CUZZIE BROS: THE INTERFACE BETWEEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND MAORI/PACIFIC ISLANDER MIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA

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BA (Hons)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Newcastle

March 2014
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor John Maynard and Emeritus Professor John Ramsland for their input on this thesis. Professor Maynard in particular has been an inspiring source of support throughout this process. I would also like to give my thanks to the Wollotuka Institute of Indigenous Studies. It has been so important to have an Indigenous space in which to work.

My special thanks to Dr Lena Rodriguez for having faith in me to finish this thesis and also for her practical support.

For my daughter, Mereana Tapuni Rei – Wahine Toa – go girl.

I also want to thank all my brothers and sisters (you know who you are). Without you guys life would not have been so interesting growing up. This thesis is dedicated to our Mum and Dad who always had an open door and taught us to be generous and to share whatever we have. Ake! Ake! Ake!

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of:

Upokoina Poona Ian David George

Matilda Akenanua George

Jackson Doolan and Richard Saunders
ABSTRACT

This work is a study of the Maori and Pacific Islander diaspora in Australia and its relationship to the Aboriginal community, the tangata whenua (people of the land). What has emerged from my research into Maori in Australia - a contact which began over two hundred years ago - is that for many Maori, Australia is now their home. Until approximately twenty-five years ago, Pacific Islanders did not migrate to Australia in significant numbers, preferring to move to New Zealand from the home islands. However, the economic decline in New Zealand has prompted greater migration of Pacific Islanders here, and this is now one of Australia’s fastest growing immigrant groups. This thesis offers a perspective on the struggles that have transpired within the broader Pasifika community, with its diverse views, opinions and positions from an insider perspective. It will then explore this community’s relationship with Aboriginal people in a series of contemporary settings.

In order to place this work in a cultural and historical context, there is an account of early contact between Maori and Australian colonial authorities from 1792. There is an overview of the divergent political experiences of Indigenous people in Australia and New Zealand from this early point. This is followed by an explanation of the early Maori migration to Australia in the 1960s and 70s. The rise of global revolutionary and resistance movements are discussed in relation to the activism of both Maori and Aboriginal people during this period, and the support they gave each other. The later chapters will explore the deterioration of this relationship since the 1990s, as the spirit of collectivism and pan-Indigenous unity has, arguably, diminished under the weight of neoliberalism. These chapters provide analysis of qualitative interviews with thirty-two Aboriginal and Polynesian participants. There is focus on the significant tensions between these two groups via rivalries in certain urban spaces, specifically in Logan, a south-eastern suburb of Brisbane. However, this thesis also explores more positive contemporary relationships between these two groups through the lens of the popular cultures of music and sport.
Preface

About the author:

I was born in Rotorua, the eldest of nine children in the 1950s. My father was born in Atiu and my mother in Rarotonga, both are Cook Island Maori. My parents were the first generation of Pacific Islanders to arrive in New Zealand after World War II. The early school years were difficult as my parents had little formal schooling and the cultural climate of the time extended only to New Zealand Maori and Pakeha. School administrative procedures had no box to tick for Pacific Islanders. However, by the time my brothers and sisters came through the system, they were warmly welcomed by the New Zealand Maori ‘as one of them’. Having attended Rotorua Boys High, I then spent time in Auckland inspired by the politics of the sixties.

I arrived in Sydney in 1972 and worked as a labourer on building sites. This led to my involvement in trade union activities. At the same time, I participated in the emerging Aboriginal Land Rights Movement. I enrolled in an arts degree at the University of New South Wales. By the end of 1983, I had First Class Honours with the Sociology Department. However life for a Polynesian with strong opinions was not easy in this era. I was told, for example, ‘you don’t look like an academic’. After many arguments I decided I would do an ethnographic study of the Sydney Maori community for my doctorate. I involved myself in the activities of the extended Aboriginal and Maori/Pacific Islander communities residing in Sydney. Also in 1983, a group of three Maori, including myself, began a weekly Maori radio program on Aboriginal community radio, Radio Redfern. The radio program still goes on every Saturday – the longest continually running programme on what is now Gadigal Radio.

In my capacity as a writer and community activist I have been engaged in the workings of a great number of organisations, across a broad political spectrum. As a consequence of this long involvement, this thesis has changed form and has broadened out from just the Sydney communities. In this work, I have endeavoured to contribute to an understanding of the achievements and sometimes failures of Maoridom and Pasifika towards the tangata whenua of this land. During these decades I have observed a great many events where Maori, Pacific Islanders and Aboriginal people have worked together around campaigns for social justice. Somewhat sadly, I have also witnessed a deterioration in that relationship, particularly over the last decade. As a growing number of Polynesians have come to make Australia their home I consider this work to be a contribution and reminder of our responsibility towards the first owners of this land.

Now I have returned to complete a doctorate thanks to Wollotuka, Institute of Indigenous Studies, University of Newcastle.

Mereana Tapuni Rei you have been an inspiration to your Dad!
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