

## **Maori in Australia: the rise of a trans-national people**

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One in seven Maori now live in Australia. It's a figure that astonishes some people, partly I think because the idea of so many Maori living beyond New Zealand's shores is that much harder for people to get their heads around than the general idea of a New Zealand diaspora of at least half a million people.

While the rise of a substantial Maori population in Australia is relatively recent, the Maori connection with Australia is anything but. Many Maori believe that their ancestors had pre-European contact with the Aborigines and don't accept the merit of arguments about the lack of archaeological or genetic proof.

If we accept, however, that Maori never did make it to Australia it's a remarkable thing to reflect on in its own right, given the amazing voyages of discovery by Polynesian explorers that saw lands settled from Hawaii to Easter Island to New Zealand. For some reason that voyaging ceased, and Maori seem never to have become aware of mainland Australia's existence (the exception is Norfolk Island, where there is evidence of long abandoned settlement from New Zealand).

The first Maori then on what we could call 'Australian soil' were two unwilling men called Tuki and Ngahuruhuru from the Bay of Islands, who in 1792 were kidnapped by British sailors and taken – coincidentally – to Norfolk Island to teach convicts how to dress flax. With tongue in cheek I guess one could say that they began the tradition of Maori moving to Australia for work, although on this occasion they knew little of preparing flax because it was generally work undertaken by women. So they were eventually shipped home again, having imparted what little they knew.

In the decades following British settlement in Australia, however, hundreds of Māori made their way willingly to Sydney to trade, acquire skills and learn new ideas. Many undoubtedly arrived as crew on whaling and trading ships. There's a 'Maori Lane' in The Rocks in central Sydney which commemorates the Maori whalers who lived there. A significant number of Māori entering Australia may have also been slaves in the Bay of Islands who were fleeing a life of captivity, mirroring the way escaped Australian convicts often made for New Zealand.

A key early visitor was Ngapuhi chief Te Pahi, who in late 1805 stayed in Sydney with Governor King for several months studying European farming techniques and carpentry and meeting Samuel Marsden, who first soon established a mission in New Zealand.

Without going into detail on this period, suffice it to note that James Belich estimates that up to 1000 Maori had traveled to Sydney by 1840, and that this era represents what I like to think of as the first of two great periods of Maori

discovery of and encounter with Australia. The other began well over a hundred years later, and I'll turn to that in a minute.

After the 1840s and 1850s – when Maori were still a notable presence in Australia given the whaling trade, the export of their produce to the Australian colonies, and the presence of a number of them trying their luck on the Australian goldfields – the documentary record of Maori in Australia becomes somewhat slight. This is probably because Maori had become less of a novelty in Australia, but also doubtless because of their dwindling population and social dislocation in New Zealand.

But there were Maori in Australia and references to them do pop up. There were apparently groups of Maori living in fishing camps along the shore of the Mornington Peninsula near Melbourne in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and a community of Maori pearl divers in the islands of Torres Strait around the same time. There were also regular theatrical performances by visiting Maori entertainers which greatly appealed to Australian audiences.

One thing worth reflecting on about Maori in Australia – because it has echoes to this day – is that they were spared the kind of racial vilification reserved for other groups such as the Chinese, and were on the whole much better treated than Aborigines. In fact they were, simply put, the great exception to the White Australia policy.

On the odd occasion an Australian government official tried to deport or withhold entry to a Maori, but it was likely to lead to a diplomatic incident, such as the one that saw an outraged Peter Fraser make a protest in 1948. Maori were expressly given voting rights in Australia in the Commonwealth Franchise Act of 1902 in an effort to allay New Zealand concerns about joining the Federation. Remember that Aborigines weren't even counted as citizens until after a 1967 referendum.

One factor cited by some commentators for the Maori acceptance in Australia is the fact that Maori fought side by side with Australians in both world wars, Korea and Vietnam. As can be seen in a photo of Maori soldiers marching alongside Australian diggers on Anzac Day in Sydney in 1937, that was something Australians took seriously. But in reality the acceptance predates that. The Victorian British believed in a descending order of races and the Australian colonists readily placed the supposedly 'war-like' Maori well above their own Aborigines, who were frequently detested.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century Maori in Australia probably most came to the attention of Australians as soldiers passing through on their way to or from various wars or as visiting Maori rugby teams. In 1909 and 1910 in Sydney and Melbourne the famous Te Arawa guide Maggie Papakura led a large group of Maori entertainers who set up Maori villages for tourists to visit. The

success of this venture again highlights the enduring Australian interest in Maori culture.

To illustrate the longstanding presence of Maori in Australia, when Australia finally asked an ancestry question in its national census in 1986, the great majority of Maori aged 65 and over were born in Australia. While we're only talking about two or three hundred people in this age group, it does show that there were *at least* several hundred Maori born in Australia in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century.

So, after urbanization in New Zealand, Maori began to look further a field. Like other New Zealanders they were enticed from the 1950s and 1960s by the bright lights of Sydney and the opportunities Australia offered. At this early time, of course, economic factors weren't the key driver for Maori to leave, because New Zealand's standard of living was very high. Also, those leaving in the 1960s bucked the trend which had, till a point in that decade, usually always seen New Zealand take more migrants from Australia than vice versa. I suspect some Maori were curious to follow in the footsteps of their fathers who had been around the world at war.

Some may have also been those who had experienced that freedom first hand themselves. There's a story about how a Maori soldier of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion returning on a ship to New Zealand went out with his mates for a look around the town when it docked in Perth. When he gets back to the ship a Pakeha soldier on the top deck yells out at him 'You look neat in uniform now but when you get home you'll be working for me!' Maori soldiers were immensely respected in World War II but some may have felt that respect didn't carry on when the fighting ended.

Many of the first Maori migrants of this new era were entertainers. Popular music was changing and Maori were well positioned to capitalize on it. Talented Maori musicians and singers formed showbands and – like their theatrical show forebears – attracted good audiences and acclaim. By 1966 it seems there were about 4000 Maori in Australia.

The first major 'exodus' of New Zealanders to Australia, to use that word fashionable in the newspapers, came in the late 1970s. This was the age of carless days, the wage-price freeze and so on. In fact the net permanent and long-term outflow of New Zealanders to Australia of the time, given our lower population back then, makes today's so-called exodus seem somewhat slight in comparison.

At any rate, at this time we knew a fair amount about rates of Maori emigration and return migration because we had an ethnic origin question on our arrival and departure cards. Some Maori didn't like the question, which till 1983 asked people only to record 'Maori' if they were 'half-caste' or more, but others

bemoaned its dropping in 1986. Since then it's been very hard to keep track of Maori migration patterns.

As noted though, in 1986 Australia asked an ancestry question in its census. The idea was to see how the composition of Australia's population had changed since the removal of ethnic criteria from Australia's Immigration Act in 1973 (i.e. the final dismantling of the white Australia policy). The census revealed there to be 26,035 Maori in Australia. But there were some problems with this figure – it included Cook Islanders, who were coded together with Maori; of course missed those who evaded the census (New Zealanders are more likely to do that in Australia than most other groups); and also failed to include anyone who wrote 'Maori' third on the form. If you juggle those factors around a bit you still end up with roughly the same number of Maori, or perhaps a few more. Demographer Jeremy Lowe thought 27,000.

The biggest number – around 40% - of Maori lived in New South Wales, and particularly Sydney. There's an enduring stereotype of New Zealanders and Maori in particular congregating in Bondi, and this was certainly true for a while, but as early as the mid-1980s Maori had been effectively forced out by rising rents. In fact a group of Maori who styled themselves the 'Bondi Maori Self-Help Housing Group' got themselves in trouble with the local council in Bondi in 1984 by squatting in a vacant council property near the beach in protest over their housing problems. Most Maori in Sydney today live in the outer western and southwestern suburbs like Blacktown, Mt Druitt, Campbelltown, and so on.

Unfortunately no sooner had the ethnic origin question been dropped from our arrival and departure cards than the Australians gave up on the ancestry question in their census, leaving it out in 1991 and 1996 and not reinstating it until 2001. So, at a time when Maori were obviously leaving New Zealand for Australia in large numbers – particularly in the late 1980s as the economic reforms of the day had their impact and into the 1990s as benefit cuts had theirs – it was next to impossible to know how many they were.

In the 2001 Australian census the number of Maori had leapt to nearly 73,000. But once more there were real problems with the question. Census respondents were not instructed to limit their responses, and in fact were encouraged to trace their ancestry back to their great-grandparents. Again, what no-one was told was that only the first two ancestries ticked or entered would be counted. This created an inevitable bias towards the mark boxes. Maori were heavily impacted by this because they, like other New Zealanders, tend to have a relatively high multiple ancestry response rate. The Australian census people tried to work out the rate of lost ancestries in the 2001 census and this showed that around 17,500 people entered 'Maori' on the form and it wasn't counted. So there were in fact at least 90,000 Maori in Australia in 2001.

The 2006 census at last instructed respondents to name only two ancestries. This time the official figure was just under 93,000 Maori. That's a 27% increase over the 2001 official figure but actually only a 3% increase over the number who we know did enter 'Maori' on the form in 2001. I'd actually anticipated a much higher figure in 2006 but I think it really shows that Maori do have multiple ancestries and many people will have squeezed Maori out in their list of choices.

Before I leave these numbers I just want to make one final point. That is that a surprising number of Maori do not enter Maori on the Australian census form at all despite there being no question of their strong sense of Maori identity. The 2006 Te Puni Kokiri Maori in Australia survey I ran asked the 1205 respondents how they'd answer the census ancestry question. No fewer than 14% said they'd only answer as 'New Zealander' or 'Australian' or something else other than Maori. It shows that many people interpret the ancestry question as a nationality one – and why wouldn't you when 'Australian' is one of the tick-box options – and that for many Maori being overseas means their primary sense of identity is as a New Zealander.

Bearing all this in mind it makes me think that there were probably around 30,000 Maori in Australia in 1986, 100,000 there in 2001, and probably at least 110,000 there in 2006. This means we've had a rise from one in 50 Maori in Australia in 1966, to one in 16 there in 1986, to one in seven there today.

Incidentally the net out-migration of New Zealanders to Australia has ebbed and flowed as the Australian and New Zealand economies have done well relative to each other. There were peaks in around 1979, 1989 and the year 2000 just before Australia tightened access to benefits for New Zealanders at the start of 2001. After all these peaks there's been a drop-off and then steadily building flows again over the years that follow. Right now we've hit another of these peaks but, if history is anything to go by, it'll keep peaking for another year or two before it drops back again. The year of arrival figures for survey respondents in the 2006 survey bear these trends out very nicely.

Okay let's leave all these numbers aside and ask the burning question: why have they gone? There are essentially a mixture of push and pull factors at play here – I'll look at the pull factors first.

I believe that, fundamentally and like most other New Zealanders, Maori are leaving for Australia for the job opportunities it offers. New Zealand wages are now something like 30% lower than Australian wages and many are enticed by that. We have to remember that New Zealanders have also moved to Australia in large numbers during the last 35 years when there wasn't such a big wage gap and when New Zealand's unemployment rate was the lower of the two countries. But Australia offers the prospect of opportunity, in much the same way that Auckland does within New Zealand.

New Zealanders have a reputation for hard work in Australia and Maori are to the fore in maintaining that notion. One man wrote that if you're Maori and turn up at a building site with mud on your boots, you're almost guaranteed a start on the job the next day. The stereotype of the Bondi Beach dole bludger had now all but vanished, although its relation – the idea of New Zealanders as job thieves – is still alive. Some Australians do see New Zealanders as a threat to their wages and conditions, if not their employment itself. Unions in Australia have remained relatively strong during the 1980s and 1990s and some New Zealanders have been prepared to work longer hours for less pay. The shearing industry is a case in point, and the bitter dispute between Australian and New Zealand shearers over such matters led to some violent clashes that climaxed in about 1983.

Today an occupation that's attracting many Maori is mining, particularly in the so-called resource states of Western Australia and Queensland. The resources boom has driven wages very high and created what some Maori in Kalgoorlie described to me as a 'blue-collar paradise', because the mines suck up labour and mean other employers have to stump up to compete. There aren't just drillers and excavators in the mines of course – drivers, mechanics, electricians and other tradespeople are also in big demand.

The mines are certainly not where the majority of Maori are working. Like other Australians the big Maori trend has been a move to booming south-east Queensland. Between 2001 and 2006 the Maori population of the Gold Coast-Tweed Heads statistical district went up a staggering 86% and that of Brisbane up 45% (remembering that the national average rise was 27%). The Sydney Maori population went up only 12%, which in fact probably represents a decrease when you consider those complicating factors such as census instructions and lost ancestries. Sydney, which has always been the focus for the Maori community in Australia and which was the Australian destination of almost all Maori in the early nineteenth century, is now being increasingly passed over for Queensland. It's not surprising given Sydney's traffic and house prices.

Then there's the whanau factor. Grandparents will often go over to be with their mokopuna, for example. In other cases one whanau member will go over and secure a base and siblings, parents, children, aunts, uncles and grandparents will all follow suit until the move of one person can lead to 30, 40 or more Maori relocating to Australia to keep the whanau together.

Another enticement is the 'lifestyle' of Australia – the sun, the multiculturalism, the shopping, the range of leisure activities, and the bright lights.

So these are the pull factors. The other side of the story is the push factors – the things about New Zealand that make people want to leave. I can't say what proportion of people feel this way, but some themes do come through from the research I conducted for Te Puni Kokiri.

First of all a number of people told me or wrote in their survey comments that they'd come to get away from gangs – to get out of that lifestyle themselves or to stop their kids getting into it. As one man put it to me in Sydney, 'I came to get away from my bad habits'. In fact a regular theme was the notion that one can come to Australia to 'sort yourself out'. Drugs were another issue – some teenagers get sent to live with whanau in Australia for secondary school to keep them safe from P. I also heard cases of women fleeing domestic violence in New Zealand, and several sad stories where Maori grandparents had taken grandchildren off their daughters in New Zealand because the daughter's domestic life was putting the children at risk.

So, for Maori suffering through some of New Zealand's worst social statistics, Australia can offer the prospect of security or a new start.

Then there are perceptions of anti-Maori negativity in New Zealand – the idea that if you pick up the newspaper there'll be some story casting Maori in a bad light. As a man in Canberra told me, 'People are always thinking "the bloody Maoris"'. Many Maori simply find it very nice to go to Australia and to instantly climb the race ladder and see a lot of that negativity being directed at other groups like Asians, Aborigines and, increasingly, the Lebanese. Many people said that, in a city like Sydney, it feels as if everyone is accepted. Also, if you do well in Australia no-one will detract from it and say you must have had a hand-out. I found that many Maori were quite motivated to succeed in Australia to prove a point.

Finally, there are those who want to leave what I might call 'the Maori environment'. By this I'm grouping together people who said things like success wasn't celebrated in their whanau and that if one tried to get ahead one was accused of being 'too Pakeha'; or that they resented the notion that one's actions had to benefit the whanau first and foremost before oneself individually. Some said that Maori in New Zealand are often in a rut, with Pakeha seeing no potential in them and Maori themselves not being able to step outside this limiting paradigm.

All in all, there are likely to be a mixture of factors in every individual's decision to leave New Zealand. A lot of people also just go for a holiday and stay on when never having intended to in the first place. I do think the economic reasons are the key, but my conclusion is that if you want to understand why Maori are moving to Australia you have to look at some of those push factors as well.

So that's the story of the growth of the Maori population in Australia and the reasons why people have been moving there to live during the last 30 or 40 years. There's much more to the story though so let me just note very briefly that Maori in Australia

- maintain a strongly New Zealand-focused outlook and have minimal participation in the Australian polity (few become citizens and they are massively disenfranchised as a result);
- mostly intend to return to New Zealand to live (that's amongst the New Zealand-born, who are still the large majority);
- are fighting an uphill battle to retain knowledge of their culture and language;
- suffer a lack of community cohesion arising from the problematic nature of pan-tribal and kaupapa-based (as opposed to whakapapa-based) representation and governance;
- lack communally-owned cultural space and face many difficulties, culturally-speaking, when a death occurs; but
- report that their finances, employment, housing and social life have all significantly improved since they left New Zealand.

Let me conclude by saying that one in seven Maori now living in Australia gives some pause for thought from a policy perspective.

If the growth in the proportion of Maori living in Australia carries on at the same rate one in three will live there by 2050. Even if it starts to taper off quite a bit it should still be one in four or five. Bear in mind that it doesn't take too many people leaving for it to shoot up because those leaving tend to be in the young adult age bracket and so they have children there not here. In my view, Maori have become a trans-national people, and one should no longer see Maori development solely in terms of the New Zealand nation state, just as Samoan development clearly occurs well beyond Samoa itself. There's no Pacific-like remittance culture but there is a two-way flow of language, ideas, money and people across the Tasman that is having a profound impact on Maori society.

So I concluded my report with the suggestion that the Government engage more with Maori in Australia – through the moderate extension of cultural benefits and support to them – in order to help maintain their connection and potentially reap an ongoing benefit to New Zealand. This is much in the same way that all kinds of states around the world engage with their diaporas because they see them as important sources of development money, facilitators for home businesses entering the global market, and vital contributors to the national image abroad.

Simply, Maori are going to be a much more enduring component of the New Zealand diaspora, because while second-generation Pakeha in Australia have become white Australians, Australian-born Maori are remaining strongly linked to New Zealand in identity and outlook. And I think that's something Maori in New Zealand can leverage off. Ultimately, we have something they want in terms of the language and the culture, and they have something we can benefit from, in terms of their economic success. It's not about obligation, it should be about opportunity. There are many Maori children growing up in Australia. In my view, these kids can be part of New Zealand's future as well as Australia's.