

# CULTURAL COMPETENCIES, CULTURAL CONTAGIONS: NEGOTIATING THE INTIMATE IN COLONIAL NEW ZEALAND AND FIJI

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5 February 1881, Lake House Hotel, Rotorua, New Zealand:

On a warm night in late summer 1881 the earth cools down after the heat of the day, and the first stars punctuate the clear night sky. On this side Lake Rotorua laps lazily at its shoreline. There is stillness, the calm of a gentle dusk. But across the way, the newly renovated Lake House Hotel is abuzz with activity. A pervading hum of excited chatter and laughter spills out across the lake, frequently interspersed by shouts of “welcome” as more guests arrive. Locals are scrambling to put the finishing touches to the billiard room. Delicate flower and fern arrangements grace the tables, and the ceiling is hung with many coloured Chinese lanterns. The band arrives and sets up in one corner meanwhile refreshments are laid out.

In honour of Sir Arthur Gordon, New Zealand’s new Governor dancing is to commence at nine o’clock. Fresh from postings in the Caribbean, Mauritius and Fiji, Governor Gordon is on a North Island tour, having arrived in Rotorua earlier that day. The natural wonders of mineral waters, hot springs, geysers, and bubbling mud pools promise a glorious future for the town as a “Great South Seas Spa,” and residents are concerned to welcome him in style, impressing on him this potential.

As a night of welcome and celebration, it is also a night of mixing as European, or Pakeha, and Maori rub shoulders. For some Pakeha, Governor Gordon is not the draw-card at all. They are attending out of a “very pardonable curiosity to see a savage race in a transition state between barbarism and civilisation” (*New Zealand Observer*, 19 February 1881:4). This

is the first time many have socialised on such intimate terms with Maori. What motivates the Maori presence is not so clearly articulated. Like Gordon, many are leaders, principal chiefs in the region who recognise the *mana* of the Queen's representative on New Zealand soil. Three hundred Maori travelled many miles to hold council with Governor Gordon during the day, yet after waiting hours for him, he failed to appear. Tonight might offer a better opportunity.

More and more people are arriving, but still Gordon is not among them. He refuses to leave his hotel room upstairs, preferring rest and quiet after his recent travels. Such "ungentlemanly" snubs will ignite debate in the Pakeha press in the following days. Some argue that his practical experience from other colonies may not be so seamlessly applicable to the New Zealand situation: "the high-handed policy of cool indifference may suit the attenuated culture of the Fijians, but not the keener organisation of the Maoris, who, as a race, are painfully alive to the importance of political recognisance" (*Auckland Weekly News*, 5 February 1881:20).

But dance is a universal language, and Maori, like Pakeha, may be here simply to have a good time. Nowadays they often open their own festivities with Pakeha dances (*Auckland Weekly News*, 12 February 1881:17). It's nine, and despite Gordon's absence, the band strikes up the lancers. This popular nineteenth-century dance was a simplified version of the quadrille, a square dance for an equal number of couples. Originating in France, it arrived in England about 1815, where it was recreated with less complicated movements to popular folk songs. It was then exported mid-century to New Zealand as part of the settlers' cultural heritage from the Homeland. Tonight in Rotorua it again finds new life.

The Maori who join in go "about the intricacies correctly," this being an "instructive sight" for many, and seems to be causing Captain Knollys, Gordon's aide-de-camp, much surprise. Yet some Pakeha are commenting to each other on the "bare legged" male dancers (*New Zealand Observer*, 19 February 1881:4; *Auckland Weekly News*, 5 February 1881:20). They are not quite properly dressed. It appears that moving beyond the transition from barbarism to civilisation will demand more cultural competencies than dance moves.

Local journalists are also keen observers, paying close attention to the women, making notes on the prettiest and most fashionable dresses for the "Ladies' Column" in the morning papers. The most popular colours are pale pink, pale blue, pale green, rose and cream. Cascaded lace trimmings frame the bodice and hem. The new thing is for shoes of the same colour as the dress. The journalists admire the women, and how the "sun-tanned faces of the Maori belles, muslin clad, with ribbons of rainbow hues, formed a striking contrast to their sober-attired, pale-faced European partners" (*Auckland Weekly News*, 5 February 1881:20).

After a time the room becomes crowded and hot, and a "very pronounced odour of shark oil and 'waipiro'" pervades the atmosphere (*New Zealand Observer*, 19 February 1881:4). Maori once deemed the cheap spirits of European seamen and settlers "stinking water" (*waipiro*), but over time many have developed a taste for alcohol. What was once a very Pakeha smell, for Pakeha tonight marks a Maori presence. Dancing continues with great spirit until the early hours of the morning. This doubtless disturbs Governor Gordon's rest. Departing guests spill out into the cooler moonlit calm. Lovers meander by the lakeside, Maori make for their nearby camps, while Pakeha retire to their homes in Rotorua town.

I have chosen to start with this story, constructed from newspaper accounts of the period, since it speaks to the central theme of my study; a comparison of racial mixing in New Zealand and Fiji. More specifically, I locate my study in two colonial sites – the urban centres of Suva and Auckland during the period c.1880-c.1920. “Racial mixing” captures both the practices of sexual intimacy between individuals –the sharing of bodies and the reproduction of mixed-race offspring– and more “public” forms of mixing and interaction, as different groups came to live, work and socialise together in differing degrees of proximity. Both private sexual and public collective practices, in the words of Ann Laura Stoler, “signaled the lines of descent that secured racial identities and partitioned individuals among them” (1995:45).

My work examines cultural competencies and cultural contagions in the negotiation of the intimate in colonial New Zealand and Fiji, with intimacy connoting this broader understanding of mixing. Indicative of one’s innermost thoughts and feelings, and the intrinsic, essential nature of things, the intimate implies deep knowledge and understanding. To be intimate is to be in close acquaintance, association or familiarity with places, people and things, as well as functioning as a euphemism for sexual relations. To *intimate* is to communicate indirectly, to hint at or imply. Varied meanings for the intimate –the essential, the known, the familiar, the sexual and the implied– for me point to the ordering of bodies in space. Whether that be personal or social, private or public, or the appropriate degrees of distance and levels of engagement between people, and forms of knowledge about self and other in these spaces. The ways in which people defined and managed the private and public in colonial life directly address political questions about intimacy – about sexual relations between races, acquaintance and familiarity between people, emotions and feelings, and the implied cultural competence that marked people as belonging to particular gendered and racialised groups.

Intimacy has an (often unspoken) culturally specific time and place. Inappropriate intimacy, intimacy in the wrong time or place and with the wrong people can be affronting, threatening or dangerous. The intimate in my work is about both the “tense and tender ties” that were understood and misunderstood across race, gender and class.<sup>1</sup> It is suggestive of both cultural competency and cultural contagion. Competency is about knowing your place and belonging, and through this, the reproduction of cultural norms. Contagion is about transgression and disruption, whereby such “norms” are contested and redefined.

In my opening narrative, much speaks to these ideas about mixing, intimacy, competency and contagion:

- In what circumstances and on what terms do people mix? This was an occasion for people of different racial groups to welcome the newly arrived Governor. Both Pakeha and Maori recognise his role as the Queen’s representative, yet this also speaks to their

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<sup>1</sup> I have taken this phrase from Stoler’s (2001) article “Tense and tender ties: The politics of comparison in North American history and (post)colonial studies.” Stoler’s title itself is a play on Sylvia Van Kirk’s (1980) *Many Tender Ties*.

differential relationship to the Crown. Pakeha want to impress on him the potential for development of a Great South Seas Spa and thus imperial recognition. Maori are, presumably, concerned to secure the Crown's recognition and maintenance of their own rights in the region. Doubtless both were disappointed and irritated by his absence.

- In this encounter, people were on show and observed for their appearance and behaviour. Being competent in dance and dress (and other cultural practices) speaks to the links made between individual bodily dignity and the dignity of the community as a whole. As I am drawing here on Pakeha perspectives, we can only gauge a sense of their preoccupations, and not the expectations and evaluations Maori may have had and made about Pakeha on this occasion.

- While the men may not have measured up clothing-wise, the Maori women, who are “suntanned belles,” rather than “brown,” make a pleasant contrast to “pale-faced” Europeans. There is a gendered nature here to the evaluation of competency. However, in other circumstances Maori men also secure praise that is then used to exalt “the power of England's greatness.” In a sketch of a Native Land Court proceeding in 1881, one journalist notes:

Lounging carelessly against the wall stands the picture of a Maori swell; faultlessly “got up” in the correctest European morning dress, with the whitest shirt collar and cuffs; a pair of Oxford shoes revealing the latest fashion freak in coloured hose; his handkerchief redolent with perfume; his jewellery good and in correct taste; and with a society smile upon his face, he shows the highly civilising power of an English suit of clothes. This reminds me of what I once heard a friend jestingly remark, “that a ton of paper collars and cheap looking-glasses were equal to ten tons of gunpowder in conquering savage nations” and really I believe it. (*New Zealand Herald*, 19 February 1881:6)

- References in the scene to the smell of shark oil and alcohol point to the sensory experience of cross-cultural interactions. Smells here are connected to bodily practices, such as hygiene. David Howes (1991:128-47) writes of smell as the sense of transitions and thresholds. Smells are most notable at boundaries, at junctures; they are never “in place” as they always escape from their objects. This is suggestive of contagion and signifies matter out of place. In negotiating the intimate, the senses play a central role in social classification and evaluation. It is my intention to develop and further explore these dimensions of the sensory perception of otherness.

- The mention of alcohol signposts the “vices” of “civilisation” and the lack of European control over the types and consequences of cultural mixing. I want to explore why certain things and practices get picked up more readily than others, and what happens to the meanings of these practices when they do shift.

• Finally, in contemporary reports of this dance, there were links drawn between Fiji and New Zealand in imperial terms –Governor Gordon was part of a long line of officials traversing and linking up the British Empire. Comparison was also made in indigenous terms when the commentator contrasts the supposed collective nature of different “natives” – the “attenuated culture of the Fijians” and the “keener organisation of the Maori”– leading into a reflection on ideas about how to govern them.

In essence I seek to embody history; to locate individual lives and the mixed experience as lived. I want to look to the cultural forms that secured a life in a colonial urban environment. My questions here are: What were the key determinants, the cultural competencies that defined one’s racial and gendered identity in colonial New Zealand and Fiji? When were these competencies, aspirations and desires misplaced? What sorts of limits were placed on competency? What practices or attitudes were classed as contagions, posing a threat to these constructions and marking people as “out of place,” dangerous or in need of reform? What sort of mixing was officially viewed as problematic and what went on in a productive fashion? How was mixing embodied and performed? Was it disguised, concealed, asserted, celebrated or promoted?

In talking about race, we are also talking about gendered relationships –about sex, marriage, domestic life, childbearing and childrearing. Echoing Stoler, Martha Hodes notes how the shifting production and construction of racial categories and the concept of “race” itself is often a history of sexuality; “for it is partly as a result of the taboos against boundary crossing that such categories are invented” (1999:1). When talking about race we are also talking about empire, nation and citizenship. Racial categories and the politics of state intervention in intimate practices speak of and to each other. As a way of addressing narratives of categorisation, belonging and “nation-building,” this study is rooted in the everyday, in the routine and the habitual, in domestic life, as this is where the colonisers along with the colonised were produced.

## **Boundary Construction and Intimate Encounters**

The construction and maintenance of boundaries between communities of descent, and the classification of individuals within them are age-old questions. Henry Yu emphasises that before we seek to address and theorise mixed populations, we need to take a step backwards and more carefully define the qualities of the “pre-mixed” groups themselves (2003:1407). These qualities are not somehow pre-given, stable and obvious and, as Desley Deacon (2002:ix–x) suggests, we need to ask ourselves more carefully what sort of “white” or “black” people were they? Were some Maori tribal groups more receptive to intimacies with Pakeha than other tribes? Were Europeans from different classes and religious groups more receptive to mixing with Maori, Fijians or Indians than others? In asking these kinds of questions, far from depicting communities as divided along clear cut lines of self-evident “native” and “European,” or “colonised” and “coloniser,” I seek to recover diverse, complex and

contradictory “bundles of relationships” and interconnections that characterised colonial societies (Wolf cited in Ballantyne 2002:1). Rather than taking it for granted that binaries necessarily prevented interaction I want to look to the ways that people manoeuvred and to the varieties of encounters that this interaction produced.

While interrogating the sense or reality of fixed boundaries and sharp dichotomies, I am not evacuating these contexts from the unequal relations of power and privilege in which they existed. Such divisions did work and they carried imagined and real power for people at the time. While the language of race, gender and mixing shifts across time and space, Hodes reminds us “no matter how fickle we prove ... classification to be, knowledge of that malleability alone cannot subdue its power to circumscribe lives, to categorize, distinguish, and separate people, to subjugate some and elevate others” (2003:118). Simmering throughout mixed racial colonial life were the tensions between impulses of inclusion and practices of exclusion, between incorporation and distancing. Exterior boundaries between groups and internal frontiers within them were shifting constructs that marked people off as either belonging, not quite belonging, or simply “beyond the pale.”

Increased rates of intermarriage are often celebrated as an index of progress and indicative of a decline in racism. Highlighting the conceptual stability of the categories being mixed, discourses and practices of mixing often function to reinforce rather than destabilise difference: Intermarriage would prove the superiority of the European. In late nineteenth century discourses of marriages between Pakeha and Maori, and the production of half-castes, whiteness/Europeanness was typically framed as stable. With the non-white diluted, offspring were regarded as shifting closer to whiteness and away from otherness. This discursive practice was inseparable from contemporary fears about the declining Maori population. Race mixing held to be a way of “improving” Maori and tying them more closely to European civilisation.

Working on the perception of race mixing as grafting the best features of the European onto the Maori, Maori leaders also sought to strengthen the standing of their people, producing stronger offspring who were more capable of confronting and engaging with new cultural forces. Apirana Ngata recognised that half-castes were in fact

still in their outlook and spirit and physical characteristics very much Maori. Those of us who are interested in the Maori race would deplore less the loss of physical type than the loss of what may be called the Maori spirit. (Cited in Riddell 2000:93)

Both these discourses do not work to unhinge racial categories. While mixing often troubled racial categorisation, in many ways it helped racial differences retain an apparent integrity.

## **Articulation Theory**

In terms of crossing boundaries, mixing, borrowing and reconfiguration, I want to discuss these practices as occurring within the realm of normal cultural activity. Stuart Hall's theory of articulation is central here, giving us a way to describe how people

make meaning and coherence of their world out of disparate beliefs and practices. This is a theory of contexts. The double meaning of articulation – to put into words/to utter, and to connect physically/to hook up, as in “articulated lorry” – reveals that this is both a discursive and social practice. It coheres in discourse and becomes articulated to certain political subjects as identities. James Clifford argues that

in articulation theory, the whole question of authenticity is secondary... It is assumed that cultural forms will always be made, unmade and remade. ... The relevant question is whether and how they convince and coerce insiders and outsiders, often in power-charged, unequal situations, to accept the autonomy of a “we.” (2001:479)

Margaret Jolly (2000) notes that while both indigenous and Europeans had a prior sense of cultural difference, colonial conditions made people more self-conscious about culture; there was a heightened awareness of it. In these contexts “culture” was more firmly attached to the indigenous, but could be narrated as something external to them, to be detached and left behind, replaced with Western forms. Colonists could argue that if natives no longer did certain native things, then they were no longer natives, but, as Jolly argues,

if colonizers are no longer doing what they were two decades ago, this is a comforting instance of progress. Diversity and change in one case connote inauthenticity, in the other, the hallmarks of true Western civilisation. (2000:282)

Yet, at the core of the colonial project was the promotion of progress and civilisation rendering questions of authenticity less salient. As seen in the rhetoric of intermarriage such shifts in native practice were to be regarded as positive signs of transformation and reform, with European observers generally investing in over-drawn and over-confident accounts of their own impact.

While there is no natural, predetermined shape for these articulations and ensembles, there are always constraints, sanctions and resistance which work to limit how much reconfiguration can occur at any particular time. People mix in certain ways and not others. In particular, intermarriage was highly gendered in colonial sites, with far fewer European women than men marrying across racial lines, a disparity not lost on Maori. So, politics is at the heart of creolisation, determining the type and timing of mixture, and the respective worth attached to it (Jolly 2000:279). As Nicholas Thomas reminds us,

“contact” is a process, and some phases of that process have far more limited ramifications than others. ...[we] must be concerned both with the limits as well as the effects of cultural change. (1997:11-13)

Greg Dening labels the hidden resistance that preserved native identities in new cultural idioms as “creative aboriginality” (1998:15). Translation, adaptation of and

selective engagement with European ideas and practices was never a denial of self (Denning 1998:213).

There are enduring cultural forces at work that do not readily appear open to mixing and realignment. The power of place is particularly central to articulations of indigeneity, in Clifford's words: "a desire called the land is persistently active" (2001:481). Land is the ground on which fundamental claims to distinctly rooted histories are made. Now that we have reached a point where human relationships to the land are key, as a means to then reflect back on the power of place and my choice for a comparative study of mixing in colonial Auckland and Suva, I will take a quick detour and talk about some recent debates in imperial historiography and their relevance to the Oceanic context.

## **The Transnational and the Comparative**

Historiography is a vehicle through which empires expand and nations are built. Imperial history as practiced from the late nineteenth century, arose out of a vision of empire that privileged the idea of "Greater Britain," of a national expansion that connected Britons "at home" to those "in the empire." Dominion nationalism did not undermine this framework; imperial and national interests were seen as interdependent (Ward 2003:45-46). From an antipodean perspective, imperial histories were narratives of building a "Better Britain." Imperialism itself was generally framed as a coherent and pre-determined force, expanding ever outwards from a foundational British core. As extensions of the Britannic nation, far-flung colonies were not understood to exert an equivalent influence in the Homeland, and were absent from domestic histories of the British Isles. Nationalist liberation movements in the post WWII climate challenged the idea of Empire, and historians turned inwards, looking to tell stories that spoke of national uniqueness. Borders were naturalised: the nation constituted the natural framework for research.

A recent re-turn to imperial history challenges and unsettles the reification of an all-powerful, dominant imperial centre determining the histories of imperial outposts. This 'entangled' approach recasts the nation as imperialised space, and many historians have looked to the imperial imprint back in Britain. This approach is attentive to the broader networks and circuits that disrupt nation-centred stories about the past. Colonies were traversed, criss-crossed and linked up by the flow of ideas, people and things. In suggesting we need to take a more mobile approach to the imperial past, Tony Ballantyne (2002) posits a metaphor of the web. The empire was an integrative structure whereby disparate points in space were connected in a complex mesh of networks, both between the metropole and colonies, and between colonies themselves. These intra-imperial links were equally significant. Any given colony or city or site could occupy multiple positions in the imperial web, depending on the particular perspective taken (Ballantyne 2002:14-15).

To think about this is in the context of colonial Oceania, Epeli Hau'ofa's reconstruction of the Pacific as "Our Sea of Islands" is in opposition to developmentalist rhetoric of the islands as small, remote, isolated, dependent and

unproductive, as “islands in a far sea” (1993:2-16). This rhetoric stems from imperial boundary-fixing which belied indigenous perceptions of their own environment. The reclamation of a ‘Sea of Islands’ is a form of subaltern region-making. Oceania is in fact vast, is a totality made up of islands *and* sea. The ocean is connection, and indigenous peoples were mobile, and are increasingly so in our global diasporic world. The fixity of the native in a kind of premodern rootedness, in island isolation, is an ahistorical delusion (Hau‘ofa 1993).

While Hau‘ofa stresses indigenous movement and journeying in both precolonial and postcolonial Oceania, I want to look more closely at the colonial period itself and investigate both indigenous and European movement at that time. Boundaries and borders may have been drawn on maps and mapped in words, but what were people actually doing and thinking? By asking: Who and what moved between Auckland and Suva? What did these movements enable in terms of knowledge about self and others? How did power operate in these transfers? Did Auckland operate in its own way as an Oceanic metropole? What happened to these links and flows as the nation-state became more formalised over the period? The idea of mixing is extended to capture movement and exchange around and across empire.

There are numerous cases, for example, of Fijian-born Europeans departing to Auckland for their education before returning to Fiji. Just as and there were indigenous Fijians, too, who made educational stints in New Zealand. Many men with business interests and capital moved between these places, often trying their luck in Fiji after time on goldfields in New Zealand or Australia, or leaving Fiji’s failed cotton plantations for New Zealand. In this respect, the Pacific appears as a shifting field of opportunity. Did these men have families and did they move with them? In terms of indigenous movement, take the case of Joe, a native servant of a European planter who sold up and moved to Auckland with him. Joe, who was actually from the New Hebrides, committed a series of attacks on Pakeha one night. In relating his capture newspapers alluded to other Fijians living in Auckland, some of who had also fallen foul of the law.

Jolly is wary of romanticising and universalising the “world traveller” (2001:422). Some indigenous people did (and do) not have a connection to the ocean that Hau‘ofa privileges, and were (and are) not able to move between islands. As such, they are situated differently “in the global geopolitics of state forms and migration patterns” (Jolly 2001:423). Being rooted, being “people of the place,” or *tangata whenua*, can carry more power and purchase than mobility (Jolly 2001:423-25). This links back to the ways in which human relationships to the land can problematise the centrality of realignment and mixing to articulation theory. Conflicting ideas over land ownership that were intimately connected to modes of land use dominated public discourse in colonial New Zealand and Fiji. Indigenous Fijians retained control over eighty-five percent of their lands, while white settlers sought more access to it. In New Zealand, as white settlement continued to intensify, Maori were experiencing heightened alienation under heavy government and economic pressure just as the Native Land Court was validating titles and arranging transfers. In this context, being rooted and owning land legitimated one’s existence.

Just to destabilise us further, home is not in itself an immobile site; there is internal movement too. Hau'ofa depicts natural landscapes as “maps of movements,” where indigenous groups named places as landing points, as markers of localised mobility out of one's own territory into another's (2000:466). Places were named by deeds done there, of battles and of past settlements. Naming charted populations in flux, naming charted mobility (466). For the different Maori tribal groups in the Auckland region, their relationship with the land was structured by the natural cycles of seasons, which influenced the timing of agricultural, marine and trading activities. People moved from resource area to resource area, but rights to specific resources were established (Ballara 1995:7). Indigenous understandings of land were more fluid, layered and complicated than Europeans initially perceived. This had major impact when sites were chosen for new towns in the new world, which I will touch on shortly.

In critiquing the naturalisation of nations and the isolation of islands, we cannot overlook the particulars of human interaction in specific contexts. Nicholas Thomas reminds us “colonialism can only be traced through its plural and particularised expression” (cited in Hall 2000:16). We also need to carefully distinguish between movement and living across multiple sites in an imperial Oceanic context from their workings today. I seek to both *historicise* moving and dwelling, and to reflect on their *cultural* specificities by remapping the connections between Auckland and Suva, tracing the similarities and differences of urban life in two sites.

When discussing comparison we must realise that this is not only a researcher's tool, but also a form of historical consciousness. Undertaking a comparative study I must recognize that peoples in the past did compare themselves to others and explore in depth the sorts of platforms employed for comparison, the stakes involved and the politics of it. Who drew comparisons? What/whom was compared with what? Why? What does this reveal about the power relationships in colonial New Zealand and Fiji? The production of categories enabled comparisons, and to some extent, prior categories determined the choice of what to compare and the types of conclusions that could be reached. For example, historical comparisons of settler-indigenous relations have often ended up as exercises in ranking, determining “good” and “bad” colonials on the basis of levels of frontier violence and the survival rates of indigenous groups (Montgomerie 1997:157). We must remember that colonials themselves drew such comparisons. At the time of Australian Federation in 1901, New Zealand officials constructed a national identity in opposition to that developing across the Tasman. They extolled the “worthiness” of Maori to participate as full citizens in the nation and, by extension, the benevolent and enlightened attitude of whites towards them (Bennett 2001:33-54).

Comparisons were linked not only to social reflection but also to action, to the implementation and revision of colonial policies. The imperial project in Fiji and New Zealand was characterised by a preoccupation with indigenous health and survival. This was demonstrated through census taking, the improvement of maternal health and childrearing practices, discourses surrounding interracial marriage, and the status of mixed-race offspring. I look to the types of comparisons that were drawn in

relation to these concerns between New Zealand and Fiji, and the shifts in policy that these comparisons might have enabled.

There is a specific reason underpinning my choice of time. Colonial societies became more formalised and increasingly racially organised from the end of the nineteenth century. Stoler (1995) has noted this change that occurred in other contexts wherein gender prescriptions and the regulation and management of sex became more central to forms of rule and the imagined identities of these places. James Belich (2001) terms these shifts in New Zealand the “Great Tightening”. It is my intention to examine the impact of these shifts at the level of state control and policy, to individual lives as lived in mixed communities.

Belich also labels this period one of “recolonisation” in New Zealand, whereby relations between Britain and New Zealand were tightened after a period of super-charged settlement, investment and development from 1850. He suggests that New Zealand became a “town supply district of London. London became the cultural capital of New Zealand” (2001:30). I want to look to other networks in the web beyond the metropole-colony, and to take a particular local site, rather the nation, as my frame. What did the impact of life in Oceania, living with Maori and others, and establishing links with other Pacific places have on articulations of Britishness, as well as “Maoriness” in Auckland? While today it is not difficult to appreciate Auckland as a Pacific place with significant influx of island populations, these intra-Pacific links have a history.

In drawing comparisons, demographic differences are central. 44,000 Maori in 1880 formed eight percent of the total population. By 1920 the 52,000 Maori comprised only four percent of the total population. In 1880 the mixed Pakeha/Maori population was calculated at four percent, rising to seven percent in 1920. “Pakeha” made up the rest of the population. In Fiji, the European population increased from two to two and a half percent over the period, while the indigenous population fell from ninety to fifty-four percent. This was accompanied by a decline in real numbers too (115,000 to 84,000). The part-European community hovered at about one percent, while the arrival of 60,000 Indians by 1920 put them at thirty-nine percent. There were also significant numbers of other Pacific Islanders, five percent of the total in 1880, decreasing to one percent by 1920 (Pool 1977; Knapman 1986).

As ports, both Auckland and Suva were centres of shipping and trade. The capital of Fiji moved from Levuka to Suva in 1882, so that “a fresh start might be made for white settlement” (Smythe cited in Schutz 1978:8). Suva was deemed a better site for expansion and development, with most of Levuka’s best land owned by missions. Regarded as the finest port in the islands, over this period Suva expanded to become the busiest commercial centre in the Western Pacific. This period was also one of expansion for Auckland, even with a Long Depression in the 1880s, the population increased in forty years from 16,000 to 83,000.

So let’s go back in time again to these two centres at the turn of the twentieth century. This depiction of Auckland was written in 1900:

At the very narrowest portion of this island-colony, Auckland sits enthroned amid her volcanic hills, verdant meadows and bright sub-tropical gardens, with an arm resting on either coast. Her right arm dips into the Waitemata, land-locked and capacious enough to carry on its waters the navies of an empire. Her left arm extends to Manukau Harbour. Between these two points, Auckland is seated like a young Queen, with the diadem of empire on her brow. She looks out upon the amplest expanse of water upon the surface of the globe, and is on the direct line of commerce between the continents of America on the one hand, and Australia on the other. Away to the northward, with a lateral sweep to both east and west, lie in brilliant clusters those summer isles of Eden which glitter like diamonds upon the bosom of the eastern Pacific. From the Fijis on the west, to the distant Paumotus on the east, all their treasures and bountiful productions, which are only just in the infancy of exploitation, must pour into the lap of Auckland for distribution to the ends of the earth. (Lowe 1977:5)

Here Auckland is perfectly positioned in the Pacific as an imperial entrepot, linking up islands and continents. The land is feminised, with imperial tropes employed to heighten the sense of majesty and beauty. In other booster literature, designed to encourage others to see the future greatness of a town, the site for Auckland is framed as predestined, perfectly situated to be a great centre. Yet, in 1840 it was considered in such literature to be a zero-site. Although a “Maori metropolis of sorts stood on the site,” and various tribes favoured the region for its rich soil, abundant seas, fresh water and forests, these tribes had vanished and “abandoned” the area before whites arrived:

a dreaming silence had settled over an area once populous ... thus it was, when in the fullness of time, a site was needed for a capital, here it was ready without having to displace anyone. (Grainger 1953:15-16)

And so the story of Auckland begins. A Maori name for the region is *Tamaki-makaurau*, *Tamaki* of a thousand lovers, so named for its desirability (Walker 1990:100). The natural advantages of the site were as equally apparent to Europeans as to Maori.

While Auckland was seen to draw in the wealth of the Pacific for redistribution, it was also envisioned as an exporter of British values out into the islands. On opening the Auckland College and Grammar School in 1880, Sir George Grey spoke of his hopes that boys educated here would build up a

highly-instructed and noble nation in New Zealand, and whose learning, worth and devotion to duty should also regenerate the islands of the Pacific, and wake to new life and energy of renewed youth the semi-barbarous nations which lie in the northern part of that great ocean. (*Auckland Weekly News*, 7 February 1880:5)

Suva's natural setting and attractions were also lauded:

It is pretty in its own scattered way and delightfully situated on a hill that slopes down to one of the most beautiful of bays, land-locked and reef-sheltered, with but one passage, forming a smooth lagoon that is the paradise of boating parties. In the distant background rises an amphitheatre of mountains, grand and impressive. (*The Cyclopedia of Fiji* 1984[1907]:213-14)

Whereas the Maori are absent in the above depiction of Auckland, Fijians are central to Suva life:

The stranger will be interested in the spectacle of Fijian humanity on the wharf, and will be struck with admiration of the splendid physique of the natives ... [along with the narrow crooked alleyways] the scantily but gaily draped figures of Fijian men and women, and the occasionally passing rickshaw ... lend to the picture a novel quaintness, which enhances the enjoyment of the inanimate beauties of nature. (*The Cyclopedia of Fiji* 1984[1907]:213-14)


In his book *New Towns in the New World*, David Hamer (1990) argues that the most important index of the levels of civilisation in colonies was the state of cities and within this trend there was a preoccupation with establishing capitals. Cities were described as if they possessed an organic and natural wholeness, things were relational and in balance – there was economic prosperity, social harmony, and pleasing natural surroundings. The successful establishment of a capitalist system was central to the identity of a town, as commerce was regarded as an advanced, complex form of society. Towns in new countries were often defined as centres from which influences radiated – moral, intellectual, religious. We can see all these elements at work in the above descriptions.

Through layering sites of encounter and practices of intimacy, I explore the tense and tender ties that were forged, reproduced, challenged and broken in the dynamic places of mixture in colonial Auckland and Suva. This allows me to chart how the sensory, embodied lived experience in these mixed places impacted on people's identifications over time and how these experiences caused changes in social ways and cultural understandings for all those involved.

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