

## Article

# A Māori and Pasifika Label—An Old History, New Context

Dion Enari <sup>1,\*</sup> and Innez Haua <sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sport and Recreation, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland 1011, New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> Department of Indigenous Studies, Macquarie University, Macquarie Park, NSW 2109, Australia; innez.haua@mq.edu.au

\* Correspondence: dion.enari@aut.ac.nz

**Abstract:** The term ‘Māori and Pasifika’ is widely used in Aotearoa, New Zealand to both unite and distinguish these peoples and cultures. As a collective noun of separate peoples, Māori and Pasifika are used to acknowledge the common Pacific ancestry that both cultures share, whilst distinguishing Māori as Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Pasifika as migrants from other lands in the Pacific region. The term ‘Māori and Pasifika’ is a ‘label’ established in New Zealand to combine the minority cultural populations of both Māori, and Pacific migrant peoples, into a category defined by New Zealand policy and discourse. Migration for Māori and Pasifika to Australia (from Aotearoa) has generated new discussion amongst these diasporic communities (in Australia) on the appropriate collective term(s) to refer to Māori and Pasifika peoples and cultures. Some believe that in Australia, Māori should no longer be distinguished from Pasifika as they are not Indigenous (to Australia), while others believe the distinction should continue upon migration. Through the voices of Samoan and Māori researchers who reside in Australia, insider voices are honoured and cultural genealogy is privileged in this discussion of the label ‘Māori and Pasifika’ in the Australian context.

**Keywords:** Māori; Pasifika; diaspora; Pacific; Indigenous; sovereignty; label; Australia



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## 1. Introduction

As Samoan and Māori academics who were raised in Australia, we encounter controversial dialogue surrounding the term ‘Pasifika’ as an appropriate collective term and label to refer to both Māori and those of Pacific Island origins who have resettled in Australia. This article is an exploration into the arguments of this dialogue. In Aotearoa (New Zealand), the term is mutually exclusive in all aspects of New Zealand society, as Māori are tangata whenua (people of the land) and Pasifika are a migrant diaspora from various islands throughout the Pacific. We acknowledge this distinction in New Zealand and the cultural identities founded on these terms. However, as we discuss later in the article, the ‘label’ of ‘Māori and Pasifika’ is fraught with colonial elements designed to produce and categorise these minority populations of New Zealand. Both the words ‘term’ and ‘label’ are separate descriptors used interchangeably throughout this article. The use of ‘term’ describes the (largely) accepted collective noun used by both Māori and Pasifika peoples to describe their identities. ‘Label’, as it is commonly defined, refers to the “classifying name or phrase assigned to a person(s), especially restrictively or inaccurately” (LABEL 2021).

The appropriateness of the term and label “Māori and Pasifika” is contended upon resettlement in Australia, as both groups of peoples are migrants. As we look into our own Samoan Australian and Māori Australian communities, we have seen, heard and actively been a part of this discussion. There are two main perspectives regarding the term “Pasifika” and the inclusion (or exclusion) of Māori in this Australian diasporic collective. Some believe, through our shared whakapapa (genealogy in Māori) and migrant status, that Māori should no longer be differentiated and that they should be included under the term Pasifika. The shared whakapapa of Māori and Pasifika begins with Māori ancestors migrating in waves from Hawaiki. In Hawaiki, waka/va’a (canoes) were built, launched

and navigated across the Pacific ocean to bring Māori ancestors over vast distances and via various Pacific islands to settle in and become the First Peoples of Aotearoa. There are various Māori and Pasifika oral accounts of where and how these waka/va'a began and journeyed across the expansive Pacific. Whilst the precise location of Hawaiki is not known, it is culturally and scientifically proven to be a "zone of eastern Pacific". There is also various scientific and empirical evidence to support these oral accounts of migration (Reilly et al. 2018, pp. 65–69). The whakapapa of Māori and Pasifika is a *focus of connection*; however, as we explore further in this paper, both groups are eventually labelled according to the colonial aspirations of the nation state New Zealand. Conversely, the alternative argument in both of our communities believe that if Māori were distinct from Pasifika in New Zealand, then this label should continue in Australia. As a Samoan and Māori who have been raised, educated and active in our respective diaspora communities, we draw upon our lived experiences, community engagement and research to highlight these labels of identity, and what they mean in relation to each other in a contemporary Australian context. In order to better understand 'Māori and Pasifika', we draw upon the gafa/whakapapa (genealogy) of these terms (Enari and Matapo 2020, 2021).

## 2. The Term Māori

According to 'Māori Dictionary online', the definition of the noun Māori is expressed as "indigenous New Zealander, indigenous person of Aotearoa/New Zealand—a new use of the word resulting from Pākehā contact in order to distinguish between people of Māori descent and the colonisers". The same source defines the verb and modifier Māori as "natural and ordinary" (Māoridictionary.co.nz 2003). Largely recognised as a foundation in Te Reo and English translations, H W Williams, in the 1971 seventh edition of *A dictionary of the Maori Language* defines the noun Māori similarly as "native or belonging to New Zealand", and the verb as "normal, usual." Williams goes on to explain that usage of the term "(Māori) began circa 1850. Early European writers invariably spoke of natives or New Zealanders. It appears therefore as if the usage originated with the Maoris themselves" (Williams 1985, p. 179). In 1945, Sidney J. Baker compiled a series of notes exploring the etymology of the words "pakeha [Caucasian] and maori", and claimed that the first written record of the term appears (with the word tangata) in 1817 (Baker 1945, p. 228).

It is evident that the noun, label and categorisation of Māori were conceived in response to the colonisation of New Zealand. The term is the antithesis of the European man, or Pākehā, and a clear distinction between Indigenous peoples and colonisers. Prior to the advent of Aotearoa colonisation, there was no conceptualisation of an Aotearoa pan-collective, as the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa identified themselves in groups by iwi (tribe), hapū (sub-tribe) and whānau (family). In the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi, 1840, the terms 'Chiefs', 'tribes' and 'natives' are used interchangeably and the term 'Aborigines' is also used (once) when referring to the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand. In the te reo Māori text of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the term 'tangata maori' is written thrice and 'Rangatira Maori' features once, when referring to the "native peoples of New Zealand" (Archives New Zealand 2021). It was the above H W (William) Williams' brother, Henry Williams, who translated the original 1840 English treaty text to te reo Māori, about which there remains much contention and discrepancy. This also disputes the statement that "usage originated with Maori" (Williams 1985, p. 179). In spite of this, it is difficult to determine when the term Māori became an everyday categorisation for Māori and by Māori, whilst Williams claimed that the term Māori (and all it encompasses today) became the unofficial sovereign term of the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa from the late 19th Century (Williams 1985, p. 179).

According to New Zealand government statistics for 2018, the term 'Māori' names approximately 16.7 percent of the national population of New Zealand (Stats Govt NZ 2018). However, this 'term' is not just a noun, modifier or adjective, nor can it be simplified as a categorisation or label. Today, Māori speaks to and of a whakapapa connection between the Indigenous peoples, lands and waters of Aotearoa. It is a distinct Indigenous world

view from, and of Aotearoa peoples, ancestors, lands and waters, and has evolved into a collective of iwi simultaneously subject and resistant to the ongoing colonisation of its world and all that it encompasses.

### 3. The Term Pasifika

Albert Wendt, an esteemed Samoan academic, has said on numerous occasions there is no such thing as a Pacific Islander until one arrives at Auckland airport. Such a label would have made little sense, as prior to arrival in New Zealand, Pacific peoples and cultures identified with island groups, such as Samoans and Tongans. This statement by Albert Wendt not only highlights the diverse nature of Pasifika people but also their distinct cultures. 'Pasifika' is an umbrella term used to collectively group Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian (excluding Māori) peoples who reside in New Zealand. The large migration wave from the islands to New Zealand commenced in the 1970s in order to meet the labour demands of the country at the time. According to the 2018 census, 381,642 Pasifika people reside in New Zealand (Stats Govt NZ 2018).

Pasifika is representative of "diasporic nationalism" (Lie 2001) that contests Pākehā hegemony and "transforms ethnicity" and "locate[s] migrants and diasporic subjects within global rather than national landscapes" (Madan 2000, p. 26). Pasifika is, thus, a transnational association that offers a means for "contestation over local discourses of power and race" (Fernandes 2003, p. 576). Others believe the term Pasifika was birthed from "shared histories of racist subordination, cultural resistance, and hybridization" which encompasses "diasporic identification inclusive of multiple Pacific subjects, citizens, and identities" (Grainger 2006, p. 54). The New Zealand Ministry of Education believes Pasifika people as having numerous worldviews with various cultural identities (Ministry of Education 2009). Others, however, hold a more critical view, calling it patronising and arguing that Māori and Polynesian young people often identify in a way that is "sophisticated in terms of discursive and narrative tools" (Borell 2005, p. 203). Once maturity is gained, it is believed this self-identity will change to "ethnic-specific identities" (Anae 1998, p. 110).

The pan-Pacific umbrella of aligning separate island nations as 'Pasifika' causes issues. There is no generic 'Pacific community'. Instead, there are Tagata Pasifika, who align themselves variously through geographic, ethnic and church groups (Anae et al. 2001, p. 7). The literature shows how pan-Pacific and nation-specific identities can exist simultaneously. Boyce Davies (1994) believes the terms we use to name ourselves "represents an original misnaming and the simultaneous constant striving of the dispossessed for full representation" (5). McGavin (2014) further explores the notion of Pacific collectivism and ethnic-specific identification through the term "unity in diversity", as she believes pan-ethnic islander identity is important and realises group collectivism that embraces difference. Throughout time, there have also been other labels, such as Moana Pasifika, Pasefika, Oceania and Pasifiki, that have been used to describe these peoples (Enari and Fa'aea 2020; Lemusuifeauaali'i and Enari 2021).

### 4. Māori and Pasifika in New Zealand

The collective label 'Māori and Pasifika' was born in New Zealand, and from New Zealand government policy. Whilst the term acknowledges the Pacific connection between these peoples, it simultaneously distinguishes Māori as tangata whenua (people of the land) and Pasifika as migrant communities. The label of Māori and Pasifika is fraught with racist undertones by governments who sought to categorise minority ethnicities through policy (Enari and Matapo 2021). The label Māori and Pasifika is used throughout all sectors, including government, education, sports and popular culture (Enari 2021; Enari and Faleolo 2020). It has generated negative representations of the cultures and peoples. Many research and media narratives would employ the term Māori and Pasifika to instill fear among the wider public. Mainstream discourse have continually portrayed Māori and Pasifika as a violent group to the general public. They perpetuated Māori as unsettled, angry natives,

whilst depicting Pasifika communities as physically confrontational, unwanted migrants occupying New Zealand jobs and resources. (Re)occurring portrayals of Māori and Pasifika as a social underclass pervade much of Aotearoa, New Zealand discourse. Persistent social commentary and representation of Māori and Pasifika as welfare recipients, gang members and uneducated and undeserving citizens were heavily perpetuated among mainstream society (Samu 2006; Tiatia-Seath 1998).

Alice Te Punga Somerville, in her book *Once Were Pacific, Māori connections to Oceania* (2012), comprehensively examines the relationships between Māori and Pasifika through text and outlines in the book's introduction that the connections and relationships between these communities in New Zealand is shaped and manipulated by the colonial project, stating that: "Māori-Pasifika communities are drawn into the logic of New Zealand specific prejudices as long as they insist that their primary relationship is with the New Zealand nation-state" (Te Punga Somerville 2012, p. xxiii). Te Punga Somerville elaborates:

"Māori-Pasifika connections are marked by discourses of relationship and reconnection but also of disjuncture.[] . . . Compounding this pākehā racism has tended to lump Māori-Pasifika together in a way that flattens out differences and further marginalizes all communities involved" (Te Punga Somerville 2012, p. xxxii).

The racism that Te Punga Somerville identifies was designed, tailored and perpetuated in New Zealand as a political tool to divide and conquer. Our current self-perception, self-identification and labels are dictated by historical and current political agendas of the New Zealand nation state. As this term has derived from New Zealand policy, it is still used by the government to further impose their label and their connotations on our peoples.

## 5. Māori and Pasifika Australia

The 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that 142, 107 Māori reside in Australia, with other remaining Pacific Island groups collectively at 214,635 (ABS 2016). The migration experience for these groups to Australia is varied and contrasted. The Australian government has a well-documented history of a predisposed attitude to and of Pasifika people (excluding Māori). The White Australia Policy discouraged migration from the islands between 1901–1973 (Lee 2009). Upon arrival, many were labelled unqualified, inexperienced and only able to work as unskilled labour (Vasta 2004). A 1971 Australian cabinet publicly described Pasifika people as too "unsophisticated and unsuited" to live among Australian society (Hamer 2014). Degrading public comments by the government are as recent as the current deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormick in 2019, when he publicly stated that Pacific Island people would survive climate change when they "come here and pick our fruit" (Pacific Islands Will Survive Climate Crisis Because They 'Pick Our Fruit', Australia's Deputy PM Says 2021). This very recent public statement by the Australian government exemplifies the prevailing racist perception and attitude of Australia towards Pasifika peoples and lands.

Conversely, the historical experience of Māori resettlement in Australia differed greatly to that of other Pacific migrants. As Indigenous peoples of New Zealand, Māori received distinctive and special status throughout decades of immigration policy reform aimed at keeping other migrants out. In the hopes that it would become a part of the Australian federation, the 'native peoples' of New Zealand were inadvertently identified as a white New Zealander (Haua 2017, p. 24). The mostly constructive interaction between the British settlers and Māori in Australia during the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century enabled and affirmed this positive perception. The federation in 1901 saw Māori exempt from the Pacific Island Labourers Act. This Act "was designed specifically to remove Melanesian people from Australia and included all natives (not of European extraction) of the Pacific Islands except the islands of New Zealand" (Hamer 2014, p. 96).

Melanesian islanders became a source of societal fear in Australia by the late 1890s, as their numbers had increased to half of the Queensland population. Blackbirding, or the kidnapping of Melanesian men (mainly from the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands) to

become indentured labour for Queensland cane farmers became a common occurrence in the 1860s (McQuire 2021). As the islander population increased, they became a threat to the white, xenophobic social consciousness and new Australian nationalism. The Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901 was an attempt to completely exclude the Melanesian slaves from any chance of freedom or citizenship, and more importantly from the sight and minds of the society that kidnapped them in the first place. Polynesian peoples were also a part of this exclusion, as were all other non-European natives, except for Māori (Hamer 2014, p. 96). In 1902, in the Commonwealth Franchise Act, Māori were “entitled to have his name place on an Electoral roll” and from 1903 in Australia’s “Naturalisation Act, Section 5”, Māori could “apply to the Governor-General for a certificate or naturalization” (Australian Govt Comm Law 2015), cementing Māori privilege in history.

The political influence of previous Australian governments formulated the categorisation of Pacific Islanders as a minority, ostracising Pasifika in Australia in the process, whilst simultaneously privileging Māori. As a result, these state-imposed labels have shaped the way these groups view themselves and their connection and disconnection with each other in Australia. This is evident in the numerous claims of Māori identity by Pasifika people in Australia from the 1960s to the 1990s. In the experience of the authors of this paper, several people in the Samoan community have shared their experience of telling Australian authorities they were Māori, as they understood that this community was more accepted by mainstream Australian society, than Pasifika. Meanwhile the resettling of both Māori and Pasifika from Aotearoa in Australia also meant the migration of prevailing New Zealand colonial discourses to Australian shores. Many of the cultural identities encompassed in Māori and Pasifika cultures also migrated from New Zealand to Australia. These colonised identities homogenize the diversities of Māori and the diverse cultures and identities of Pasifika peoples; identities that sustain imposed colonial labels which, in a New Zealand context, differentiate the Indigenous from the settler *and the migrant*. The term Māori and Pasifika is a label that was imposed by the New Zealand government on these peoples and cultures; upon arrival in Australia, its usage among Australian government policy is a further perpetuation of colonial imposition. Collective consultation to find the appropriate term(s) between our peoples and the Australian government has yet to occur.

Whilst Māori and Pasifika wrestle for a mutually accepted Australian ‘label’, regardless of government involvement or outcome, our cultural identities in Australia will evolve and form upon the unceded lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our communities will always be settlers in Australia, in spite of historical, political and social struggles in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands—as migrants resettling in Australia, our communities benefit from the ongoing colonial project waged on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, communities, peoples, lands and waters.

Even with some ambiguity surrounding the officiality of the term Māori, referring to a pan-iwi collective of the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand, all iwi will trace their whakapapa back to Hawaiki. When different groups, such as Māori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islander and Tahitian peoples gather, we unite as kin. Many of our cultural songs, poems and chants speak of our shared ancestral and familial connection with each other long before colonial contact (Lemusui feauaali’i and Enari 2021). Our gatherings today are a family reunion, where we celebrate our genealogical connection and showcase our cultural diversity. This article sought to highlight some of the complexities of labels and terms when we think about Indigenous identities; particularly when there are colonial influences complicating the way that we see ourselves and see ourselves in the world (Chao and Enari Forthcoming; Matapo and Enari 2021). The whakapapa/gafa of Māori and Pasifika is a *focus of connection*, here in Australia and beyond.

For Pasifika—including Māori—and the generations that are settled in both Australia and New Zealand, all of our beginnings start at the same place. All of our migratory journeys commenced—not with a passport and a 747 aircraft, but with the launch of va’a/waka into the vast beauty of le vasa loloa/Te Moana nui a Kiwa—the Pacific. This ocean that has nurtured and continues to nurture all of our identities. An ocean that has

held aloft and sustained the va'a/waka who were navigated by our paramount chiefs and priests, knowing the ways and knowing the destinations that would grow and prosper many, many generations to come (Enari and Rangiwai 2021; Fa'aea and Enari 2021; Rangiwai et al. 2021). It is our humble prayer that our communities continue this dialogue and have labels and terms that are created by us, and for us.

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