

## **Hybrid Youth Identity in the Maori/Pacific Island Diaspora in Australia: A Study of Young Urban Polynesian Men in Sydney**

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### **Abstract**

In the aftermath of World War II, the relegation of small Pacific Island states to the responsibility of Australia and New Zealand, largely translated into Australia administering English speaking Melanesian islands such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Torres Strait, and to some extent Fiji, while New Zealand, presumably because of its large Maori population, looked after Polynesia. This rather ad hoc arrangement led to large-scale Pacific migration, mainly to New Zealand, in search of work. However, since the 1990s, the lack of work opportunities and low wages in both New Zealand and the Islands has meant Maori and Pacific Islanders are coming to Australia in increasing numbers, and staying permanently. This paper is an attempt to examine why Maori and Pacific Islanders are putting down their roots in Australia and to what extent does this inform the identity of their children, particularly young men. The complex nature of transmutable, hybrid and negotiated identities are explored in this rapidly growing population group. This article represents a sample study of eighteen young Polynesian men, aged 18-28, who were born in Australia or migrated as young children. These interviews are part of a larger study being conducted by the first author.

### **Introduction**

The neo-colonial carve up of the Pacific over the last century has distributed dominion of many small island nations to larger countries with little regard to common ancestry, pre-existing allegiances, enmities or assertions of sovereignty. The annexation of Guam, American Samoa and Hawaii by the United States and the preservation of the francophone island states of Tahiti, New Caledonia and Vanuatu, has allowed these larger powers access to the Pacific for their own strategic military purposes. Australia has also tended to regard the Pacific states for which it is responsible, as ‘strategic interests’ with no apparent cultural identity, or national agenda of their own (see Sheridan, 2006). Outside of

exploitation for natural resources, Australian disinterest and neglect of the Pacific is pronounced given its proximity and self anointed role as the largest power broker in the region. In Australia, even in academic circles, ‘the Pacific’ variously means the borders of the ocean itself which stretch from Canada to the Philippines, or in a more local context, Papua New Guinea to Vanuatu – Melanesia. Polynesia is rarely mentioned, and little understood. The serious absence of academic work regarding Polynesia by Australian institutions has meant we have dramatically fallen behind New Zealand in our understanding of cultural values and political movements in the region<sup>1</sup>. Arguably, it is now Australia, in its role as ‘destination of choice’ to many more Pacific peoples, which needs to appraise itself of issues concerning culture and identity in this migrant population group<sup>2</sup>.

For the tiny Pacific Island nations exposed to post-colonial neglect and poverty, their biggest ‘export’ is their labour power. The relatively large-scale Pacific migration from Samoa, Tonga, Niue and the Cook Islands to New Zealand, particularly since the 1960s, has seen the establishment of substantial communities with representative numbers greater than the home population (NZ Government Census, 2006). During this period, very few Pacific Islanders chose to come to Australia, particularly as family groups. Now that pattern is changing, and when combined, Maori and Pacific Islanders comprise one of Australia’s fastest growing immigrant groups (ABS, 2006). This verifies what has been described as the ‘beaten path’ effect whereby prior migration of family members precedes an upscale of further migration. An Australian government report, commissioned in 1995, outlined the trends to be expected in the next twenty years, in relation to South Pacific migration to Australia (Appleyard & Stahl, 1995). This analysis predicted a 10% flow on of Pacific Island migration from the numbers expected in New

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper Polynesia refers to Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and Niue

<sup>2</sup> The authors have used a flexible ‘working definition’ of identity, in the individual sense, as a composite of how one perceives and describes oneself in relation to *whanau*, *hapu*, *iwi*, culture and ‘nationality’. Each of the cohort was allowed to ‘self identify’, prioritizing their own racial, cultural, and sub-cultural entities in interview. In order to systematize the identification of quotes, we used their initials, Polynesian origin and age.

Zealand. While this report did foresee that deteriorating local economies in the Islands would act as a prompt to migration, it does not appear to have factored in the high birth rate of this population group, or the escalation of 'family' migration directly from the Islands to Australia (Singh, 2005).

One of the more complex aspects of gathering demographic data on this combined population group is that most Maori and Pacific Islanders come to Australia as 'New Zealanders'. Researchers have tended to use the formula that as Maori are 14% of the New Zealand population, then that same percentage could be extrapolated out to estimate the number of Maori, as proportion of New Zealanders, in Australia. However, anecdotal evidence had suggested this figure may well be larger due to a variety of factors including high mobility, suspicion of government agencies, and lack of compliance with Australian census procedures, especially by single men. This has been borne out in this research sample, as *none* of the young men interviewed had filled out a census form. In spite of what would appear to be poor compliance, Australia's 2006 census figures concluded there were approximately 476,000 New Zealanders in Australia, of whom 92,911 identified as Maori (ABS, 2006). Combined figures for Samoans, Tongans, Niueans and Cook Islanders in Australia have now reached 72,082, including both those who arrived as 'New Zealanders' and others directly from the Islands (ABS, 2006).

While Maori emigration to Australia has steadily risen over the last 40 years, since the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in Maori coming to Australia as 'economic migrants' and not returning to New Zealand. Despite being referred to by some as 'plastic Maori' or 'not real Maori', the phenomenon has attracted more attention in recent years in New Zealand, including substantial web-based discussions, leading one cyber correspondent to comment: 'If current demographic trends stay the same, within a few decades perhaps one third of all Maori could be living in Australia' (Jonathan, 2006). In a more scholarly response to this pattern of larger scale, one-way movement of Maori, Paul Hamer, in partnership with Griffith University, has conducted an extensive qualitative study of approximately 1,200 Maori in Australia (Hamer, 2007). The reasons given for migration in Hamer's study are dominated

by the economic drivers, but the other causes most often cited are to escape gang violence (and associated negative stereotyping of Maori), and to get a reprieve from *whanau* responsibilities including financial and personal demands by members of the extended family (see Hamer, 207, pp. 41-50). Analysis of this data (and our own) reveals a mix of those who are settled in Australia and extol the lifestyle choices available - those who do not intend to go 'home' - and others who harbour a nostalgia to return to New Zealand, but in fact will not, either because of growing family commitments here, or simply by default, not quite getting around to it. There appears to be an informal element to this situation. Most Maori and Pacific Islanders do not take out permanent residency or change their citizenship status in the legal sense (referred to as 'having the operation'), they simply tend to stay on:

Mum and Dad always said we're going back to New Zealand but it just never happened. Dad would still like to go, but Mum is happy here now – she couldn't leave her *mokos* (JP, Maori, 25).

For the generation represented by the parents in the above quote, people obviously miss their *whanau* in New Zealand, while for younger people, friendship networks and to some extent many of their *whanau*, are in Australia. This tends to have the effect of having a foot on each side of the Tasman: 'I had a funny accent in both places' (JH, Maori, 24).

Some respondents are already entitled to Australian citizenship by birth, but none of those born overseas have shown any inclination to formalise their status here. Indifference to their citizenship status and low rate of transition to Australian citizenship may reflect an ambivalence about severing ties with New Zealand, or a reluctance to fully embrace an Australian identity. Equally, it may simply be an aversion to officialdom that reflects the disengagement of youth more generally.

For many years before the introduction of passport and visa clearance, the passage of Maori back and forth across the Tasman attracted very little attention from either New Zealand or Australia, other than to generate the odd joke. The only official acknowledgement of the large numbers of New Zealanders coming to Australia was the legal restriction on welfare payments, most specifically the 'dole', for a period after arrival, and there is some resentment to this stereotype:

When Maori come over to Sydney we are seen as beer drinking, dole-bludging, party hearty types and they don't realise that the reason we are here is because we want to make a career and make something of our lives...that we are here to work (NT, Maori/Cook Islander, 27).

However, overall, acceptance by the broader Australian community appears high, particularly when compared with the experience of other migrant groups. Australia's tabloid media and shock-jock radio are filled with racist sentiment towards non-anglo migration – most particularly Asian and Middle Eastern (see Poynting, 2006). The overall tolerance/indifference to Polynesian immigration from the Australian perspective appears based on a combination of two issues. The first element is that because most Maori and Pacific Islanders are regarded as 'New Zealanders', this appears to reignite the lingering ANZAC spirit. Our shared history has meant that Australians (read white Australians) do not perceive 'New Zealanders' as a threat to their national and cultural identity.

The second issue, is that most Polynesians, particularly Maori, do not see themselves as 'migrants' nor do they seek out migrant services (see Hamer: 2007, pp. 71-78). This may be largely attributable to the fact that New Zealand is geographically close enough that people could afford to return to visit relatives, take home the body of a loved one, or participate in signature family events. There is also a strong assumption amongst Maori that only the New Zealand government would support anything to do with a cultural proposal by and for Maori and it is rarely suggested the Australian government should be expected to contribute. Consequently, other migrant groups such as Greeks, Italians, Maltese, Vietnamese and Croats have sought government assistance in relation to large community projects, and have their own halls, churches, restaurants, precincts and businesses, while Maori have not. Hamer's study further suggests that this reluctance to perceive themselves as migrants, the 'visitor' mindset, may be one reason why Maori do not have a *marae*, or even dedicated venues for cultural practice.

In relation to Maori in Sydney, the history of attempts to build a *marae* is long, complex and unresolved. It also has a dramatic undercurrent. During the 1950s and 1960s, the ascendancy of the Maori

showband phenomenon was mentored in part by a colourful Scotsman, Jim Anderson, who was active in Wellington in securing the services of bands such as the Maori Hi Fives. Their success in Sydney nightclubs encouraged Anderson to bring over other bands and move to Sydney himself, where he became the right hand man for crime boss Abe Saffron ('Mr Sin'), and earned himself the nickname of the 'Overlord'. While Anderson is remembered fondly by Maori musicians from this era, he was better known in Sydney for crimes such as extortion, prostitution, bribing police, arson, drug dealing and even murder (McNab, 2005). During this time, Saffron and Anderson had extended their criminal connections to include contacts in Las Vegas, where the Maori showbands enjoyed enormous success. Anderson remained popular and sponsored the careers of many Maori entertainers. By the late 1970s, the vast revenue generated by Saffron's empire, meant Anderson was seen to have a virtual 'blank cheque' with which to build and promote a Maori meeting place of lavish proportions in Bondi. The vision included a bizarre mix of Sydney *marae* meets Las Vegas casino. Plans were drawn up for a five story building which would house a *marae*, gaming rooms, a childcare centre and entertainment venues. Extraordinary as this sounds today, it was supported by many local Maori, and New Zealand government ministers and dignitaries travelled over the Tasman to view the plans and be part of this venture.

On October 12<sup>th</sup> 1980, however, the building was mysteriously burnt down in circumstances that would later incriminate Anderson and Saffron (see Howard, 1985). Since this time, there have been two decades of fundraising for a Sydney *marae* by various groups. Financial scandals and issues of factionalism between *iwi*, as well as the difficulty of forging a single united vision have continued. It seems the idea of a Sydney *marae* is resurrected at least every five years, and currently there is a new push to move this goal forward under the 'corporate' model. A panel of Maori and non-Maori have been conducting meetings and have plans for corporate sponsorship and family subscriptions to pay for a new *marae*. This business model has inevitably put many Maori offside who regard it as impossible to reconcile the corporate nature of this proposal with the traditional *kawa* of a New Zealand *marae*. Approximately two years into this project, no land or building has been bought or leased, and

divisions between members of the committee itself have emerged about the cultural correctness of this approach, and doubts expressed as to the long term financial viability of this project. Despite the failure of so many attempts, there would appear to be general goodwill towards the *idea* of a pan-tribal meeting place, however in the opinion of the authors, it may be too late. Unlike Hamer's conclusion that there requires a 'critical mass' population to support the actualization of a *marae*, arguably such a moment has passed in Sydney. Where there used to be distinct clusters of Maori in certain suburbs, now the demographic has spread further and is more thinly dispersed over a much greater area, it would appear to be less likely that Sydney Maori will achieve this goal.

On a more positive note, greater numbers of older Maori are coming, staying and offering their breadth of knowledge and wisdom to many Maori here regardless of tribal or religious affiliations. The most common reason cited by these *kaumatua*, who, in many ways would prefer to be spending their twilight years in New Zealand, rather than in a new housing estate in Sydney's western suburbs, is that their *mokopuna* are here and they want to be close to them and be there for them as they grow to adulthood. This is twinned with a confidence that grandchildren in New Zealand will always have access to their *tikanga* while those here need them more (Rodriguez, 2003). Another significant element in the shift towards permanence, and related to the statement above, is that more Maori are choosing to be buried in Australia. Even twenty years ago, this would have been extremely rare. Should a Maori pass away suddenly in Australia, whether through illness or industrial accident, immediately funds would be raised within the community and the body returned to New Zealand. Belated recognition should be given to those *kaumatua* who, during these years negotiated with many officials, such as police, coroners, airline officials and customs to allow the bodies to be returned. It was some of these same elders who led the establishment of *Wairua Tapu*, the Maori church in Redfern, Sydney, as a multi-denominational space in which Maori protocols could be observed. For the last two decades *Wairua Tapu* has successfully acted as a *de facto marae*, particularly in relation to christenings and *tangi*. During this time, *Wairua Tapu* was regarded as the first step towards the acquisition of a Sydney *marae* and for many young Maori in Sydney, it is the closest

they will experience to visiting a *pa*. Unfortunately, at this point, the building itself is quite run down and its future uncertain.

For Pacific Islanders, by contrast, the story has been very different. While it is arguably more difficult and expensive to return to the individual island states, anecdotal evidence suggests Pacific Islanders appear to be applying themselves more in regard to establishing a recognizably 'Island' presence, particularly the Samoan and Tongan communities. These communities have put down roots particularly in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, where along with becoming more permanent, they are also more 'visible'. In most cases, this means more churches, and most major Australian cities have a number of Samoan and Tongan run churches. The presence of an 'Island' church in a suburb is a reassurance to the Pacific migrant community that they are able to observe the major Christian rituals in the 'Island' way. They also serve as an information exchange as to what social services are available to help families adjust to being in another country. Integral to this arrangement, is the use of the church facilities to host traditional learning centres, and provide rehearsal space for culture groups. The Island church therefore performs a function as a community forum and a rallying point for the extended community. However there is another side to this arrangement. As in New Zealand, Australian born Pacific Nationals contribute heavily to remittances to the home islands, and their local churches (Singh, 2005). In the case of the Tongan community in Melbourne, they have recently raised eight million dollars for a Free Wesleyan Church to be built. This has led to intergenerational tensions in the community. Younger members, born in Australia, have begun to resent the practice of giving a disproportionate amount of household income as tithe, when people are living in overcrowded conditions and in some cases, houses have been lost when repayments could not be made to the bank: 'All the money was going to the church and we were running around without shoes' (Lemafa, 2008, p.4).

### **Role Models**

The Jake Heke thing is really sad, but it reflects the way they've been brought up. We're from a long line of warriors – but you

should not fight with your fists but with your brain (DL, Maori, 21).

Even the tightly knit Pacific Island communities are finding it progressively difficult to keep their young men away from alcohol and crime. The strict corporal discipline common in the Islands is illegal in Australia, financial pressures are escalating, unemployment is rising and family breakdown is becoming more frequent. Within Maoridom also, a common complaint heard throughout the extended community is that without a cultural facility such as a *marae*, where will the young people, particularly the young men, find role models and mentors? This in turn raises the question – where are the fathers?

As both authors have noted in this extended community over 20 years, there appears to be many Polynesian fathers who have families ‘back in New Zealand’ and new families here. It would seem some support the *whanau* at home, and some do not. While no figures are available on this (government forms do not have a box for this one), the widespread nature of this two family situation could be regarded as the biggest ‘sleeping’ statistic in migration patterns. For many men, family breakdown in New Zealand or family payment avoidance is often acknowledged as a prompt for migration. This is admitted freely when discussed in an informal social situation, however it is highly unlikely to be acknowledged in a more formal interview format.

When asked to talk about their fathers, many of those in this study referenced the film, *Once Were Warriors*, in the language of their response. This was used both negatively and positively, for example, ‘Dad was like Jake’ or ‘We didn’t grow up like in *Warriors*’. In a ‘snapshot’ of the eighteen young men in this sample, nine had no input from fathers at all (one from industrial death, the others because of relationship breakdown). Of those remaining, four described their fathers as intimidating and violent, three were not violent but disinterested and uninvolved, and only two claimed to have ‘good’ fathers.

In most cases, someone else in the *whanau* provided some degree of role modelling. A significant number cited the women in their lives as more functional and influential:

Dad was like Jake the Muss - in the pub fighting. He left home when I was 5 and the only figure we had that was 'father like' was our mother. She brought us up (JH, Maori, 24).

Maori culture influenced me first, my grandmother and my aunts and people around me who never really had to drink, who could express their feelings and emotions. All those characters stay in my memories when I was younger. I always remember the *tangis*. I remember the *kuias* (KH, Maori, 28).

The remaining cohort cited Polynesian sporting heroes such as Ruben Wiki and Roy Asotasi: 'It's what they do off the field. A warrior is fearless, leading from the front, he knows the needs of his people' (LT, Samoan, 25). Most of the young men interviewed for this article acknowledged there were older men here in Australia, some of the same *iwi*, and others who are not, who have the knowledge and the status to teach the 'old ways' and who are happy to be asked. In one informant's opinion, a great deal of what may be loosely called 'antisocial' behaviour by young Polynesian teenagers, would respond to the input of these older mentors:

There are a lot of young men who want to be proud of their culture and who might be playing up. But they would get so much benefit from the knowledge of the old people that I know is around here (TO, Tongan, 22).

However, when pressed, none of the respondents had taken any practical steps to engage with these men, or follow up suggested cultural activities.

### **Polynesians in sport:**

'I just lived for sport at school. If I didn't have that I think I would've bashed someone' (JT, Tongan, 20).

The figures relating to Polynesian sporting participation in Australia are already extraordinary, and rising. In some areas in western Sydney, certain rugby league teams can comprise rates as high as 50% to 70% Polynesian (see Buettner, 2007). Australian recognition of the huge contribution Polynesians are making in sport, particularly both codes of football, is arguably a significant factor in the overall acceptance of the broader Polynesian community. After nearly twenty years of Polynesian

involvement at the top level of Rugby League and Rugby Union, Australian commentators are at last making an effort to pronounce names correctly. In more recent years, an increasing number of Maori and Pacific Island families have complained to football authorities and media outlets in an attempt to improve pronunciation. This represents a marked departure from the days when 'Willie 'O' became the easy way round a long Tongan name, and may also reflect a growing confidence by the extended community. The sheer number of Maori/Pacific Island players, their awesome natural physiques, and their *difference*, has generated a certain mystique in Australian sporting circles. This has resulted in vast amounts of print media, in particular, showcasing the Polynesian players: 'We have to understand their culture and the big part religion plays in their lives ...' Newcastle Knights recruitment manager (Onslow, 2008, p.52). While it may be commendable that football clubs and sports writers are looking with more depth at these issues, it could be regarded as an indictment of Australian scholarship generally, that the only place one sees a discussion of Polynesian cultural values is in the sports pages of Australian newspapers.

The dazzling incomes of sports stars also tends to mask the low socio-economic status of many Maori/Pacific Islanders living in Australia. In much the same manner as sporting prowess is perceived as a way out of poverty for African Americans, this would appear to be the case also in Australia, where sporting excellence is regarded as a passport to financial security and prestige for young Polynesian men: 'The Pacific and Maori community is very small and they feel when one achieves, we can all achieve ... in what's generally a low socio-economic demographic, of course that's leading to more 'Plan As' - planning a career in sport' (Lakisa, 2008, p.5).

Undoubtedly, Polynesian parents are looking at a football career by one or more family members as a positive development, however this in turn may translate into pressure on individuals to provide for their families from a young age, and may also have implications for alternative career and lifestyle choices. Maori academic, Brendan Hokowhitu (2004), articulates his concern that the hegemonic masculinity around sport leaves little interpretation for young Maori men who are not drawn to the sporting arena, to find a cultural identity. By prioritizing and

glorifying sport to the exclusion of other traits of masculinity, it leaves very little room for young Polynesian men to exert their masculinity in a way which is balanced and creative. While speaking in the New Zealand context, Hokowhitu's work addresses a similar situation in Australia: 'The mainstream discourse recognizes this phenomenon as an acceptable alternative to providing Polynesian boys with an education system that caters to their academic needs' (Hokowhitu, 2004, p.273). The exclusive channelling of resources and expectations into sporting achievement overshadows other opportunities for young Polynesian men to excel in more diverse areas. It could be further argued that in terms of cultural recognition, diversity and identity, young Polynesian men growing up in Australia are starved of positive imagery outside of sport.

I dunno. I tried out for the Sharks and got knocked back. I don't know what I'm going to do - brickies' labourer I guess (GL, Samoan, 20).

### **Education in Australia**

Without the cushioning effect of sporting excellence, Polynesian students in Australia are likely to encounter an indifferent or even hostile schooling environment. The intolerance towards anything outside the 'norm' exemplified by White Australia, is expressed by a lack of value and regard for anyone who displays a distinct cultural identity.

My nephew (aged 10) was told if he didn't take his *pounamu* off at school, the teacher would cut it off! (MG, Maori, 22).

While New Zealand has, with varying degrees of commitment and success, attempted to implement a mentoring environment and a *whanau*-based approach to health care and education, Australia has chosen a different path. Eleven years of the conservative Howard government derided multi-culturalism as a failure and conspicuously resurrected and promoted assimilationist policies. The vehemence of the government's rejection of cultural difference, underscores the ideological foundation of its attitude towards those of non-anglo origin instead requiring students '... to hang their cultural identities at the school gates ...' (Thaman, 2002, p.26).

None of the respondents in this study, all of whom spent most or all of their school years in Australia, expressed any engagement with the education system. A common response, 'I just couldn't wait to leave

school', reflects an *anomie* also exhibited by many working class and indigenous students. In the sample under discussion in this paper, sixteen of the eighteen respondents left school after Year 10 (approximate age 15) while two have continued to higher education, having done so as 'mature students'. While sport, and to some extent the music industry, provide possible career options outside of manual labour, the sixteen working members of this cohort are involved in 'blue collar' occupations. Most are working in unskilled jobs, with three learning a trade 'on the job', meaning they are not part of the formal apprenticeship system, and only one is being trained formally which will see him acquire his trade 'ticket'.

A further element for concern is that many high schools in the urban Australian context have become sites for ethnically divided gangs: 'I just try and get along with everyone – I'm not into the aggro, but a lot of the Island boys are in one gang or another. My two brothers are in gangs at school' (JT, Tongan, 20). On the one hand, while schools, as government instrumentalities, are allegedly attempting to provide a cohesive context for shared 'citizenship' and national values, the grounds and surrounding transport systems are being used to play out disputes over territory and identity. This phenomenon may serve in some ways to reinforce cultural identities, but unfortunately it is equally likely to cultivate xenophobic perspectives and reinforce racial and ethnically driven stereotypes.

### **Music and Identity – or Identification?**

Access to television, i-pods and the internet has meant we are living in a global whirlpool of transmutable identities. The humble tourist lei, found throughout most of the Pacific, allows Europeans to pretend to be 'Islanders' while Islanders may well be trying to be African Americans. As one contributor observes: 'Every second person in the suburbs is a homey Islander' (GL, Samoan, 20). The music of Hip Hop remains extremely popular but also 'the look'. Despite the hot climate of Australia, Polynesian teenagers' co-option of Black American style and imagery extends to the oversized, all-encompassing garments favoured by the Hip Hop crews. In recent years in Australia, as happened in New Zealand, Hip Hop has undergone the process of 'Polynisation'. With the

addition of drums, ukeleles and traditional chant rhythms, the music being produced now has a distinct Pacific feel. Influenced by artists such as Scribe, Merenia, Kye of Budspells, King Kapesi, and Che Fu, a new generation chooses to see themselves reflected in the sound and imagery of what was originally an entirely American phenomenon. This is done by the citing of local suburb names, use of regionalized accents and simply by supporting each other. As Kirsten Zemke-White (2005) argues, while the adoption of Hip Hop rhythms and imagery may look like taking on a 'simulated identity', its central referent is the 'hood', '... signifying place, ownership, belonging, and alluding to gang culture, allows hip hop culture and rap music, no matter how commercialized and mass mediated, to incorporate and insert local dimensions' (Zemke-White, K, 2005, p.1).

For Polynesian youth, music is providing a vehicle for exploring and presenting what can be quite complex emotions and states of identities both in New Zealand and Australia:

Anyone can mimic Usher or Mariah Carey if you've grown up with it but it's when you are writing your original music you get lost in it – that's what Polynesians and Maori are good at. They don't think anyone wants to know their 'hori' songs but everyone does! (KH, Maori, 28).

The arts, generally, are often where complicated notions of identity and belonging can be expressed. The Australian Polynesian arts scene is also part of a broader renaissance to reclaim the integrity of Pacific images that have been confined for so long to tourist memorabilia, and suggests that this is a very positive step towards Pacific youth retaining certain cultural images that they may then be re-worked in the form of a music video or other medium. A striking example of this would be the work of Haro, whose mixed heritage is reflected in his elaborate and highly successful artwork. Having spent some years as a talented but 'illegal' graffiti artist, Haro was able to appreciate the challenge of learning traditional Maori carving and incorporate this into an exciting new art form – carved graffiti. It is this interface of traditional and the very new, even edgy, that makes such work difficult to evaluate. His work is popular with young Polynesians and is also appreciated by the traditionalists and the art-buying public. The central motif for his work is still his 'tag' or graffiti name *Prinsat*, which is so intricately wrought as

to be unrecognisable. Haro's core identity of *Prinsat* reflects his compound identity of being a mixed race, displaced, urban youth and celebrates this fusion through the discipline of carving.

### **Migration and the threat to cultural identity**

Even though they have been born here and grew up here, I tell my children they must maintain their identity and culture. Because if you've lost that you've lost everything (Cook Island grandfather's advice to respondent)

Once outside the country of birth, however, one's individual identity does become more complex to express. Maori who might describe themselves simply as 'Tuhoe' in New Zealand, would modify this in Australia in an attempt to help the other person locate his/her history. For New Zealand migrants, or Australian born Polynesians, identity is not a 'given', it is created - a complex and negotiated status. Bloodline and land ties have to be re-interpreted in a new country. How one describes oneself may depend on who is asking the questions, and the extent of their knowledge of relevant geographical and ethnographic information. For example, in Australia, outside the Maori community, many resort to simply saying 'I'm Maori'. Nonetheless, all interviewees (with one exception) knew their tribal backgrounds, most of both parents, and expressed it was important to them to pass this knowledge on to their children in Australia.

Additionally, having to describe themselves as Maori and relate to Maori outside of tribal affiliations has had another effect. Those who travel between New Zealand and Australia regularly commented that it was easier to engage with other Maori here without the complicated inter-tribal histories of New Zealand. 'Yeah here we're all Maori together – back home, you might not hang out with them or have fights' (CT, Maori, 21).

For migrants, even those who are happy with their decision to move countries, there is often still a longing for the familiar: relatives, food, collective singing; things that are missed. For Polynesians, like many migrant groups, considerable effort is made to bring 'home' with them. Giles Petersen who curated an exhibition of contemporary Polynesian artists in Queensland, refers to the dual state of existence that is common in the newly arrived Pacific communities: 'They're carrying

their culture with them, they're adapting to the new environment but they're still maintaining or struggling to maintain and honour the traditional values' (Petersen, G, 2000). For other people, it is not until they leave home that they appreciate what 'home' has to offer. 'Although my parents spoke fluent Maori...it went in one ear and out the other. When it's with you all the time you don't really feed on it but when I left home I was really hungry for it again' (MG, Maori, 26).

Preservation and assertion of identity can take many forms, and in Australia, the expression of tattooing, as cultural practice, is widespread. Until possibly ten years ago, Maori and Pacific Islanders who wished to have traditional tattoos would return to their country of origin for this to be done. Today there are a growing number of master tattooists working in Australia, particularly for Maori and Samoan *tatau*. This is another indication (along with the increase in Polynesian churches and sporting teams) that Polynesian migrants are here to stay. Twelve of the eighteen young men in this study have been tattooed to varying degrees. Eight could be described as having extensive work done, while all expressed an interest in being tattooed more fully in time. Approximately half said they would rather return to New Zealand or Island or origin for this to be done. All respondents acknowledged *tatau* as a point of cultural recognition. They also indicated being tattooed was a mark of identity in another country.

### **Moving Towards a Pan-Pacific Identity**

I'll go for Australia if they're not playing New Zealand.

This sentiment was expressed repeatedly during the interview process when respondents were pressed for their present national allegiances. All reported to be primarily All Black supporters and this appears to confirm the role of sport (and the All Blacks in particular) in retaining an emotional hold on the New Zealand connection, even amongst those who had been born here. Most volunteered they would back Australia against other countries such as France and South Africa. Outside of the sporting arena, most respondents also said they would describe themselves as 'New Zealanders' or 'Kiwis' in the workplace.

The decision to move countries also brings the tensions of being part of a new, larger community. For many young Polynesians this means 'coming of age' in an environment vastly different from that which their parents and other family members had experienced. There are also the complexities and challenges of juggling a 'hyphenated' identity.

The escalation of Pacific migration has prompted a rapid rise of 'mixed' families both in New Zealand and here in Australia. The Maori/Islander mix (quite rare a generation ago) is now common in New Zealand and Australia, with the children colloquially referred to by nicknames such as 'Hula Hakas', in reference to their bicultural status. The large number of Australian born children of Maori parents, or those born of one Maori parent and one Australian, are affectionately referred to as 'Mossies' (Maori/Aussies) in the Maori community, and they will continue to evolve and state who they are in time. However, many have explored the bicultural options available to them and have broadened their own definition of identity: 'I suppose it is also how we look at ourselves, because us young people of Pacific Island heritage sometimes call themselves 'Australian'....It's up to them how they portray themselves. I know how my culture has been for me and I know that a lot of others have that influence in their life' (ML, Niuean, 26).

The metaphor of navigation frequently appears in Pacific language, literature and the arts. It encompasses the idea of successful movement between places of importance in one's life, as in 'Navigating Identities'. This process will, of course, be different for the next generation of children, once removed again from what may be described as an 'ancestral home'. To some Pacific researchers, this is not a new phenomenon. Polynesians have always been great voyagers and travellers, and to some, this shift to Australia and beyond, is really part of this tradition: 'They are once again enlarging their world, establishing new resource bases and expanded networks for circulation' (Hau'ofa, 1999, p.34).

Indeed, the struggle to find identity is not always a traumatic one, but a stimulating voyage of self-discovery: 'Man I had no idea there were so many types of people, eh? I'd never met a Muslim before I came to Sydney. Even in Bondi you hear all these languages. A lot of people think I'm Brazilian till I open my mouth' (GT, Maori, 20).

Again, it is most often music and sport which bonds the Polynesian community: 'I've got over my thing about Islanders being coconuts – we all play music, we're all cuzzie bros over here' (KH, Maori, 28).

### **Conclusion**

There's nothing wrong with growing up being an Australian, an Aussie, but you are not from here, your blood is Pacific Island, something you must never forget (Rarotongan aunty's advice to respondent).

The last century has brought about tremendous changes in Polynesian identity: from independent landowners and seafarers, to being small stakeholders in a marginal economic reality. These previously self-defined cultures have been re-defined from 'without' in the post-colonial (some may argue neo-colonial) discourse. Now the process is evolving again, adding to the complexities of defining a 'modern' identity. In this era of intensified globalisation, Polynesians are travelling further, living in many countries, and marrying people of vastly different cultures from their own. However, seemingly against this tide, young Maori and Pacific Islanders are forging their own individual and collective identities through many channels. They are manifesting identities in transition which reflect their own experience. This confirms the assertion of Teresia Teaiwa that identity is not an absolute '...its identifications through kinship provide mobility and fluidity and a dynamism which confounds and resists colonial, nationalist and even post-colonial representations' (2005, p. 19)

The significant difference between those who migrated to Australia, now aged 40 to 65, who express the desire to 'return home', and the young men interviewed for this paper, is that they do not intend to return to their country of ethnic origin. They are proud of their heritage, and manifest a great many of the cultural traits associated with the Polynesian extended family, but none of the eighteen interviewed expressed interest in living permanently in either New Zealand or the Pacific in the future. As they mature, they may well embrace the traditional cultural experiences that are available here and be part of maintaining these, or they may not. For the young men in this study, the challenges are complex and will become more so as they become fathers.

Some may engage in a process of re-traditionalisation that often accompanies parenthood. However it would now appear to be their turn to define own identities in a 'third' place, Australia.

### **Appendix: Summary of Respondents**

Total interviewees: 18, aged 18-28 years
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10 Maori, 3 Samoan, 2 Tongan, 1 Cook Islander, 1 Maori/Cook Islander, 1 Niuean
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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 14 Came to Australia as children (aged from 2-14)</li><li>• 4 born here (3 Maori, 1 Samoan)</li><li>• All attended school in Australia at some stage, most at both primary and secondary level.</li><li>• 16 are working, 2 are unemployed (collecting benefits) also 2 who are working (both Maori) are also studying at tertiary level.</li><li>• While most of the cohort now live in or near to Bondi, 8 were raised in Bondi (or close proximity) and 10 grew up in Sydney's outer suburbs.</li><li>• 16 of the 18 either pay rent or contribute to the family's rent.</li><li>• 10 are single, 8 have partners. Of those with partners, 3 have partners of the same cultural group (Maori), 4 have partners who are of non-Polynesian ethnicity, and 1 (Samoan) has a Maori partner.</li><li>• 1 of the singles (Maori) is an 'out' gay man.</li><li>• 3 have children, and one has a partner who is pregnant.</li></ul> |
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