ, Tasti - Ad Kitchen (0:08).

Figure 1.8

(Bottom): Still from Tasti NZ, Tasti - Ad Kitchen (0:25).

\*“the gulf between those who have ready access to computers and the internet, and those who do not.”.



Yet, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) had said there were no grounds to complain, saying that the ad had not breached the code of ethics and was “a light-hearted and cliched montage of New Zealand culture and history” (Backhouse, 2013). Tasti has since made a statement in June of 2020 after they re-ran the advertisement on TV, stating that after negative feedback on the advert they are no longer running it and apologised for any offence caused (Tasti, 2020).

conclusion

The first section of this literature review presented the background history of colonisation within New Zealand and how this affected various Māori across the country. The severity of colonisation was revealed from a design perspective and how Western ways of thinking and acting suppressed Māori culture. This review began to understand decolonisation within a design environment not only for Māori and then channelled those ideas into Māori focused design examples within New Zealand.

It wasn’t until I began researching the history of colonisation in this country, that I realised how shocking it was. This thesis presents an overview of how Māori culture has been treated throughout history. By researching and understanding previous knowledge within decolonisation, these valuable insights into the past histories of Māori provide grounds for future projections of the wellbeing of Te Ao Māori through a design and branding lens.

The second part of this review analysed past attempts at including Māori culture within the branding and advertising industry, ultimately

leading to appropriation and wrongful use of Te Ao Māori. By further investigating the unlawful use of Te Ao Māori, we can craft a way to correctly and respectfully include Te Ao Māori within contemporary branding and set up methods to decolonise brand design.

Decolonising offers a unique new perspective on design and ways of living and being; designing for all cultures allows for inclusive and fair interaction not just within design but nationwide. This analysis has revealed the gaps and under-representation of knowledge specific to Māori within the contemporary branding industry and revealed future avenues of research. This research will speculate how society can build a healthier, more inclusive future not only for Māori but to allow other cultures to engage and understand each other’s cultures and worldviews—allowing for a safer engagement with Māori and Māori culture to ensure the longevity of this beautiful culture by creating a safer way to design more inclusively. Aotearoa is waking up to itself, and we need to be the ones to pave the road for future generations to come and lead them down the right path. This thesis aims to understand how tikanga can be understood and applied to the relevant areas of design to understand how New Zealand might contribute to the decolonisation and indigenisation of branding and design within Aotearoa.

**toru.**  
**methodologies**

## my position

I am Ngāti Raukawa on my father’s side and have Pākehā whakapapa on my mother’s side; therefore, this research is grounded in two very different ontologies. This research provides me with an opportunity to understand my whakapapa and who I am. Through this journey of self-understanding, I have gained the strength to question the integrity of my research and decided to continue and further understand my Māoritanga. I must understand that I, too, am complicit in colonisation, which has granted me the privilege to undertake this research.

## critical theory

Critical theory seeks human emancipation and provides a descriptive and normative base for social inquiry to decrease domination and increase freedom in all forms. It provides a philosophical approach to culture, which considers the social, historical, and ideological forces and structures which produce and constrain it (Thompson, 2017). Critical theory is used to free those Indigenous cultures who have been subject to Western oppression, granting their tino rangatiratanga and, once again, their right to govern themselves.

Critical theory grounded in a kaupapa Māori framework informs the research and envisions a future where Indigenous research knowledge is protected from the oppression of Western worldviews. Together, critical theory and kaupapa Māori seek to tell stories, celebrate survival, and make structural changes to continue to envision an equal future collectively (Smith, 2012). Research for, or on, Indigenous people has the potential to cause more harm than good if not

done right. Therefore it is essential to recognise how or if the research should be done. This concern is questioned by Barnes (2018), who writes that research can be limited in its ability to inform any form of social or economic change and argues that researchers need to be cautious not to simplify the relationship between decolonisation and those research methodologies. Barnes (2018) continues to state that decolonisation is not only what we are researching and how we research it; it also requires “*focus on the research enterprise itself, its pedagogies, systems, exclusions and power that privilege certain knowledge over others*” (p. 380). Considering this, I believe the employment of critical theory within kaupapa Māori provides this research with the structure to pursue Indigenous research.

## kaupapa māori

Smith (2012) claims that a Kaupapa Māori methodology doesn’t wholly disregard colonial knowledge and systems, “*it is about centring our worldviews and concerns and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our perspectives and for our purposes*” (p.89). Kaupapa Māori is research done for, by, and with Māori. It weaves in both practice and critical analysis and centralises the needs and interests of Māori. Kaupapa challenges mainstream ways of knowing and being for the collective vision of Māori. Informed by the ethical and cultural obligations of tikanga Māori, kaupapa questions the ‘accepted’ ways of understanding mātāuranga to make a positive difference (Smith, 2017).

Applying kaupapa Māori as a methodology allows me to understand my own Māoritanga and the people with whom I share whakapapa.

Barnes (2018) indicates that a kaupapa Māori methodology directs the research to create a decolonised future, but what exactly is meant by that? Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonisation isn't an 'and', but an elsewhere. They claim that decolonisation offers a different perspective to human civil rights based on approaches to justice—an unsettling one rather than a complementary one. Tuck and Yang (2012) state that “*decolonisation is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable*”. And that incommensurability is the acknowledgement that decolonisation will require a change in the order of the current world (Fanon, 1963).

## semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather the information needed whilst being flexible and allowing room for exploration. During semi-structured interviews, the questions are asked from a preplanned list. They are still open-ended to allow for in-depth answers and possible alternative talking points arising at any given moment. Although this approach may not allow for every question to be asked, the nature of semi-structured interviews supports diverging from the initially planned structure. Semi-structured interviews allow for much more authentic conversation that flows naturally; and, most times, create unforeseen or unaccounted-for answers that enrich the research much more than a strictly structured interview would have.

## sampling method

Jackson (2015) illustrates that when working with people, the processes are chaotic and non-linear, as they should be. Initially, I began with convenience sampling, which involved reaching out and contacting those whom I already knew and whom I had an existing relationship with. That current relationship with participants allows me to have that initial connection that I wouldn't have had with strangers. From there, those participants could organically recruit others to participate in my research. Fossey et al. (2002) considers this form of recruiting 'snowball sampling'. Snowball sampling is the process of existing participants recommending additional participants they believe will be interested in the research. By participating in Snowball sampling, I am guaranteed to receive participants who are interested in the study, as they have been recommended to me by their peers. This form of sampling also allows me to vastly increase my sample size from the original participant list I had drafted.

## qualitative research

These semi-structured interviews (kōrero) use a qualitative approach and analyse non-numerical data in the form of thoughts and experiences to gather in-depth insights and generate new research ideas. These experiences are unique to the participant and illustrate their interaction with Indigenous design and Western colonised ideologies. By analysing these experiences, I was able to discuss the most prominent elements present and most influential factors in the decolonisation and indigenising of brand design for a more equal and fair future for New Zealand branding.

## speculative design

Speculative design addresses colonialist ideologies and begin to craft the future of design in a new light. It allows us to envision a world of design regardless of the current technological, social, or ethical limitations. It enables us to ride the line between the probable and impossible, not predicting the future, but imagining all the possible futures. Speculative design tackles design colonisation by thriving on imagination and opening new perspectives for design fiction. Design fiction is another name given to design methods that “*imagine, speculate on, and represent alternate versions of design and the worlds it inhabits*” (Galloway & Caudwell, 2018). Using speculative design, I have crafted a framework that outlines a set of principles, that guides designers to decolonise branding in the near future, in spite of the current social factors that inhibit our ability.

## research about design

Schneider (2007) states that research about design focuses on the history of design aesthetics, and design theory, as well as the analysis of design theory, and is “*not restricted to the product on which the research is being conducted*”. Using research about design to analyse and critique design precedents within case studies, I have determined what decolonisation means in the context of design and branding.

Furthermore, the guidelines for separating colonised thinking from design are explored through existing design literature and material that expresses attempts to diverge from colonialism. Through this analysis, the gaps in literature are identified and further investigated within the research.

## research for design

Research for design provides the information, implications, and data that designers can then apply to achieve decolonisation of branding within New Zealand in the future. Downton (2005) describes this form of research as “*primarily prescriptive research methods for specific and feasible design solutions*”. Research for design is used within my research as it can reflect what decolonised brand design looks like and how it can be achieved.

This methodology is used to produce branding-based knowledge to assist my understanding of how colonialism can be reduced, or eliminated, from branding in the future. Research for design can also call attention through design to the issue at hand. It can encourage viewers to engage more with the research and hopefully understand the next steps needed to begin to decolonise branding.

Using research for design, a book will be created inclusive of the experiences of various current design practitioners. This book aims to synthesise possible suppressed experiences so that they may be heard, and acted upon. This book gives voice to those experiences of colonisation and suppression within contemporary branding and design.

## aims and objectives

This research recognises that it cannot decolonise design in and of itself, rather, it aims to understand the changing landscape of brand design in hopes of diverging from Western ways of thinking, and thus contribute to decolonising brand design. The semi-structured interviews offer valuable insights into the personal experiences of current design practitioners, which can be gathered and assessed to develop recurring ideas present within the design industry.

Additionally, creating case studies and reviewing literature on modern attempts to decolonise provides insight into how colonialism is viewed within the rest of design and what steps can be taken to indigenise the space in the near future.

**whā.**  
**discussion**



## the aim

This chapter discusses the findings both of the interviews and research in regards to how New Zealand might contribute to the decolonisation of brand design. Furthermore the findings and gaps identified in the literature review are re-visited and discussed in relation to the outcome of my findings. In the creation of the literature review, it became clear that there was a need for more Māori-based branding knowledge within the field of design. It became clear that knowledge around contemporary Māori branding elements was severely under-researched and often misinterpreted. This research identifies those gaps of information and knowledge and sets the scope of colonised branding within New Zealand to open up possible stems for future research. In effect, the knowledge discovered and methods to decolonise depend on those willing to adapt, step out of their comfort zone and truly make a difference for the benefit of Aotearoa's future.

## limitations

My participants were great to speak to and had valuable knowledge to share in our kōrero. Through these interviews, I collected various experiences of what it means to be a designer in today's industry, and what it means to be Māori within design. However, I cannot claim that the experiences of the few are representative of all design practitioners and Māori out there. Every Māori has a unique experience of what it means to be Māori, each uniquely different and as enriching as the last. Additionally, every designer has their own experience with design. Therefore I cannot truthfully say that these experiences

alone represent the entire design and branding industry. Design is full of unique and untold stories and experiences waiting to be shared. To exclude those experiences by classifying them as representative of all design wouldn't be fair to the designer nor to design itself.

As I continued with the research, I found myself engaging more with the tikanga of this research, understanding everything to a deeper level, going off-script, asking questions and engaging in that kōrero as if it was a discussion between friends rather than a planned interview. This is because my eyes were opened to my own whakapapa along the way, and I realised that I wanted to pursue this knowledge further in my journey. As I went on, my knowledge broadened, and I could continue the conversations further, which is why, as the research progressed, so did the interviews' length, integrity and quality. This is not to undermine the authenticity or contributions of the interviews, as they all build together as stepping stones. If I were to take this research further, I would have continued along this path, moving further along and building this foundation of knowledge that will hopefully be used one day to take this research even further.

## enrichment

Research is never complete if the researcher isn't constantly thinking about things they could have done to improve the research. In hindsight I believe that engaging more with the history of each participant's designs and how their experiences informed them would have benefited the research. I began to discuss this with some participants, but it was lost with others. I believe diving further into the mātauranga that each

participant used in their past works would have enriched the research within this space even further. Understanding the pūrākau behind the work further enhances the mana of each piece of design. Additionally due to distance and Covid restrictions, all of my interviews had to be conducted online. It would have been beneficial for not only the research but for my own personal journey to develop a meaningful connection with each participant by meeting them in person. Interacting with the participant in person not only enhances the mana of the process, but it also further builds the relationship as you can react and interact in a more meaningful way. There is only so much you can provide and react to through a screen, and I think in-person would have been more beneficial to the kaupapa.

## 46. extensions

This research barely scratches the surface of Māori design within Aotearoa. There is much more to be explored through unlimited Māori design experiences. There is endless mahi and kaupapa to be explored and to expose to this new world we're building, not only for ourselves but our rangatahi. The best direction for this research to be taken further would be to explore the tikanga that is coming back to design, through: additional interviews with more Māori practitioners that aid in further building a foundation for the future of branding within Aotearoa; and engaging more within the design industry, working closely with Māori practitioners to provide real-world examples of decolonised branding that follows the methodologies found within this research and portrays the new values that were discovered. There is a severe under-representation of research material

specifically on decolonising branding within New Zealand from a Māori perspective. So it would be great to see this research further developed within that space and judiciously represent Māori worldviews through branding. This research has much more potential beyond this thesis. To further this research would mean exploring the engagement with clients and designers: to create a methodology that's more authentic to Ao Māori and respects the tikanga of Māori design elements, a method that doesn't exclude anyone from engaging in Ao Māori design. Māori isn't a culture that should be excluded from certain parties.

Throughout the research interview process, I could build connections with the participants, as I was not only listening to their experiences but understanding and engaging with them. I was acknowledging what happened in the past, which is an essential aspect when manifesting the future. The interview process started with a few friends with whom I already had an established connection to, before research, which brought a more authentic and enriched perspective to the interviews. From there I was provided further contacts as possible participants either by a recommendation from my supervisors, or the participants themselves. This deeper level of participant selection breaches the shallow layer of research solely for research's sake. Each interview participant had links to either me or the research and weren't just randomly selected. This opened my eyes to how interconnected we all truly are. The different perspectives gained from all these vastly different people brought together through research just goes to show how enriching Māori culture and design truly are. This

snowball effect could continue indefinitely, for if the research were to continue, future participants would present themselves through existing connections with previous participants. No participant would be an outcast. They would all have a relationship with each other in some way. A connection to each other would enrich the research's kaupapa tenfold.

## how might nz contribute?

It became apparent throughout the research that some New Zealanders are actively attempting to decolonise. However, in my personal experience, I struggled to know where to start. Therefore, I've created a framework on how New Zealand might contribute to the decolonisation of brand design, informed by the experiences and opinions of my research participants. This framework has been created using the contributions of my research participants, formed from consistent themes present throughout the research process. Although these themes have arisen across the interviews, they may not represent all Māori or designers within the industry. This framework aims to answer the question:

*How might New Zealand contribute to the decolonisation of brand design and transition from Western-era design thinking?*



48. **tahi.**  
**whakapapa is enough**

At the beginning of the research, I was reluctant to refer to myself as a Māori researcher because of my complexion. But as the research went on, I began to create a deeper understanding of what it actually means to be Māori. I found that you don't need to be fluent in te reo Māori. You don't need to "look like a Māori," whatever that may mean. As Darryl Roycroft\* states, "Whakapapa is enough". That connection to the past, where you've come from, and your family history, defines you. No one can take that away from you; you can't be more Māori than just being Māori. This is precisely what Te Tiriti o Waitangi represents; Māori actively engaging with non-Māori. Where Māori and Pākehā were put at the centre of decision-making for the future of New Zealand (Glynn, 1998).

Simba Ncube spoke with Khandwala (2019) and discussed the implications of a homogenous group deciding what is good for a particular group of people; that can cause problems and prove detrimental to the profession at hand. This can be applied to people who tell you, you have no authority to claim to be Māori. Madeleine Bell\* states that *"it's important for anyone, regardless of their cultural background, to have the space to be themselves and bring themselves and have ownership over how they move through a space and how they're represented in the space."* As the voices of the masses impacted me, I was told I was not Māori, and I began to question whether I was myself. My Pākehā whakapapa comes from my mother's side of the family, and my Māori comes from my father's. This shared ontology gave me an eccentric upbringing, which

I'm sure many others are familiar with. Growing up, I was told I was "too white to be Māori". Whenever I was asked about my ethnicity, I always replied with Māori. Even my teachers questioned it whenever they would view my school record, and I would always explain, "yes, on my dad's side". Growing up, I was close with the tūpuna on my dad's side but never close enough to fully understand my whakapapa's history. All I ever really knew was my iwi, Ngāti Raukawa. I never learned my pepeha until recently. To some degree, I never truly felt worthy enough to call myself Māori; regardless, I continued to do so, even after continuous ridicule from my peers. Thanks to this journey, I now understand that I was justified all those years for proudly announcing my heritage, even when others told me I was wrong. However, it's essential to acknowledge the Scottish whakapapa from my mother's side, as it is just as important to who I am.

\*Madeleine Bell & Darryl Roycroft are design practitioners interviewed in the book produced in support of this research, ā tōna wā.

**rua.**  
**appropriately appropriate**

I believe the appropriation of Māori design is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be seen as progressive. However, Darryl claims that it is imperative to recognise the distinction between appropriation and misappropriation and to understand what it genuinely means in the context of Te Ao Māori. Darryl explains that there is appropriation, where you have taken inspiration from tradition and given it a modern skew to own it and be authentic to traditional Māori roots. Then there is misappropriation, where you've just completely unpacked it and thrown it on the label. The worst part of misappropriation is the lack of understanding the tikanga and kaupapa of what all those elements actually mean. Shand (2002) uses the koru as an example, arguably one of the most appropriated symbols from Māori culture. Through appropriation, the koru becomes dislocated from its original context of symbolising birth, regeneration, new life and growth.

These specific meanings are erased, and the cultural significance of this symbol begins to fade to the point where it is now regarded as a form of modernism. To avoid this in the future, we can use Darryl's idea of an appropriation methodology, where a whakapapa is created for that client which understands the origins of their brand. That whakapapa is then used to create a visual story in a traditional Māori sense, using traditional Māori tohu that are relevant to that brand and help aid the story of that brand's whakapapa. Then each of those designed elements is unpacked in collaboration with the client to understand where they all originate from and which of those elements is

there to stay. They are then given a contemporary skew to portray the business' organisational values and contribution to this design. The final design output is a Māori-inspired, appropriately appropriated piece of work. They are not traditional Māori. They do not sit in that traditional space and therefore respect the boundaries of appropriation. The designs are understood, modernised and contemporised to be relevant to that brand story without displaying and claiming traditional Māori patterns or motifs. The end product is inspired by traditional Māori elements, yet it has changed dramatically throughout the design process and talks to that brand's story. It is about understanding the background of that Māori story, and which part of it is relevant to you or your brand's design. In doing so, you produce a brand that is not a direct rip-off of Māori tohu and, therefore, can be taken into that space where the client or brand can authentically own it. Decolonising brand design is about drawing inspiration from traditional Māori designs and stories and adding modern twists to those elements so that they're not a appropriation of that art. Yet, they talk to that space as appropriately appropriated pieces of work.

## toru. kia kaha, have courage

As Darryl states, everyone fears cultural blunders and faux pas. If you start to position a culture as a completely fenced-off, unapproachable taonga that nobody should be able to enter other than Māori, brands begin to believe that it's not their space to play in, and they distance themselves from Māori culture. But it is their space to play in. It's a space for all to engage and explore, as long as the intricacies and nuances of Te Ao Māori are understood, respected and recognised for what they bring to the table of branding. Clients fear getting it wrong and, therefore, do not try.

50. But it's more than blindly attempting to incorporate Māori tohu into a brand. It's about understanding those stories and the pūrākau and then adapting them to fit the client's brand or business. This fear can be attributed to the lack of knowledge surrounding Māori culture within design educational systems. Failed by the institutions' curriculum, some designers were never exposed to cultural awareness and therefore were unaware of the true depth of Māori culture. It is no longer sufficient for design institutes to include a greater diversity of perspectives; the responsibility of these institutes is to transfigure the structure of design education to better include Indigenous ways of thinking and designing (Abdulla et al., 2019).

The loss of Māori culture can be attributed to the fear of being told, "fuck up bae, you don't know", a quote from the movie *Boy* that Darryl references as the biggest fear of every non-Māori client. One way designers and clients can combat

this fear of getting it wrong is to understand that guidance is there to get them to the endgame. The input that the client requests are fine. They just need to understand the output and that what they see in their head isn't necessarily what will be produced. By bringing clients along on the journey to understand the power Te Ao Māori can bring to their brand and producing design elements that understand that story, the brand will be richer for it.

Part of understanding Te Ao Māori design is recognising that it is not subjugated to the Western hierarchies of the past (Abdulla et al., 2019). The expression of traditional Māori through branding has been subject to the onslaught of mainstream design discourse dominated by Eurocentric and Western ways of being. Decolonising means to stop classifying Matauranga Māori as something different from design, as it deems Māori practices as 'other' and therefore inferior to any other way of design (Khandwala, 2019).

As Darryl stated within the interview: don't fear it, just understand and learn more about it, and then use it in the way it is meant to be used. It is telling stories and embracing pūrākau; it's not tapu. Many designers do fear it, and that's because there are too many other Māori out there, all too prepared to knock it. They want to ring-fence this culture for themselves, and they want to be seen as the experts. If you're Māori, then it's in you. It's been gifted to you by birthright. In a branding sense, we're not executors. We're not someone who is just going to take a design and put it into Illustrator or InDesign. We are storytellers. As Māori designers, we tell these stories through our designs and branding. We all have different

experiences as Māori that we can lend to the overarching picture, but we all have the same objectives. And that is to take these beautiful things that we can create, that people have only just come to realise are central to the New Zealand brand, and make sure they're not bastardised or overused, and keep that continuum so that we as Māori don't end up colonising it or allowing it to be colonised by corporations. It is about sitting down with the client and picking apart the elements they like to use and discussing and talking it through with the client so that they understand and can become comfortable in that space. While simultaneously developing a brand story unique to that business that engages in traditional Māori tohu without misappropriating them. By doing this you are demystifying and destigmatising this content for that brand, who can then take that forward. They'll never get a "fuck up bae" again because it's theirs. That brand was created with all the authenticity required, and nobody can take it away from them.

Destigmatising decolonisation material can help nurture the next generation of designers to continue the legacy of Māori. The lack of Māori culture usage throughout mainstream design is not only an indicator of the effects of colonisation but also of language death. In the literature review, it was pointed out by Walker (1990) that years after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the loss of te reo Māori was so significant that it was expected to succumb to language death. Bell (1992) linked the near loss of te reo Māori to the harsh effects that colonisation had on Aotearoa. According to Darder (1992) suppression of te reo Māori is actually a form of psychological violence. McCarthy (1997)

illustrates the psychological effect of this suppression. Most native te reo Māori speakers deliberately chose not to teach their tamariki to speak te reo. This was after many New Zealanders were led to believe that te reo Māori was of no practical use to society, and it was banned from being spoken in schools. Some are now afraid to use Māori cu in fear of the inappropriate use of Māoritanga. This previously brought Māori culture to the brink of extinction. To avoid extinction of Māori language and culture we need to swallow our fears and bring in advisors and learn how to properly engage with Māoritanga, rather than aimlessly trying which poses the risk of appropriation. The onus is on the designer to become culturally literate, to employ Tuakana-Teina and pass on this knowledge so that Māoritanga may be carried on by our rangatahi.

## whā. recognise when to disengage

Māori design elements are derived from nature and are each there to tell stories. When you see Māori motifs and patterns, know that every line, every colour and every stroke tells a visual aspect of the larger story. Furthermore, Maraea Gourlay\* states that “*Māori culture is so rich with storytelling and visual narratives, and this has been suppressed as a result of colonisation*”. Renati Waaka\* strongly argues that organisations need to understand the distinction between what is storytelling, and what is design, and what those design elements actually mean before engaging with the culture. In saying this, it is important to respect the boundaries and limitations of yourself when engaging in this space. As a designer, it is important to recognise when a project is right for you. This means recognising when a client is overstepping, and advising them why you can’t do what they’ve asked for. When clients ask for traditional Māori elements or designs you need to be cognisant that they have the right understanding of what they are trying to do.

One of the first things to do when dealing with a client that is too eager or unaware of customs is to take a step back and ask them who within their organisation deals in the space of Te Ao Māori? Do you have Māori within your organisation? Because it’s important that you get them on board and on the journey. Using a co-design process, we can sit down with the key stakeholders and those who are going to be impacted by the work and not look at solutions but problems. As outlined by Darryl, when everyone brings a problem to

the table, you all share the solutions to those problems. From there, it’s simple to sit down and begin to question how you can roll those out. Be sure not to rush the client, and to give them the time they need to actually have those hui. If the client doesn’t have that internal Māori view within the organisation, then it’s a matter of talking with them honestly and informing them that it is a communal effort and shared responsibility.

Acknowledging that it takes more than just you, you’re not the lead on this, and you have to measure the appetite of the client. If the client doesn’t really have the appetite or that true drive, then you have to be honest and disengage. There are things you can do, you could give the client a design that leans toward a story, just so you understand what the story and design are, and what goes into it. But if the client wants something deeper, then that’s going into whakapapa and that’s defining and creating a narrative, and that’s when you need that internal Māori view within the organisation.

The model of Māori design up until now has often been: that if a client approached any agency with a Māori idea or approach, then the work that was produced had no depth, no sincerity or authenticity to that process. Design groups would “brown-wash” each project they worked on, by finding a brown face and putting them in front of the client as a consultant. As Blair Mainwaring\* said, the agency would then tick the box and move onto the next client. There is ample opportunity for designers to actually engage in that space respectfully and correctly, and it is important to understand how that can be done, to have an understanding of that mātauranga and to immerse

\*Renati Waaka, Maraea Gourlay & Blair Mainwaring are design practitioners interviewed in the book produced in support of this research, ā tōna wā.

the client in that and bring more authenticity to the work. It is equally important to realise when a space is not yours to work in.

Perhaps there is someone more qualified to do so, or the project is a bit out of your hands. Giving these opportunities to respectful parties ensures that the project is completed to its potential and respects traditional Māori in a way that still allows that brand’s whakapapa to be shown through the whakataukī created by both the client and designer. We are taught that as designers we know best, more so than the client. Often we do, as we study this for years. It’s this god complex that proves harmful to design, which stems from the colonial history where Western countries would overrule countries because they thought their way of living was superior, and it is this attitude that is reflected in design today (Khandwala, 2020). Acknowledging when a job is not yours to accept, or is better suited for another practitioner, is pivotal in the indigenising of design, as it allows the rightful people to carry out these activities. It allows Indigenous knowledge and methods to be fairly expressed and voiced where they would otherwise not be.



## existing knowledge

It was Smith (2012) who argued that colonisation is a process of dispossession and control and now requires us to think differently about how research can adapt. Actively engaging in this space and thinking about different ways we can design helps us realise that what we've been taught isn't universal and doesn't apply to every aspect of design (Abdulla et al, 2019). Decolonising design for non-Māori may seem like an impossible task, but decolonising relies on the combined actions of all cultures. Non-Māori can contribute to decolonisation by acknowledging the significance of Indigenous perspectives within design.

As stated by Abdulla et al (2019), it is no longer sufficient for design institutes to include a greater diversity of perspectives, the responsibility of these institutes is to transfigure the structure of design education to include more Indigenous ways of thinking and designing. To decolonise means to hinder colonial ideas about society, relationships and craft from Indigenous perspectives. By utilising the skills, techniques and mentalities of the next generation of designers, we can design a future that is aimed at ecological, societal and technological advancement. As stated by Abdulla et al (2019), this future can embrace the differences between worldviews and accept them in mutually enhancing ways. Khandwala & Dolat (2020) stated that unwrapping and understanding where these institutional-specific design tastes come from unveils the harmful attitudes that designers tend to have. Unlearning that a lot of what we've been taught is 'good' design or 'timeless' design disconnects our minds from the

colonial curriculum that has been provided by the educational institutes. By unlearning what we were wrongly taught to believe as the only way to design, it opens up our minds to the vast new world of alternate cultures. Schultz et al. (2018) explained that it is not as important to defend the ahistorical truth of the decolonisation of design, but more to design meaningful symbolic change that is not prejudiced by the colonial designs of these institutes. This research aims for a progressive understanding and treatment of Māori branding within contemporary literature. However, due to the under-representation of Māori-based branding knowledge, parts of this discussion are backed up by the real-world experiences of Indigenous practitioners. Therefore, this research highlights the area of knowledge in need of further research and coverage from literature. As such, the experiences of my research participants act as a foundation for future research avenues which would further this research directive. The research knowledge that I've gathered contextualises Māori within the wider framework of brand and design, and gives Māori an opportunity to voice their concerns and rightfully express their culture, free from the restraints of Western colonists.

## objectives

An objective of this research was to understand the changing landscape of design in hopes of diverging from colonial ways of thinking. More New Zealanders are becoming cognisant of how they can do better. New Zealand is in a position where as a nation it is beginning to recognise Māori culture and its importance. An additional aim was to contribute to the Indigenisation

of design and establish a framework that aims to decolonise brand design in the future. As such, creating a framework for decolonising branding fulfils both of these research objectives. This framework guides us to respectfully engage in Māori design practices and indigenise not only branding, but design as a practice. A framework that reassures those who fear engaging in that space and guides them to do so correctly to uphold and respect the tikanga of mana whenua.

## further research avenues

In response to the findings of this research, possible further research avenues have been identified:

### design institutes

Completely re-imagine the contemporary design curriculum within New Zealand to encapsulate design that is more authentic toward Māori. By revisiting core structures within educational systems we can focus more on understanding the histories behind Māori culture before engaging in it.

### contextualised branding

Additionally, this research could be contextualised and furthered within the branding industry, in terms of exploring how traditional Māori elements can be contemporised and applied to businesses that are appreciative and respectful towards Te Ao Māori.

## academic contribution

This thesis has attempted to present a methodology for decolonising brand design, and ways society can change their actions to become more authentic to Māori, whilst attempting to avoid the tendencies of

research that could further colonise and misappropriate kaupapa Māori. This research has brought together a range of knowledge grounded in kaupapa Māori and centralises the worldviews of Māori in a contemporary space. The findings of this research voice the concerns of Māori across Aotearoa and provide a foundation on which others can stand in the hope of influencing further avenues or opportunities for research in the future.

## value of findings

This research provides a framework that New Zealanders can use to work toward a more culturally inclusive future, one that is aimed at understanding and engaging respectfully in Te Ao Māori, and transitioning brand design from a colonial-centric industry to become decolonised and more authentic to our Indigenous heritage; an industry where mainstream practitioners can become better treaty partners. The findings of this research can be contextualised to better the lifestyle, workflow and essence of Māori culture. That isn't something that comes with a value. It undoubtedly improves the quality of life for not just all Māori practitioners, but design as a practice.

## conclusions

In many ways, this discussion revealed the under-representation and gaps in mainstream literature surrounding Māori presence in branding and design. It also demonstrates the power of Māori pūrākau and tohu within contemporary branding and the benefits it could bring the branding industry. A recurring theme throughout this discussion was the urge for authenticity toward Te Ao Māori, not just for design but as a nation. Additionally, the importance of understanding Māori culture before engaging with its practices was also explored. Given to those who question, if you are Māori you have the birthright to engage with those Te Ao Māori spaces. However, the crucial part is understanding before doing so. Thus, at the crux of this discussion is the role of rangatahi in relation to the process of decolonisation and restoration of Māori within brand design for the future of Aotearoa.

**rimu.**  
**conclusion**

## summation of research

*“To decolonise New Zealand means the restoration of values from the ineffable beauty and hopes in this land. It means the restoration of the sense of justice and harmony that the treaty envisaged. It means restoring, for Māori, the sense of government and self-determination that is of the people, not just by Māori or for Māori. Once the final point has been reached, we have decolonised this country. We have recovered the justice of change. We have fulfilled the hope of change, and finally left behind the persecution of change” (Jackson, 2021).*

Through a collection of various design practitioners’ experiences with design, this thesis has demonstrated the unique potential that branding could become by encapsulating and utilising Te Ao Māori within a branding perspective. This thesis highlighted the need for cognisant change within design institutes and the design community. Unlearning what we were wrongly taught to believe as the only way to design opens our minds to the vast new world of alternate cultures.

## summary of chapters

The overarching objective of this research was to understand how New Zealand might contribute to the decolonisation of brand design. Secondary objectives were to understand the landscape of modern branding and identify gaps in knowledge. These objectives have been fulfilled throughout different chapters of this research. This thesis explored the potential that contemporary branding could become and how we could correctly engage with Te Ao Māori to work toward this.

The literature review explored the range of knowledge relevant to Indigenous design and acknowledged the severe under-representation of Māori-based branding knowledge in a contemporary space. This thesis has highlighted the need for further research in these areas and begins to fill these gaps, providing a foundation for more branding-specific research in the future.

Critical theory grounded in a kaupapa Māori methodical approach to this research has guided the entirety of this research. From the conceptualisation of the research direction to the kōrero with design practitioners. These research methods have guided this research toward the innovative and restorative future that brand design could become.

The discussion presented the primary findings and similar themes prevalent within the research and provided a methodological framework that guides designers in the decolonisation of brand design within New Zealand. This framework illustrates a method to consider when designing in a Te Ao Māori space. It provides a guide to decolonisation and, in a localised context, reimagines what contemporary brand design should be. The framework created uncovered a design method that engages in Māori culture yet respects the traditional Māori space.

**tahi.**  
**whakapapa is enough**

That connection to the past, where you’ve come from, and your family history, defines you. No one can take that away from you; you can’t be more Māori than just being Māori.

**rua.**  
**appropriately appropriate**

It’s imperative when engaging with Te Ao Māori, that you draw inspiration from Māori tradition and remain authentic to traditional Māori roots. Ensure that you understand what those design elements mean in the context of Ao Māori and be wary of appropriating.

**toru.**  
**kia kaha, have courage**

Darrl states that when a culture is positioned as a completely fenced-off unapproachable taonga that nobody shjould be able to enter other than Māori, brands start to believe that. The fear of this can be attributed to the lack of knowledge surrounding Māori culture within design educational systems. To better include Māori means engaging and understanding that culture’s history and not being afraid to seek guidance or consultation. Darryl reminds us that Māori culture is about telling stories and embracing pūrākau; it’s not tapu.

**whā.**  
**recognise when to disengage**

It is essential to recognise when a project is right for you and if the client’s true intentions are to the heart of Māori. Ensure that you are engaging with the right parties within the business and not excluding Māori from the process.

Acknowledge that it takes more than just you; if the client doesn’t have the true incentive or internal Māori view, you disengage.

**design decisions**

It’s important to understand the history behind Māori culture when engaging in its practice. As such, the application of design elements had to be considered.

The typeface ‘Ngā Mihi’, which I have used throughout as a display typeface, was created by Maimoa Creative for projects that promote Māori culture and respects Tikanga Māori. This lowercase typeface is inspired by common Māori motifs appearing in traditional art and designs, in particular the art of whakairo (carving). Therefore, this typeface was an excellent choice, as it discusses histories that enrich Te Ao Māori within branding and strives for a better future for all Māori.

The colours of this work are representative of the tino rangatiratanga flag. Elements of the flag represent the three realms: Te Korekore, potential being (Black), Te Whai Ao, coming into being (Red), Te Ao Mārama, the realm of being and light (White).

This book engages in whānaungatanga as it brings back a sense of belonging to those who were ever told they were not Māori. It speaks to rangatiratanga, as this research aims to bring self-governance back to Māori through understanding the experiences of others. And it engages in Tuakana Teina, building a better future for our rangatahi and mokopuna. Every element

within this book was carefully thought out and respects Kaupapa Māori in hopes of enlightening society to ways of decolonisation in everyday branding practice.

**concluding statement**

This thesis has unearthed the under-representation of Māori presence in contemporary branding; and demonstrates the power that Māori pūrākau and tohu can have on a brand and a business. This research urges us, within contemporary branding, to stop engaging in colonialist and outmoded ways of thinking; and to understand how tikanga can be applied to the brand design industry to indigenise and revolutionise the way we and our future generations design.



# ono. appendices

# glossary

**Epistemological:**

Relating to the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion.

**Hapū:**

Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe.

**Hui:**

Gathering, meeting, assembly, seminar, conference.

**Iwi:**

Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race.

**Kia kaha:**

be strong, get stuck in, keep going.

**Kōrero:**

A conversation, discussion, or meeting.

**Mana:**

Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma. Mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object.

**Mana whenua:**

Territorial rights, power from the land, authority over land or territory, jurisdiction over land or territory.

**Māoritanga:**

Māori culture, Māori practices and beliefs, Māoriness, Māori way of life.

**Mātauranga:**

Knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill - sometimes used in the plural.

**Mokopuna:**

Grandchildren, grandchild.

**Ontological:**

Relating to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

**Pūrākau:**

Myth, ancient legend, story.

**Rangatahi:**

Younger generation, youth.

**Rangatira:**

Māori chief, chieftain, chieftainess.

**Tangata Whenua:**

Local people, hosts, Indigenous people - people born of the whenua.

**Taonga:**

Property, goods, possession, effects, object.

**Tapu:**

Sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden.

**Te Ao Māori:**

Māori world view, acknowledges the interconnectedness and interrelationship of all living and non-living things.

**Tikanga:**

The customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.

**Tino rangatiratanga:**

Self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government, domination, rule, control, power.

**Tūpuna:**

Ancestors, grandparents.

**Whakapapa:**

Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent.

**Whānau:**

Extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people.

*\*Definitions based on Te Aka Māori Dictionary*

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1.2	<i>Air New Zealand Logo, 2002.</i>	27	This image shows one of Air New Zealands past logotypes. From <i>Wikimedia Commons</i> , 2002 ( <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_NewZealand-Logo.svg">https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_NewZealand-Logo.svg</a> )	
1.3	<i>Air New Zealand Logo, 2019.</i>	27	This image shows one of Air New Zealands logotypes. From Wikimedia Commons, by Air New Zealand, 2019 ( <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_New_Zealand_logo.svg">https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_New_Zealand_logo.svg</a> )	
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1.8	<i>Still from Tasti NZ, Tasti - Ad Kitchen (0:25).</i>	29	This image shows a whale beaching itself. From <i>YouTube</i> , By Tasti NZ, 2013 ( <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_KIR-MNIuA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_KIR-MNIuA</a> )	

# Appendix 1 - Ethics and Consent forms



## Decolonising brand design for the future of New Zealand

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

#### Who am I?

My name is Josh Stables, and I am a master’s student in Design Innovation at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my research thesis.

#### What is the aim of the project?

This project will identify how New Zealand might contribute to the decolonisation of brand design and transition from western-era design thinking. Your participation will support this research by building a New Zealand specific context in how our nation can contribute to a new era of design-thinking for brand design. This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (*Reference number 0000029855*).

#### How can you help?

If you agree to take part, I will interview you at a mutual location to be determined later. I will ask you questions about your experiences with design colonisation and take down your thoughts and opinions. The interview will take approximately one hour. I will audio record the interview with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time within 2 weeks after the interview date. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

#### What will happen to the information you give?

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes or transcript of the interview. The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and destroyed on 2 weeks after the submission of the thesis.

However, you will be named in the final report. This means your identity may be revealed in reports, presentations, or public documentation.

#### What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in my master’s thesis, and to be published in my final creative output. A book of your –and other participants, collective experiences.

#### If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don’t want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study before 2 weeks after your interview date;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your interview recording;
- receive a copy of your interview transcript;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your interview;

#### If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to me in the first instance, or my supervisor:

#### Student:

Name:

Email Address:

#### Supervisor:

Name:

Email Address:

#### Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research, you may contact the Victoria University of Wellington HEC Convenor: Associate Professor Judith Loveridge. Email [hec@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:hec@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

#### Wellbeing Resources

If you have any concerns about your personal wellbeing, here is a list of resources if you ever feel uncomfortable during this research.

#### 1737

Free call or text 1737 to speak with a trained counsellor at the national 1737, need to talk? service. You can access this service for yourself and when you are supporting others. This helpline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Safe to Talk

Safe to Talk is a free service that provides advice, support and confidential information to people who have been affected by sexual harm. Safe to Talk can connect you with further support in your community, and you can use this service anonymously. Call 0800 044 334 or text 4334 for 24/7 access to trained professionals.

Just a Thought

Just a Thought an online tool that teaches you how to manage thoughts and feelings to help you to feel better. There are lessons, plans and resources available as well as a progress tracking tool. You can access this service at time anywhere on a computer, phone, or other device.

Lifeline

Lifeline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Free call 0800 543 352 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP) for counselling, help, and support.



Decolonising brand design for the future of New Zealand

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for a minimum of 5 years.

Researcher: Josh Stables, School of Design, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded interview.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point before 2 weeks after the interview date and any information that I have provided will be returned to me or destroyed.
- I understand that the observation notes and audio recordings will be kept confidential to the researcher and the supervisor.
- I understand that the findings will be used for a Masters thesis.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will be published at the end of the research.
- I understand that I can withhold information, or request information not to be published at any time.
- I consent to information or opinions which I have given being attributed to me in any reports on this research: Yes o No o
- I would like a copy of the audio recording of my interview: Yes o No o
- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview Yes o No o
- I would like a summary of my interview: Yes o No o
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes o No o

# Appendix 2 - Semi-Structured Questions

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: \_\_\_\_\_



## *Decolonising brand design for the future of New Zealand*

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. What is your background in design?
3. How long have you been in the industry? Etc.
4. How do you approach design? What is your motivation/mindset about how you design?  
*(Philosophies within their practice)*
5. How do you remain indigenously conscious of the work you're designing?
  - a. *E.g, make sure you're not stepping on any toes, or coming across as disrespectful in any way?*
6. What do you have to consider when designing with Maori elements for a business?
7. Do you consult with anyone else when you're designing using Maori elements?
  - a. *When designing with cultural elements are you in touch with other co-workers throughout the process? Are ideas bounced off each other to attempt to eliminate appropriation or colonisation?*
8. What is your perspective on branding within Aotearoa?
  - a. *How do you view it / where do you stand?*
9. What is your perspective on decolonisation within Aotearoa?
  - a. *How do you view it / where do you stand?*
10. How do you think they mediate (influence) each other?
  - a. *How do your thoughts on decolonisation work and interact with the current state of New Zealand branding?*
11. How would you approach the decolonisation of branding?
  - a. *What is something important about the way we design brands in NZ that needs to be changed?*
12. Who (which audience) does NZ branding cater to?
  - a. *Does NZ branding exclude or focus on any group in particular? If so, which and how?*



# Appendix 3 - Copyright Consent form

13. How have you continued to operate in a commercial area that is still labouring to colonisation?  

*a. How have you dealt with this throughout the years?*
14. Have you ever been asked to design something culturally inappropriate for a client? How did you deal with this?  

*a. Can you describe the process?*
15. Has the clients expectations of a culturally influenced project been different to what was produced, how did you deal with this?  

*a. Basically, a client asking for something Maori and you telling them No.*
16. What is missing from branding today from a Te Ao Maori perspective?  

*a. What is missing from branding that binds and brings different people and cultures together?*  
*b. How could this be implemented into future branding projects?*
17. What is your understanding of Tokenism?  

*a. The process of making only a symbolic effort to include indigenous culture most commonly to avoid public criticism.*  
*b. Employing indigenous culture in order to give the appearance of cultural equality within a workplace.*
18. What does design colonisation mean to you?
19. What is your experience with design colonisation? Have you experienced cultural exclusion or miscommunication?  

*a. How did this impact your practice or project?*
20. If you could say one thing to any new designer, what would it be about decolonising design?  

*a. How can we influence new designers to make change for the future of design within New Zealand?*
21. Do you believe that New Zealand can play a leading role in decolonising design in the future? If so, how?  

*a. What would be the crucial first step?*

stablesjosh@hotmail.com

[Date]

[Participant Name]

Kia ora [Name],

My name is Josh Stables, and I am a Masters student at Victoria University of Wellington, and am writing a thesis on the decolonisation of branding within Aotearoa for a Masters research thesis.

I am writing to request permission for the following images, for which I believe you hold the copyright, to be included in my research:

Image requesting  
Permission for.

Image requesting  
Permission for.

Image requesting  
Permission for.

(Left to right): Name of Work [Medium], Name of Work [Medium], Name of Work [Medium].

I am seeking from you a non-exclusive licence for an indefinite period to include these materials in the print and electronic copies of my thesis. The materials will be fully and correctly referenced.

If you agree, I would be very grateful if you would sign the form below and return a copy to me. If you do not agree, or if you do not hold the copyright in this work, would you please notify me of this. I can most quickly be reached by email at *stablesjosh@hotmail.com*.

# Appendix 4 - Human Ethics Approval

Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Ngā mihi,  
Josh Stables

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to grant you a non-exclusive  
licence for an indefinite period to include the above materials, for which I am the copyright  
owner, in the print and digital copies of your thesis.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Human Ethics Application Approved (as a Category B) 0000029855 Vs N/A Automated Email  
Fri 17/12/2021 2:47 pm

Kia ora Josh,

Application ID: 0000029855 Vs N/A  
Title: Decolonising brand design for the future of New Zealand  
Primary investigator: Josh Stables

Thank you for your application for human ethics approval. Your  
project, as described in the application, is approved as of today. Your  
approval applies for three years from the date of this email.

If you would like to receive a formal letter, please contact the Research  
Office at [hec@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:hec@vuw.ac.nz). If you need to make changes to your project,  
you will need to apply for an amendment to this application.

Best wishes with the research.

Ngā mihi,  
the Research Office



ngā mihi  
mō ngā tau  
kei mua i te  
aroaro.

*Good luck for the future.*