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(Be)Longings: Diasporic Pacific Islanders and the meaning of home

Kirsten McGavin

There's nothing like when you're flying into PNG, when you're flying over Port Moresby and you're landing in Jackson's airport and the wheels touch down; it's sort of like, I'm just at ease, I'm at rest. There's nothing like it, you know, this is where you belong. Australia's sort of like my waiting room. It's my home as well and I love Australia, but when you land in Papua New Guinea, your heart sinks into the land and you're like, 'This is where I'm from'.

Rick,[1] 20, born in Australia, of PNG and Australian descent and visiting Papua New Guinea regularly since age 11.

Abstract

For diasporic Pacific Islanders, journeys 'back to home' islands bring different consequences and have varied impacts upon identity and sense of belonging and 'home'. The purpose of these journeys plays a significant role; within this article, I compare the influence of 'homecoming' (specifically designed trips with cultural reconnection as a major impetus) and 'non-homecoming' (e.g. holidays, weddings, birthdays etc.) trips. As people's identities in 'home' islands are scrutinised, negotiated and

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1   All informants are provided with aliases in order to preserve their anonymity.·

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contested, two things happen: the boundary between socially defined and self-defined identity becomes increasingly marked; and people's sense of belonging, their idea of 'home'— both in the Pacific Islands and in the diaspora—fluctuates, morphs and/or solidifies. Indeed, identity, home and belonging are highly personalised concepts, shaped in the nexus between experience and expectation. Further, identity becomes defined through a complementary duality of categories, oscillating between a fixed construction of ethnicity/'blood' and a more interpretable idea of behaviour/performance. This is a dichotomy which I have termed 'being' versus 'doing', in which both elements must be present in order to establish an 'authentic', almost indisputable Pacific Islander identity.

Introduction

The very nature of a diaspora relies on the notion that the people 'contained' within it identify—or are perceived to identify—with a distant homeland (Delanty, Wodak and Jones 2008). In many cases, there is a paradisiacal view of the homeland; romanticised, historicised and solidified by family stories about the 'good old days' and things 'back home'. For Pacific Islanders living in Australia, this sense of transnationalism is further reinforced by others asking questions like: 'Where are you from? No, I mean, where are you *really* from?'; 'Have you been home?'; 'What's [your island] like?'. Such questions establish a subtle social distancing of Pacific Islanders from their 'diasporic home' in Australia and situate them instead in terms of their island homeland. Emplaced identity (that is, identity positioned within a particular location)—and its related sense of belonging—provides its bearer with an idea of 'home'. However, for many migrants and/or descendants of migrants, 'home' can be a multivalent concept, fluctuating throughout time and adhering in various degrees to one or more sites and localities (Kleist 2013; Kuah and Davidson 2008; Radhakrishnan 2008; Sawyer 2002; Spickard, Rondilla and Hippolite Wright 2002; Waite and Cook 2011). That is, 'home' can be a *combination of belonging* to the diaspora *and* to the homeland. This is certainly the case for Sam, a 25-year-old who was born in Samoa and grew up in New Zealand and Australia. He says, 'Australia is home now. And New Zealand is home too. Well, they're types of home, but the big home, the real home is Samoa. I guess it depends on how you define it, because when I went to Thailand for my holidays, I came home to Australia.'

For Pacific Islanders in Australia, nothing shapes this sense of belonging—and ipso facto their ethnocultural identity—more than physically visiting the island or islands of their origin. This is a key point, with the importance of the journey 'home' also reflected in Christou and King's (2010: 642) study on German-based Greek diaspora, Chambers' (1994) research on migration and identity, and Papastergiadis' (2000) work on migration and the resultant hybridity of identity (see also Jones 1980; Lubkemann 2004; Markowitz 2007; Markowitz and Stefannson 2004). Indeed, throughout this article, I explore the important interaction between 'return'[2] trips, identity and belonging by focusing on two distinct types of non-permanent journeys 'home': homecomings and non-homecomings. I define 'homecomings' as those trips to the homeland specifically undertaken by the person, and usually accompanied by a senior family member, to learn more about their heritage and family history. 'Non-homecoming' journeys include visiting homelands for more recreational purposes, including events such as general holidays, weddings and birthday parties. I argue that the distinction between homecomings and non-homecomings is an important one as, through my research, I found that each *type* of journey back to homelands usually results in a set of experiences unique to that type, which in turn affects identity and sense of belonging in a particular way. Although Pearce (2012) also examines the effect of *intentionality* of travel on people's experiences and relationship with concepts of home, his focus is on 'visiting home and familiar places' as a subset of the formal visa category of 'visiting family and friends'.

It is important to note that within this article, I focus on Pacific Islanders in Australia rather than on a smaller, discrete Pacific Islander community, for example, Fijians who live in Brisbane or Samoans who live in Sydney. This is because I use my previous work (McGavin 2014), in which I describe the circumstances under which panethnic labels of identity are important to diasporic communities in Australia, as a foundation for my current research.[3] As such, this article centres not only on the effect on identity of the short-term journeys to homelands but also on the effect when people return to their Australian 'homes'.

2   Like Tsuda (2009: 1), I problematise the idea of 'returning' or 'going back' to the homeland, because for many people, this is their first visit.
3   I also acknowledge the maintained ethnocultural diversity within diasporic use of categories such as 'Pacific Islander'. This sense of simultaneous togetherness and separateness is also found within homeland regions. As Hall (1990: 227) states of the cultural and historical differences between Islands and Islanders in the Caribbean, 'It positions Martiniquains and as both the same and different. Moreover, the boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference'.

For Pacific Islanders, especially those of Melanesian ancestry, the concept of a 'homeland' is often anchored in notions of *peles* (McGavin 2014). McCall and Connell (1993: 263) concur with the sentiment, stating that 'A central quality of Micronesian identity is the strong cultural attachment to home and land, as it is among many Pacific Islanders and other traditional peoples throughout the world'. *Peles* is a multivocal term indicating a person's place (usually a village, but it can also refer to an urban centre, province or island) of Indigenous origin. *Peles* refers not just to the physical landscape, but also to the seascape and starscape and to the less-tangible spheres such as the spiritscape (McGavin 2014). *Peles* is important because, regardless of birthplace or time spent away, a person inherits this affiliation and is said to always belong to and feel welcome in their *peles*. Indeed, some informants describe this connection as being 'carried in their blood',[4] particularly because links to *peles* are defined through matrilineal or patrilineal lines of descent. If these bonds with place are the 'being' part of Islander identity, then behaviour, attitude and performance are its 'doing' component. Indeed, my research has shown that both elements are expected of an 'authentic' Pacific Islander identity, and it is often the 'doing' component which is the most frequently scrutinised by others in the Islander community. Importantly, this is one reason which drives some diasporic Pacific Islanders to journey 'back' to their homeland—because visits to *peles* are perceived as enabling people to *remember* and therefore put into action their cultural knowledge (see McGavin, 2016).

Of course, the urge to reconnect with an ancestral 'home'—and the problematic nature of the reconnecting visits—are not unique to diasporic Pacific Islanders. Maruyama and Stronza (2010) describe Chinese Americans' desires and subsequent travel experiences 'back' to China—and the disillusionment that sometimes follows. 'Chinese Americans, born and raised in the United States … revealed that their imagined personal connection to the ancestral land was often contested in the actual encounter. The differences in language, class, family structure and gender roles overpowered a sense of affinity' (Maruyama and Stronza 2010: 23). While Christou and King (2010) explore similar stories of diasporic German-based Greeks' experiences of 'returning home', they also tell how, for one informant in particular, 'other aspects of the Greek diaspora homeland experience—landscapes and soundscapes, a profoundly

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4   I realise that many people contest the idea that ethnicity or 'race' is carried within 'blood', but I use this term as an emic descriptor.

ontological sense of belonging—override the disappointments' (Christou and King 2010: 643). Certainly, while 'return' journeys allow Australian-based Pacific Islanders to gain a greater sense of awareness that the homeland is not always the paradise that they had previously envisioned it to be, they also provide people with a stronger sense of ethnocultural identity and belonging—whether socially or self-defined. (I explain the importance of this latter point in a later section of this article.)

I acquired data for this article through conducting interviews and participant observation within diasporic Pacific Islander communities in Australia, as well as in New Zealand and the New Guinea Islands, between 2012 and 2014. Informants were current residents of Australia and were between the ages of 18 and 84. I made no distinction between first, second or subsequent generation migrants and although I do list birthplace when describing an informant's background, it is more to provide readers with a clearer understanding of the participant's cultural knowledge than to highlight the influence of birthplace itself. This is because of my own ethnocultural identity and socialisation as an Australian of Pacific Islander descent, and my consequent knowledge of the importance of concepts of *peles* to Pacific identities. Participants were an even mix of male and female. All informants were Pacific Islanders, which, for the purposes of my study, I define as being anyone with Melanesian, Micronesian and/ or Polynesian descent. I include in this group New Zealand Māori and Australian South Sea Islanders, but I do not include Torres Strait Islanders because of their Indigeneity to Australia.[5]

This article is set out into three major sections. In the first, I provide an exposé of models of identity and 'home' and relate these to the Pacific Islander experience. Secondly, I present three case studies, through which I describe people's journeys to their 'home' islands and investigate the impact each trip 'home' has had on their identity and sense of belonging. Part of this involves the gauging of people's feelings before, during and after the 'home event'. In the third section, I analyse these accounts and reinforce my understanding of them by drawing on data collected from other informants. Here, I examine the socio-politics of the 'return' journey to the Pacific.

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5   I acknowledge that my definition of 'Pacific Islander', my inclusion of New Zealand Māori and Australian South Sea Islanders, and my exclusion of Torres Strait Islanders from this category may be problematic for some. I realise that in other studies, this use of the term 'Pacific Islander' (and its inclusions and exclusions) may be contested.

I turn now to an exploration of theories of identity and home, in order to establish a framework for understanding the case studies that follow.

Theory and methodology

On identity

As Hall (1990: 222) says of identity, it is 'a "production" which is never complete, always in process …'. It is vital to develop an awareness of different facets of identity because visits to homelands provide the perfect opportunity for people's identities to come under close inspection. Indeed, the journey 'home' (that is, to the 'homeland') shows Pacific Islanders whether what they have been longing for in terms of 'home' actually exists, and if their connection to it can be supported by a feeling of belonging or weakened by a social rejection of their self- or diasporic-defined identity.

As highlighted above, 'authenticity' vis-à-vis Pacific Islander identity is determined by the presence of two elements, which I have labelled 'being' and 'doing': an Indigenous connection to place, often described in terms of 'blood' and *peles*; and the performance of this descent, through behaviour, attitude and the putting into action of cultural knowledge. In a way, this theory of identity is similar to that put forward by Linton (1936), who explained social organisation in terms of ascription and achievement. According to Linton (1936: 115–116, 128), elements of 'ascription' refer to any characteristic that a person displays that is 'ascertainable at birth', whether socially or biologically constructed (one's sex or 'race' is an example of this), while components of 'achievement' involve 'baits for socially acceptable behavior' and performance. While Linton (1936) used his theory to explain overarching social systems and to describe classifications of social status in general terms, my theory of 'being' and 'doing' is more culturally specific, applying only to individual Pacific Islanders and generated only from my academic interactions with Pacific Islanders through the course of this research and by my socialisation as a person of Pacific Islander ancestry. However, both Linton's (1936) and my theories acknowledge the geopolitics of identity (that is, the ways in which identity is interpreted in various locations/ settings) and recognise the existence of socio-political contestations and negotiations of and over identity construction.

Although a person may seem to have a 'fixed' identity in a particular location (for example, Australia), that same person may have a different identity in another place (for example, Fiji, Hawai'i, Samoa, Tonga etc.). For example, Spickard (2002: 44) argues that Pacific Islander identity— at least in the US—is 'situational', using the example of a woman of mixed Hawaiian, Filipino and Portuguese descent who identifies as: Portuguese when with her grandmother, Filipina if with her paternal aunts, and Hawaiian when on the mainland America. This is a key point, because it highlights the effect that 'return' homecomings and non-homecomings may have on Pacific Islanders' identities, whether socially or self-defined. It is clear that a person's identity—or at least perceptions of it—may flex and change according to the geopolitics of particular localities (Basu 2004: 28; Bhatia and Ram 2009: 142; Brown 2011: 229). For example, Schramm (2009) describes individuals' constructions and negotiations of their racial identities as a response to visits 'home' in Ghana. Indeed, the varying socio-politics of identity from location to location are such that a person may attain a greater understanding of the difference between socially and self-defined identity and during this process, recognise that self-definitions of identity are the most stable.

Hall and du Gay (1996) discuss the stability—and perceived instability—of some elements of identity, particularly the difference between self-determined and socially determined identity. They (Hall and du Gay 1996: 4) state, 'identities are never unified and [are] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions'. Giddens (2013: 188) takes this one step further, positing that others' definitions of an individual are not intrinsically alienating or oppressive—or positive—and that self-defined and socially defined identities are interactive and influence each other. Shotter and Gergen (1989: 4) concur, arguing that identity does not 'begin with two independent entities, individual and society, that are otherwise formed and defined apart from one another and that interact as though each were external to the other'.

As mentioned previously, visits to *peles* are often perceived as allowing diasporic Pacific Islanders to *remember* rather than acquire or learn cultural knowledge; so to reach a position where 'authentic' Pacific Islander identity is the outcome, the 'doing' is dependent on the 'being'.

It is important to remember that, unlike other authors (for example, Tonkinson 1990; Watson 1990) who focus on locally constructed identities in a specific, defined, 'contained' area (for example, Indigenous

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Fijian identity in Suva), this article examines a broad, panethnic identity (that is, Pacific Islander) and attempts to theorise the ways in which that identity—or those categories of identity 'contained' within it (for example, Papua New Guinean, Samoan, Tuvaluan)—is interpreted across and between homeland and diasporic 'boundaries'. To that point, although many of my informants used the panethnic term Pacific Islander as one of several categories of self-identification and others did not, their 'return' journeys to 'home' islands showed patterns of similarity—both in terms of how the journey shaped their identity and, in turn, how that affected their sense of belonging and ideas about 'home' after they returned to Australia.

On home

What is 'home'? According to Markowitz (2004: 22), 'home' is 'an everchanging and slippery concept' but one which is related to people's identities and belongings; a place (or places) which provides 'intimate familiarity' and comfort. She argues that 'home' is a beginning *and* end point, where 'people "have to take you in" while understanding that the "have to" is not a matter of externally imposed law but an automatic response to similitude' (Markowitz 2004: 24). Note that Markowitz (2004: 22) also acknowledges that home might be found in multiple locations. This is an especially salient point for people in diaspora who, to various degrees and under certain circumstances, may perceive both the diasporic 'home' and the ancestral 'homeland' as equal in the levels of personal belonging that the places generate for them (Weingrod and Levy 2006: 693).

Tsuda (2009: 3) describes reasons for diasporic homecomings in relation to permanent 'ethnic return migration', whereby people whose family may have lived for several generations in diaspora decide to move back to their homeland. Although this article examines non-permanent journeys 'home', many of the underlying motivations for this type of travel are the same, that is, to rediscover 'ethnic ties to ancestral homelands [and to follow] a nostalgic desire to rediscover ethnic roots' (Tsuda 2009: 3).

For diasporic Pacific Islanders, part of the construction of 'home'—and by extension, ethnocultural identity—relies on cultural memory, which Mageo (2001: 1) describes as involving the 'valorization of certain aspects of the past, as well as amnesia about other aspects'. This process is one via which the romantic, and not always accurate, idea of the homeland may

be created and perpetuated (Herbert 2012: 298). Often, diasporic people's notions of the homeland also include ideas about homeland-based people. For example, Gershon (2012: 17) describes how Samoans in New Zealand perceive Samoans in Samoa as being 'pure', 'untainted' and ethnoculturally homogenous, even though this is not the case. Importantly though, cultural memory may also include origin stories, which are entwined with 'family landmarks that Pacific people have long inscribed themselves upon their islands' (Mageo 2001:19). This highlights and reinforces the importance of concepts such as *peles* and the environment, as discussed above. It is important to note, however, that cultural memory is differentiated from the type of 'remembering' of cultural knowledge that is perceived to occur when a person visits their *peles*.

Case studies

In these case studies (each chosen because they demonstrate different aspects of the effect of the *type* of return journey on identity), I detail the experiences of three Australian-based Pacific Islanders, relating to their visit to their 'home' islands. For ease of flow, I have edited these accounts so that they appear as monologues rather than the two-way conversations that were had between the informant and me. In doing so, I aimed to preserve the participants' expression and believe I have presented a true version of their stories. The informants describe the feelings associated with their 'return' journeys, how others interacted with them and the impact their visits had on their ethnocultural identities, both in the homeland and back in their diasporic 'home'.

Case study one: Shaun

Shaun is a 37-year-old male who, at the time of our interview, had been living in Australia for nine years. He was born in Papua New Guinea and grew up there. Each of his parents identifies as being 'mixed race' and Shaun is of Papua New Guinean, German, Chinese and Indonesian descent. He says:

> I wish I could go home [to Papua New Guinea] more often but it's too expensive—and I'm not just talking about flights. Yes, the flights are expensive—well, better than they used to be, but still expensive. It takes so long to save up because you have not only the flights, but also the other expenses. I mean, it's free accommodation when you go back home,

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because you're staying with family. But when you stay with family, you've got all these other things to think about too. All these other obligations. Your parents, your cousins, your *wantoks* [people from the same *peles* or from the same language group; your kinsmen or countrymen], sometimes *wantoks* you don't even know—they all want money. Which, I don't mind. But I don't have money to give! They think because you live in Australia you're made of money, but it doesn't work that way. I wish I could go home all the time, but … I just can't.

I came this time for my cousin's wedding, but everyone's so busy— I'm so busy going to all these family events and driving people around and organise everything. It's one thing after another, it's like we're not even back in PNG, but could be anywhere. Don't get any free time. Not relaxing at all.

Anyway, maybe next time I come back, I'll come when there's no event, no big event on, like a wedding or whatever … so I can just have all free time and do my own stuff, spend time with the place. Have a real holiday. Then again, is it possible? And will it be as much fun?

It's funny, because when I'm in Australia, I'm homesick for PNG. But now that I'm here [in PNG], I'm homesick for Brisbane! For the first time! I want my house, my TV, good roads, good shops, movies, I want my own bed. PNG is always 'home' for me. But now, I think Australia is becoming … 'A' home, kind of like a home, but it's not the same.

I'm *very* secure in my PNG identity. Those ones living in Australia [Pacific Islanders], the ones born there and grew up there, especially, those ones definitely should go back home [to the Islands]—they have to! I hate seeing these ones saying, 'Oh, I'm Samoan', 'I'm PNG', 'I'm Fijian'—and yet they've never even been there! They don't speak the language, they don't know *kastom* ['traditional' customary practices], they don't know anything about who they think they are. Yes, they have the blood, they need the blood, but they also need something else as well. They need to come back.

Case study two: Mia

Mia is a 21-year-old female who was born in Australia and also grew up here, between Perth and Melbourne. Her mother is Tuvaluan and her father is Middle Eastern. She says:

When people ask me where I'm from, I tell them, 'I'm Polynesian and Middle Eastern'. Occasionally, I'll say I'm Australian, but when they ask, 'Where are you from?', they're really asking, 'Where are your parents

from?'. I can speak English and … I wouldn't say Tuvaluan, 'cause it's not fluent. I can understand it fluently and I can only speak just sort of the basic stuff, like questions and answers. I learnt it here, in Australia. Mum spoke it to us when we were younger and then in Tuvalu we got more exposed to it so I picked it up a little bit more.

I've only been to Tuvalu once and it was recently, like 2012 or something like that, when I was 19, I think. For Christmas. I went back with Mum and my younger sister and brother. We were planning that trip for a long time, well, Mum was planning it for a long time. We were there for five weeks and spent a week in Fiji on the way back to Australia. We've got relatives in Fiji as well, but we didn't stay with them. Mum wanted to take us to Tuvalu because she wanted to see her family and wanted us to see her family. She hadn't been back in 21 years or something like that and her siblings and her mum are there—and I hadn't seen my grandma since we were living in Perth. Mum wanted us to see where we're from, where she grew up. I wanted to go just to see what it was like and to see the family.

Going to Tuvalu made me feel *less* Tuvaluan than I did before I ever went there. Growing up here in Australia and with my Australian family— my Polynesian Australian family here—we're more Westernised than the people there, everything's totally different: what we eat, how we work, you just feel like an outsider, like you don't fit in. As soon as we arrived at the airport, some of the cousins who picked us up, the girl cousins, they started talking about us in Tuvaluan, calling us *pālangi* [White people]. And when they said something else, my sister and I turned around to them and responded in Tuvaluan and they were like, 'Holy shit, they can understand us!'. Then you realise, when you go to the *maniapa* (the family functions at the gathering place, with food on the side and entertainment), you just sort of see everyone in the island when you go there. We had one for Christmas and another one, like a feast for New Year's, and another one for all the Australians—all the Tuvaluans from Australia. It's such a small island, everyone knows everyone's business. Anyway, you go to the *maniapa* and we look different, dress different, topics of interest are different too—and they were talking about us until they realised we understood. Even when you go to the nightclub and everyone will come up to you and then they realise you're related. Like, some boys came up to us and then my cousins told them who my grandmother was and they back off. People are more welcoming when they realise who we are—still don't know you personally, but they know who you're related to. Otherwise they will look and stare. And you have to be careful what you do, because of all the gossip. I was talking to my cousin about this yesterday, like when I was riding the motorbikes (around Tuvalu) and

then all the questions come: why are you out, where are you going, who are you with, who are you going to see? And it gets back to my family and I wasn't even doing that!

One day when I was there, I went to the shop and tried to buy 'cake', which actually was some kind of tobacco in the tin that the ladies would roll up and sell, but I didn't know! I thought it was cake! I forget the name of the tobacco … Anyway, the look on the ladies' faces when I asked for it, it was like a scandal or something—and she must have been a cousin of my mum's because someone told my grandma because the next day she asked about it—and I didn't tell her! They all thought I smoked!

All my aunties just wanted me to stay at home because I'm a girl. But I wanted to go out to the beach and go on the bikes and go fishing. I told my mum, 'I'm not staying at home! I didn't come all the way to Tuvalu just to wash dishes in the kitchen. I want to go hunting and fishing and do all the fun stuff! I want to get a tan!' And then one of my aunties told me that some of the other aunties had been gossiping about me, saying I wasn't a 'good girl'—that I was 'too Australian' [sighs]. Of course my sister was perfect though. She was happy to just stay in the kitchen all day. All day! Doing nothing! Why bother going to Tuvalu?

Did I feel at home there, like I belonged? To a degree, but I don't know, just the traditional things, clothing, food … When we ate the traditional food, Mum cooks it better at home. It sounds bitchy to say but it [hesitates] wasn't up to my … standard of what I'm used to at home. It just wasn't nice, they have no fresh produce and stuff. And they don't know how to eat healthy. They have taro and stuff, they grow that there, and they have chicken too but I didn't eat any chicken. And they cook taro leaves. But all the fresh produce—all the fruit and everything, you have to wait for the next boat to come from Fiji—and when I was there, the boat didn't come! They have coconut and mango and stuff like that, but no other fresh stuff!

I do think I'll go back to Tuvalu again, but not for as long—I'd go for a shorter time. I'd always wanted to go to see what it was like. I kind of knew what to expect because I'd been to the New Guinea Islands before and I thought it would be a bit similar to that to be honest, and it is, but some aspects are different. I guess I only really thought about the island itself, the airport, the houses, the food. But before I went to New Guinea, I had no idea what to expect. I think, since coming back from Tuvalu, being exposed to it, I do feel more Tuvaluan now than before. Now I can compare my holidays, with other Tuvaluans and Islanders and you do pretty much the same thing when you're there, 'cause there's not much to do there.

Case study three: Beth

Beth is a 36-year-old female who was born in Belgium and grew up between Australia, Germany and Papua New Guinea. Beth is of Papua New Guinean and white Australian descent and she has been living in Australia for approximately 20 years. She says:

> Dad is from Poiam, in the East Sepik, near Dagua, so when anyone asks, I always say Dagua, because no one knows the village, but there's a clinic in Dagua, so most people know about that. My mum is from Warragul in Victoria. When people ask me where I grew up, I always say Port Moresby. I don't usually say the rest [Belgium, Germany, Australia] 'cause it takes too long, it's too complicated and I just don't want to get into all of that.

> I don't usually say I'm from Australia—only when people say to me, 'Oh, you've got a really good, strong, Australian accent' or 'You speak English really well'. And I explain that my mother's white, that she's Australian. And that I've lived here for 20 years! It's mostly like older people in Australia who say those kinds of things to me, like, people who might have lived in PNG, like in the '70s, you know? When people ask me where I'm from, I know they're asking based on what they're looking at. They see a family photo and they say, 'Who's that?' And when I tell them, 'That's my mum', they say, 'I didn't know your mum was white!' or 'European'. Nobody, nobody ever thinks I have a white mother! Other people in PNG look at me and think I'm mixed, I think.

> I feel mixed, I'm proud of my Australian heritage and I'm proud of my Papua New Guinean heritage. I'm proud to be of convict stock even though I think convicts or at least those early settlers killed lots of Aboriginals, which is terrible, but I like that my relatives came over on the First Fleet. I feel like I should feel more Australian than I do, 'cause I feel like, my ancestry goes back 10 generations or something, to the first boat. Actually, I think they came over on the second boat. On the other side, I'm also really proud that I come from a big, long line of chiefs. Even though I'm pretty sure they also did some bad things, like killing people as well—but I'm proud to have PNG heritage.

> In the last 20 years, since I've been living in Australia, I've been back to Papua New Guinea about 10 times, sometimes with my parents, sometimes by myself; most of the time by myself to go and see my parents (who were still living there) and mostly for weddings or funerals.

> My first time back as an adult was when I was 18. I went on a scuba diving holiday with a bunch of Aussies, really rich Aussies, and travelled from Milne bay to Madang. For two weeks. And when we were diving,

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travelling up the coast, it was just amazing. We went into villages and the villagers would come out in their canoes to meet us and for me, that was really amazing because I'd never seen anything like that before, you know, mostly being in Port Moresby, and I realised how much I'd missed out on—how much I thought I'd missed out on. Like, when I was in Germany, I'd forgotten so much about PNG, language mostly. And you know, from the ages of about 14 to 18, a lot of people make huge transitions, but I was really trying to work out where I was from. It probably would have been different if I was living in PNG, but I was really feeling like, 'Where do I fit in? This is shit [not knowing where she fit in]. I've got to work this out'. That first visit back when I was 18 really made me understand what I needed to do. So I went back again to try and work it out, to get my identity sorted.

I went back (to my dad's village) for two months when I was 21 or 22 I think, to try and you know, learn about the culture and stuff 'cause I was feeling really disconnected. And when I got back to Australia, I had major culture shock; everything was just so loud and fast, too much information. I went to a party the first night back in Australia and I couldn't stay, I had to go and sit on the steps outside. It was just so different. I said I'd go back to PNG again, but I just caught up with work, caught up with getting married and having children, so it was a long time before I went back to the village. If you have family here to remind you of it—PNG—you know, aunties coming over and cooking and speaking Pidgin, it would be different. Like, I don't even do much PNG cooking and Mum never did either. If I had that here, it wouldn't be so easy to forget and start feeling insecure about my PNG identity. Language plays a huge part in whether or not you fit in, and when you go back you pick it all up again and you feel good about it.

This time, when I went earlier this year [for a relative's funeral], I'd forgotten again, so I was disconnected again, and needed that … reconnection. It hasn't been all good though. Some of the aunties still call me *misis* [white woman] and this time my cousin reprimanded them for it and I was embarrassed because I didn't want to make the aunties feel embarrassed, but they got it. And I got to polish up on my Tok Pisin and the cultural stuff and I realised it's already something within me. I feel better about it. In the last couple of years, I had felt so disconnected from my identity that I got myself involved in all these PNG and Pacific Island community groups, hoping that that would give me my cultural connection, but I don't really feel like I need that anymore. I was looking for a general PNG connection—as a nation—but now I have a stronger connection to my village and my clan, and *that's* what I want to look into more. I feel like I've found a little category for myself now. I have a stronger sense of identity.

I feel more comfortable about my PNG identity now that I've been back, but if you ask me that in two years time and I haven't been back again, I might see it in a different way, I think [laughs]. I don't hold it up there on a pedestal now like I did before, because I can see and I'm more … aware about everything now than I was before. I see a lot more of the negatives now than I did before. Actually going back and making a plan of building a house in the village, for the boys [her children], it does scare me a little bit. I don't wanna get dragged back into all the village crap; even if you don't want to, it will happen. You can fight it, fight it, fight it, but they will make you … an accomplice. And I do think about whether about I want my boys being dragged into that. The village, it's more complicated than I was … I was pretending it wasn't. Village politics, gossip, and half of it's so irrational; little-town mentality that you'll get anywhere in the world.

I suppose when you feel like you belong somewhere, it's because other people are saying you belong there with them. Like, my relatives back at the village will say to me, '*Yu meri Poiam*' [you're a Poiam woman], but I think they're just being polite. Like, they don't look at me the same way they look at each other, they don't talk to me the same way they talk to each other or behave or react the same way towards me as they do to each other. So I don't really feel like I belong there, or here either. I feel like, when I'm in Australia, I always have to prove myself. I don't feel like I belong anywhere, because of the way people make me feel. Dad always used to say we were 'citizens of the world'. I think that was his way of saying, 'you can belong wherever you want. You don't have to be limited to one place'.

The socio-politics of return

As Tsuda (2009: 26) argues, 'most diasporic descendants imagine their ancestral homelands from afar in rather idealized romantic, if not mythical ways'. People long for a place where they belong, where they can feel 'at home'; and this is the impetus for many homecoming and non-homecoming trips. However, as Shaun's story in the case studies above shows, there may be hesitation about going 'home': financial costs, social obligations, familial responsibilities. And, as both Mia's and Beth's stories demonstrate, the paradisiacal view of the homeland does not always manifest upon 'return': disagreeable social mores, culture shock and exclusion based on perceived 'race', culture or language barriers. All of these factors impede the visitor from experiencing what they had been longing for, what their cultural memory had told them was there.

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In Shaun's case, for the first time during a visit back to his homeland, he developed homesickness for Australia, longing for the infrastructure, material goods, facilities and activities available to him here. It was at that point that he realised, 'Australia is becoming … 'A' home, kind of like a home, but it's not the same'. He is not alone in his use of this terminology. Time and again throughout my research, even when informants told me that Australia was their 'home', it came out in their choice of words that their homeland was 'home' and Australia was 'a home'. This was not surprising, as I realised how important concepts like *peles* were to Pacific Islander identity, and *peles* serves as an anchor for ethnocultural belonging. It is the reason that Beth chose to go back to Poiam, her father's village (rather than to anywhere else in the country), to reconnect and energise her identity as a Papua New Guinean. Likewise, the connection to the homeland was also highlighted in informants' talking about 'going back' or 'going home' even if they had never actually been to their 'home' island before. Another example of this is from Ricky, a 32-year-old woman of Cook Islands and Fijian descent who was born and grew up in Australia. She says, 'My parents moved [to Australia] before I was born. I've always wanted to go back [to Fiji and the Cook Islands] but I haven't had the chance. It was the money and now my kids. But one day I'll get back home.'

I argue that during visits that are specifically established as homecoming journeys, the visitor's identity as a Pacific Islander is under great scrutiny, and as a result, feelings of social rejection and isolation are more likely. The overall experience is likely to be a negative one. Mia's story illustrates this point perfectly. She says, 'Going to Tuvalu made me feel *less* Tuvaluan than I did before I ever went there'. The cultural divergences between Australia and Tuvalu were the biggest hurdle for Mia, with gender roles and assumptions about her knowledge (that is, her 'doing') as a Pacific Islander playing a significant role. Beth had a similar experience, through her series of homecoming trips, with relatives referring to her as 'white' (whether based on her appearance or her ability to socioculturally integrate into village life) or her feeling that her relatives were merely being polite or complimentary when they referred to her as '*meri Poiam*'. This is contrasted with Beth's positive experience when she was a dive tourist in Papua New Guinea. Jacquie, a 45-year-old woman of ni-Vanuatu descent who moved to Australia when she was four has a similar story. She says,

> I didn't go back to Vanuatu until I was an adult [22 or 23] and it was a terrible experience. I went back with Dad, who could still understand the language and all the customs, but he hadn't taught me or my brothers and sisters anything about any of that stuff. We went back to the village and met with all our relatives. I felt totally rejected … by everyone and everything about the village life. I just didn't fit in at all.

However, Jacquie went on to say that a few years later, she went back to Vanuatu for an Australian friend's wedding. 'It was a much better time, staying at the resort. Even the locals who were working there seemed to accept me more than my own relatives did when I went to the village.'

Indeed, I contend that the non-homecoming journeys are more likely to be positive experiences, because visitors' identities are not as much the focus and the 'holiday' activities are more likely to present the paradise that people had been longing for. Beth's dive trip, for example, and the interaction with villagers as a tourist, she describes as 'amazing'. It was this trip that made her realise that she was a part of Papua New Guinea and that she needed to 'return' to *peles* to reinforce that part of her identity. We see through Shaun's story, however, that despite being 'home' as part of a non-homecoming (that is a relative's wedding) his social obligations and duties as a family member became burdensome, resulting in his feeling, not any less Papua New Guinean, but rather homesick for Australia, while longing for a real holiday on his next visit to the country. This demonstrates that the distinction between 'homecoming' and 'non-homecoming' is not always clear, especially in relation to visits for a ceremonial occasion during which a visitor might be expected by a relative to behave in a certain way. Indeed, a visit with friends to home islands, initially pegged as a 'non-homecoming', may develop—either fully or sporadically—into a 'homecoming' experience depending upon the extent to which a relative has expectations of the visitor to display cultural knowledge and practical expertise.

The feelings of negativity associated with homecoming journeys lead to people developing a greater awareness of the difference between self-defined and socially defined identity. Note that Beth creates a 'category for herself', based more on her relationship with her clan and *peles* than with a country-wide connection. Often, the first connection a person makes is between the visitor and the place, rather than the visitor and the people in the homeland. When the divergence between self-defined and socially

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defined identity becomes clearer—usually due to experiencing both kinds of social systems of interpretation of identity—a person realises that what remains stable is their self-defined identity.

Importantly, the journey 'home'—and perhaps surprisingly, *especially* the homecoming visit—was ultimately viewed in the diaspora as extremely positive, regardless of whether aspects of the actual homeland visit were negative. Visits to the homeland helped to reinforce Pacific Islander identity and sense of belonging amongst other Pacific Islanders in the diaspora. As Mia notes, despite feeling *less* of a Tuvaluan during her homeland visit, 'since coming back from Tuvalu, being exposed to it, I do feel more Tuvaluan now than before. Now I can compare my holidays, with other Tuvaluans and Islanders and you do pretty much the same thing when you're there'. Shaun too, says that for diasporic Pacific Islanders, journeys 'home' were a necessary part of identity maintenance. For many, Australia becomes 'a home' but not the only 'home' and often not *the* 'home'. 'Being' a Pacific Islander (that is, having Islander 'blood' and *peles* and heritage) sets up expectations of a person, particularly in terms of what cultural knowledge they have, or are perceived to have. Even when Beth and Mia were called white, it was meant as a commentary on their lack of knowledge of Pacific Islander culture and their adherence to Australian or European customs, rather than to mean they were not Islanders. Whether or not you performed the 'right' actions, the 'correct' behaviour, reinforces this notion and effects, whether negatively or positively, how others view visitors in the homeland or back in the diaspora.

Conclusion

In what ways does a journey to their homeland affect a person's identity, sense of belonging and their interpretation of 'home'? Throughout this article, I have differentiated between homecoming and non-homecoming trips because I argue that each type of visit results in a different set of outcomes for the visitor.

Homecoming journeys (that is, those specifically designed to enable the visitor to 'reconnect' with their homeland as well as those in which someone is expected to behave in a culturally appropriate way in a ceremonial context) tend to place greater scrutiny on the person's identity. Homeland-based friends and relatives are more likely to perceive—and vocalise—the cultural differences between themselves and the visitor which, in turn,

makes the visitor question their own 'authenticity' as a Pacific Islander. The awareness of cultural differences is made greater by the fact that the visitor is usually accompanied by a senior family member (who tends to be more readily able to 'shift' between homeland and diaspora mores) and an easy comparison is drawn between the culturally competent senior family member and the less knowledgeable visitor. Many informants whose 'return' journey involved a homecoming described the experience as being a negative one, particularly because they had previously assumed that the homeland would be where they would fit in the most, over and above all other places.

By comparison, non-homecoming journeys (for example, holidays with friends) place less pressure on visiting people's identities and as a result, they tend to feel as though their identity in the homeland remains 'authentic' and secure—if not *more* secure than previously because they have just visited their homeland, an act which many perceive to strengthen Pacific Islander identity. Of course, for many people in the diaspora, there is an idealistic view of 'home': it is beautiful, fun and paradise. Although the actual homeland experience does not always live up to these 'memories' or 'longings', positive experiences in the homeland (whereby the 'authenticity'—or 'inauthenticity'—of the person's ethnocultural identity is neither highlighted nor questioned) reinforce the romantic, paradisiacal view.

In many cases though, it does not matter whether the journey is a homecoming or non-homecoming one; when the person returns to Australia, their fellow diasporic Pacific Islanders and members of the wider general community tend to think of them as having gained cultural savvy and a reinforced legitimacy to their claim to identity as a Pacific Islander. As mentioned above, the act of 'return' is itself an important one, allowing the visitor to *remember* rather than to learn cultural knowledge. This highlights the connection between inherited ethnocultural identity (through a descent connection to *peles*) and the performance of that identity through actions and behaviour, elements which I have labelled 'being' and 'doing'. Both 'being' and 'doing' are necessary components of 'authentic' Pacific Islander identity, at 'home' and in the diaspora.

Whether people are longing for a place or its people, longing for a 'home' that no longer exists or a 'home' they have never been to, it is clear that 'home' in all its forms is related to identity and sense of belonging. Because of this, people have and experience a range of 'homes' and 'home'-like states

that come to the fore in different circumstances; 'home' is not defined by an opposing dichotomy between homeland and diaspora. Connections to 'home' can be multiple, tangible and/or intangible; they are not as simple as merely longing for the 'other' place where you wish you were.

Home, identity and belonging are very personalised and shift focus where and when experience and expectations meet. Therein, of greatest importance to the relationship between identity and journeys 'home' is individuals' reconciliation of the ways in which they respond—*externally* and *internally*—to the manner in which they are defined and treated by others during their visits to Island homes.

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