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# Making the City ‘Home’: Practices of Belonging in Pacific Cities

## Introduction

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### Abstract

*It is estimated that by 2050, fifty percent of Pacific peoples will be living out their full lives in cities and towns throughout Oceania and around the world. Previous patterns of circular migration have been, over the last 35 years, giving way to permanent urban settlers and to generations born and raised in urban places. These ‘urbanites’ demonstrate a firm commitment to urban living in both the present and the future. In the cities, Pacific people have been building roots and making the city “home”. This special issue focuses on some of the diverse practices Pacific urbanites employ in creating “home”, which we define as the context where they centre their social, cultural and economic worlds and the place in which they see themselves living out their aspirations and future life course. Practices range from the use of graffiti, sharing music, playing reggae, the role of artists and exhibitions, and mobile phone use. In doing so, this special issue contributes to a growing body of work focused on the ways urban-based Pacific peoples contest essentializing stereotypes that deny their legitimacy and dismiss their urban experiences as less authentic. The collection of papers demonstrates how Pacific peoples are imagining and demonstrating their identities as Pacific urbanites reflecting their commitment to an urban Pacific, national, cultural and political belonging.*

**Key Words:** Urban Oceania, Urban Pacific, place-making, Social Change.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that by 2050, fifty percent of Pacific peoples will be living out their lives in cities and towns throughout Oceania and around the world (Bedford 2010, 242). These urban inhabitants are both autochthones of the land on which Oceanic cities have been built, and first, second and third generation urban migrants. Patterns of circular migration previously saw Islanders moving to towns for education and income generating purposes, or to experience something ‘new’, yet, in these instances, Islanders always returned ‘home’ (Bonnemaïson 1976; Bedford 1977; Connell and Lea 1994, 272). Over the last 35 years, however, this pattern has given way to permanent urban settlers and to generations of people born and raised in Pacific towns (Haberkorn 1989).

Today, these Pacific urban dwellers demonstrate a firm commitment to life in town. They own urban homes, invest in their children’s education, and participate in diverse urban

community commitments. Many urbanites continue to be committed to their rural homes too, and send remittances to rural family, participate in *kastom* ceremonies, and visit rural homesteads and family members. Anthropologists disagree, however, over the extent of urbanites' connections to rural homelands and the importance of the ancestral home as a source of identity and belonging. Some suggest that commitment is strong, that people born in towns and cities continue to identify primarily as persons of their island places (Lindstrom 2011, Lind 2010, Wittersheim 2006, Rousseau 2017). Yet, others argue that, particularly for the more recent generations who have been born and raised in town, the commitment is significantly diminished and is no longer the dominant factor influencing urban peoples' sense of belonging (Kraemer 2013, 2020; Storey and Connell 2013; Keen and Carpenter 2017, McDougal 2017). These later authors suggest that contemporary urbanites are not defining themselves in reference to their ancestral homesteads, as 'urban migrants', 'urban settlers', or part of a generation of 'urban drift' (Mitchell 2002: 187), but rather as people from or 'belonging to' town (*man blong taon*<sup>1</sup>) (Kraemer 2013, 2020).

Oceanic cities are a relatively recent phenomenon. They are also new types of spaces. There were no Pacific Indigenous cities or towns before 20th century colonial activities in the region (Connell and Lea 1994: 383; Wittersheim and Dussy 2013:18; Gagné and Trepied 2016, 10). In the early to late 1900s, Pacific peoples were prohibited from settling in Port Vila Vanuatu by colonial policies that required each visitor to town to possess a work permit (Rodman 1987). Similarly, in Noumea, New Caledonia, a cannon was fired each night to signal to Indigenous peoples that it was time for them to leave the city (Dussy and Wittersheim 2013, 19). Despite these colonial limitations on Indigenous peoples' presence in Pacific towns, Indigenous peoples have played an immensely significant role in the life and development of colonial administrative centres, particularly in their contribution to the cosmopolitan nature of Oceanic cities. Through their movements, Oceanic cities have become hubs of travel, trade, transit, encounter, and exchange between Indigenous peoples, Westerners and Asians. As Nicholas Thomas (2010) writes, Oceanians were travellers, and went abroad to work on plantations, to train in churches, to work on ships, and to join the army. All the while, passing through these administrative centres and cities.

Migration to Pacific cities occurred in waves. During World War II, Pacific towns became hubs for international military personnel and provided opportunities for employment. In the months leading up to independence, rural islanders, soon 'free' to settle in Pacific cities, migrated to urban areas at an unprecedented pace. Migration continued (and continues still) in post-independence Pacific as international work and school opportunities have opened up, and as Pacific peoples began settling in cities around the world, putting down roots and making the city "home".<sup>2</sup>

This special issue focuses on some of the diverse practices through which Pacific urbanites are creating their urban 'home', which we define as the location of their social, cultural, and economic worlds and the place in which they see themselves living out their aspirations and future life course. Writing about urbanites living in Honiara, Solomon Islands, Rodolfo Maggio (this issue) suggests that as urbanites build more positive associations with their urban 'home,' they begin a process of legitimizing their lives in town. This point resonates throughout this special issue, and in this introduction, we seek to unpack just how Pacific people's 'home-making' practices in urban contexts engender feelings of urban belonging.

Cities are diverse centres of population and built environments. Sydney is a different type of place to Suva, Honiara is different to Honolulu; and the experiences of Port Vila and Port Moresby residents, where Pacific peoples are a majority population, is different to that of Pacific peoples in cities like Noumea, Papeete, or Auckland where they are the minority. Yet, in many of these urban spaces, Pacific peoples, or groups of Pacific peoples (for example: unemployed urban youth) continue to experience a history of exclusion, marginalization, even racism. This collection of papers demonstrates not only the ways Pacific peoples are building their sense of urban belonging, but that their practices (for example: reggae music, graffiti and tagging) actively contest the negative stereotypes that had previously impeded urban belonging, rootedness and city pride. In each Pacific urban place, Pacific peoples are imagining and demonstrating themselves as Pacific urbanites and at the same time expressing their vibrant sense of Pacific, national, cultural and political belonging. They are building experiences in and to the cities in different ways, through memberships in associations, sports teams, schools, churches, and through the production of arts, street graffiti and music.

The eight papers presented in this special issue engage with these practices, analyzing the ways Pacific peoples create and demonstrate their experiences of making the city home. The contributors all come from different backgrounds, approaches, and origins. This volume thus offers an approach of multiplicity, both in terms of being multidisciplinary - authors' academic backgrounds include anthropology, linguistics, and art - and also in terms of the diversity of the researcher-subject relationship which ranges from more to less distance and includes both Indigenous and resident scholars.

The broad aim of this special issue is to add to the conversation on Pacific urban experiences. Our contribution to this discussion is a close examination of the diverse forms that urban practices take amongst urban residents. The collection asks: how do people establish belonging in the city? <sup>3</sup> What are the specific urban practices embedding Pacific people firmly in their urban contexts? And what is the meaning of being an urban Pacific person in a context where identity politics still predominantly frame "authentic" Indigenous cultures and identities as rural and remote? Indeed, urban places are still often stereotyped as sites of cultural loss and mainstream assimilation; places of Indigenous 'dysfunction'

(Gagné and Trepied 2016, 8; see also Peters and Andersen 2013) or just simply ‘bad places’ (Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017, 5). By investigating these questions, this special issue thus also contributes to a growing body of work focused on the ways urban-based Pacific peoples contest essentializing stereotypes that deny their legitimacy and dismiss their urban experiences as less authentic (see Gagné and Trepied 2016, 15, Wittersheim and Dussy 2013).

Although the practices we explore here such as graffiti, music sharing, playing reggae, the role of artists and exhibitions, mobile phone use and advertisements are not all specifically restricted to urban environments, the contributors examine their usage in urban contexts and explore the different ways these practices engender a sense of urban connection and emplacement. It is through these processes that Pacific urbanites are also negotiating the degree to which their sense of self remains tied to foundational ideas of blood, kin, language, customs, land and tradition. As this collection demonstrates, many urbanites are using technologies such as mobile phones and the internet to connect with broader global communities and root themselves in a ‘bigger’ social and cultural world. Referring to state sanctioned projects aimed at constructing national cohesion, seen in countries like Vanuatu, Solomons Islands and Papua New Guinea, Connell and Lea write: “few if any nations are more imagined than those of Melanesia” (1994, 280). We suggest here that urban practices, albeit more grass roots in their emergence than state promoted constructs like Vanuatu’s ‘national unity through diversity’ campaign, must be recognized for their integral role in influencing and stimulating the urban culture(s) and sense of belongings of Oceanic peoples.

## **2 AN URBAN REVOLUTION**

Storey and Connell wrote in 2013 that there was an ‘urban revolution’ occurring throughout the Pacific as Pacific Islander migration from rural to urban locales was becoming more permanent. Ten years later we see this revolution in full effect, influenced by the development of modern transportation and the continued stagnation of rural development. Pacific urban populations have grown substantially; we can no longer view the Pacific as characterized by only rural populations. While some of this population growth is driven by rural to urban migration, natural population growth throughout Pacific cities is also high; heightened by the limited impact of family planning. As such, natural population increase is just as important an influence on urban growth as rural-to-urban drift.

Compared to other parts of the world, urbanization in the Pacific was belated due to colonial “efforts to deny indigenous populations access to what were essentially European urban enclaves” (Storey and Connell 2013). For many Pacific countries, towns were primarily European trading and administrative centres until well into the Twentieth Centuries. Urban growth came after World War II and post-independence, as government activity and spending led to a boom in job opportunities (Forster 1980: 371 in Haberkorn 1989: 11). As

migration restrictions loosened and labour demands increased, towns and cities in the Pacific grew and their populations prospered and became more permanent (Storey and Connell 2013).

The urban revolution is now in full swing. But what does this mean exactly and how can we better define the impact that global and urban forces and technologies are having on Pacific cultures as well as peoples' sense of emplacement? This is a keenly felt issue for many urbanites who, despite living their entire lives in the urban context, experience a tension around whether town and city can be 'home' due to urban spaces still widely defined as liminal and often de-legitimized in Melanesian culture. Generally, there continues to be a negative narrative surrounding Pacific towns. They are perceived to be sites of violence, drunkenness, drug use, social disorder, and crime. They are also often framed as lawless places without *kastom* or tradition, where the *kastom*-less urban populations have lost connection with what is believed to truly constitute a Pacific person. Geographers, policy researchers, and international bodies have similarly been quick to frame Pacific towns as suffering from many development constraints and afflictions such as lack of decent housing, inadequate water supply, unaffordable food, overcrowding, increasing gender-based family violence and domestic violence and the spread of disease. This negative framing of cities in the Pacific has frequently overshadowed the creativity, innovation and hopefulness expressed by city dwellers.

Italo Pardo and Giuliana Prato (2012) describe how from the onset of urban anthropology, there were tensions in defining what anthropologists actually meant by the concept of 'urban' and what the differences between 'urban' anthropology' and 'traditional' anthropology were, as well as how to theorize and frame the study of urban contexts. For some, the 'urban' was defined by population size. Other researchers framed the 'city' more in terms of inhabitants' occupations. Still others examined urban areas through the lens of social interaction and the density of social networks. Two main positions emerged. One leading approach (*cf.* also Fox 1977, Jackson 1985, Gulick 1989, Low 1996) suggested that urban anthropology was the study *of cities*; where the city is examined as an object of study in and of itself. It was styled as an approach of urban determinism - where the city context seen as the 'pivotal force in shaping individual lives' (Pardo and Prato 2012, 7). Other perspectives, such as that of Ruth Toulson, critique framing the city as a pivotal force, arguing instead for the primacy of 'human agencies and the complexities of causality' (2015, 29). Setha Low similarly critiques the 'study *of cities*' approach for its essentializing of the city (1996: 384). She argues that productive analysis of the city should instead attend to the "social relations, symbols, and political economies manifest in the city, and view the 'urban' as a process rather than as a type or category" (1996 : 384). Low writes that "the city is not a reification but the focus of cultural and sociopolitical manifestations of urban lives and everyday practices" (1996 : 384). The authors of this introduction are of this latter view. In

contrast to the village, the city with its larger population size and many residential areas, offers people alternatives to how they live their social lives such as the possibility of anonymity and the avoidance of kinship obligations. Moreover, city dwellers can escape the intimate familiarity of village life and fashion new identities often involving different people and experiences. The papers in this publication demonstrate the extent of such co-constitution of urban belonging, showing the influence of the city in shaping individual lives and social interactions *and* the influence of technologies, international culture, home island practices, histories, and belief systems, on urban identities and emerging ways of being a Pacific person.

Anthropologists and sociologists have been researching the city for nearly a century. Researchers from both the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (University of Manchester) and the Chicago School, began exploring 'the urban' in Africa and America in the 1930s and 1940s. Today, significant numbers of researchers around the world examine the 'urban phenomenon', many also exploring urban identity and how the urban environment engenders belonging (cf. for example McLaughlin 2001, Hilgers 2009, Wilson and Peters 2005, Ramirez 2007).

Despite this significant interest in cities, socio-cultural anthropological interest in the Oceanic city is relatively new; increasing over the past two decades as Pacific urban spaces and urbanites are viewed as categories of analysis themselves, rather than as gateways to more remote areas, peoples and cultures. Christine Jourdan and Lamont Lindstrom's 2017 edited collection on urbanization in Melanesia has made significant inroads into bringing the work of urban anthropologists studying the Pacific into the limelight.

Academic interest in Pacific cities and Pacific urbanites covers a diverse number of themes. The following selection of authors is just a sample drawn from a growing body of literature. Early research on Pacific cities focused on urbanization as a process, examining practices of place-making, the development of urban land tenure, urban settlements, and peri-urban communities. These authors explored how migrants and first, second and third generation urbanites settled and innovated new contexts away from island places (for Port Vila and surrounding areas see Haberkorn 1989; Rawlings 1999; Lindstrom 2011; Petrou 2020; Kraemer 2013; Mitchell 2002; for Port Moresby see Strathern 1975, Goddard 2005; for the Pacific area generally see Connell and Lea 1994, Dussy and Wittersheim 2013, Mecartney and Connell 2017). Social relationships in urban communities are transforming, and anthropologists have been interested in exploring these changes. Researchers examine shifting relationships with kin on the islands, changing gender, kinship, and power relationships in town, and the new kinds of links and connections urbanites build with neighbours, in churches, with work colleagues, and through shared interests such as music, sports and politics (for Port Vila see Kraemer 2013, 2020, Eriksen 2009; for Honiara see Berg 2000; Jourdan and Labbé 2020; McDougall 2017, for urban PNG

see Hukula 2017, Hukula 2012, Spark 2015; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1998; for Fiji see Brison 2017). As Pacific cities grow, so do their economies. Anthropologists interested in urban economies are writing about migration and remittances, working abroad programs, and the rise of class stratification in towns (for Honiara see Maebuta and Maebuta 2009; in Port Vila see Rio 2015; Smith 2016; in urban PNG see Spark 2017, Gewertz and Errington 1999, Besnier 2011). Urbanites are also innovating and exploring new ways of practicing their *kastom*, culture, language and religions. As such, researchers have also been keen to understand the characteristics of ‘modernity’ in Pacific cities and how urbanites are enacting and constructing their own constitutions of modernity (in Honiara see Jourdan 1996; in Port Vila see Vandeputte 2014, Eriksen 2009, Mitchell 2011; in urban PNG see Gewertz and Errington 1996). Some anthropological work has also taken on a more problem-centred approach with a focus on food insecurity, poverty, the rise of violence and gender-based violence and how these problematics frame experiences and stereotypes about city life (in Fiji see Bryant-Tokalau 2014; in Port Vila see Wentworth 2016, Mitchell 2002; Kraemer forthcoming, in urban PNG see Josephides 1994). Other researchers have also captured the rich and nuanced aspects of contemporary urban life, exploring the innovative use of mobile phone and social media technology to broaden networks, meet partners, and build economic resources; the changes in dress styles and conceptions of beauty; and the significance for urban young people of peers and hobbies to help construct a sense of urban safety (for Port Vila see Cummings 2013; Kraemer 2015; Kraemer 2017; Rousseau 2017; Servy 2017; Stern 2017, Dick and Melthérorong 2011; urban PNG see Andersen 2013; Goddard 2010; Spark 2015; in Noumea see Marmouch 2017). These scholars all seek to understand who or what it is to be a Pacific urbanite and what makes urban Pacific peoples different from non-urbanites and from urbanites in other cities around the world.

This special issue continues the mission of exploring the urban context, but with a particular focus on urbanites who do not consider themselves to be migrants to the city, but instead see themselves as committed urban residents working to make urban spaces their own, which in turn also legitimizes them as “urban”. The authors in this collection also set out to understand the nuances of Pacific cities and urbanites' experiences within them. Contributors show how the sociality between residents from different origins now goes beyond *wantok* and kinship relationships (Geneix-Rabault, Crowdy and Horst, Hicks, Kraemer and Stern all this volume). Many of the papers also speak to the multiple ways urbanites are decolonizing the urban places they are living in, countering cultural understandings and experiences of urban places as European, as Western, and as spaces of colonial history (Geneix-Rabault, Le Roux, Castro-Koshy and Devatine, all this volume). Contributors also illustrate some of the ways urbanites are reterritorializing themselves in Pacific spaces, building up their sense of “home” and emplaced belongings (Maggio, Hicks, Kraemer and Stern all this volume). Additionally, contributors examine the significant



influence technology has on cities (Crowdy and Horst, Willans et al), arts (Castro-Koshy and Devatine, Kraemer and Stern), popular culture (Kraemer and Stern, Geneix-Rabault) and local cultural institutions (Castro-Koshy and Devatine, Le Roux, Kraemer and Stern, all this volume). Like Gewertz and Errington noted for PNG, all the contributors to this collection note a shifting meaning and use of 'culture' as it is invoked in understandings and practices of modernity (1999: 114). These shifts are clearly visible throughout Oceania as Pacific peoples negotiate between tradition, global influences, nation building, as well as the practices that engender urban belonging, urban legitimacy and those that give their urban life its productive and hopeful meaning.

### 3 MIGRATIONS, MIXITY AND CREATIVITY OF THE CITY

Making the city home requires social engagement with other people living in the city. It is a place of relationship par excellence and not a place of 'de-socialised' or even 'anomic' individuals (Agier 2015: 92). In this context how do people deal with urban mixity? How do they make sense of urban life? And how do they organise it? The articles in this volume describe and interrogate some specific cases of the evolution of everyday cultural practice; the 'making of belonging and the collective' (Dousset 2018: 358), or in other words, the 'urban making of cultures' (Milliot 2020: 222).

In the years following independence, rural to urban migration led to high urban population growth in the Oceanic cities discussed in this special issue. The number of migrant urban dwellers quickly exceeded the number of autochthones in the places upon which these cities were built. Often, migrants established settlements on other peoples' land by way of formal agreements with Indigenous land-owners (Wittersheim and Dussy, 2013, 27, 28). Terms were realized through negotiation and often lack contracts. As such, the status of many urban dwellings remains precarious, ephemeral and easily dismantled.

In many Pacific countries, such as Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and PNG, people choose to settle with people who trace their origins to the same village, island or region. In Port Vila, for example, some neighbourhoods bear the names of the islands of origin (e.g. Seaside Paama, Ohlen Matasso), or sometimes the names of migrant settlers from more distant islands, and nations (e.g. Nambatu Wallis). In these 'enclaves', residents continue to practice the *kastom* and traditions imported from their islands (Hannerz 1980). They also continue to communicate in their origin language (*wantok*), are endogamous, and organise ceremonies, dances and exchanges in the same manner as their rural relatives. People also maintain strong and constant links of exchange with rural kin and travel back and forth from town to origin place (*ples*). Urban migrant communities, and increasingly their urban-born children as well, support their own political parties, help each other find work, and accommodate newcomers. What does this all add up to? - the recreation of 'home' with a 'new cultural identity' (see Maggio this volume).

Being confronted with the unfamiliarity of 'ethnic' or linguistically different groups of people is a specific urban novelty for many migrants.<sup>4</sup> Within this sense of otherness, it is not easy to feel at home, and individuals work to self-identify and think about their differences in relation to the others who 'share the same city' (Agier 2015, 53). In his contribution (this volume), Maggio analyses some of the contradictions that have emerged in the discourses of migrants of the same ethno-linguistic category (Kwara'ae people) living in a mixed 'ethnic' settlement on the outskirts of Honiara. They refer to the city as a 'bad' place, in contrast to their origin island (*hom*) which is 'good'. However, despite this negative narrative, they continue to migrate to the city. Maggio argues that their statements about home are 'indicators of a process of transformation' whereby *Honiara* not only becomes 'home' but also becomes a good place to live. Furthermore, the status of Honiara as a 'good' home becomes a factor that makes their life in the city better.

It is in multicultural contexts, such as cities, that the specific 'Culture', the practices considered ancient and traditional, take on heightened meaning (Agier 2015, 163). Inhabitants 'perform' culture; express it; use it to differentiate themselves from others; to present themselves to others, and to preserve a self-identification they experience as 'true', 'authentic', and 'immutable'. Cultural similarities, links and differences, expressed symbolically, are also revealed through performances at festivals. On these occasions, the elements of each performance are subject to comment, competition, disputes about origin, authenticity, and validity (Freeman Moulin 1996; Dietrich 2021). For example, in PNG and Vanuatu, the string band music genre reflects strong links between members of the same island of origin. Members sing in local island languages, and name groups after the island or a village on the island so that people can recognize a precise place (Webb 1993; Wilson 2014).

In school settings one also finds cultural and educational events that emphasise the value of each person's cultural belonging. Rachel Emerine Hicks describes such a case in Honiara, in this volume. She analyses the ways Solomon Islanders in Honiara continue to maintain strong identifications with their ethnic and national sense of belonging, while at the same time managing the national philosophy of 'unity in diversity'. Her paper highlights two ways youth at a Honiara school actively claim an 'ethnic identity' - through performing ethnic dances and wearing ethnic jewellery. For many Honiara secondary school students, their province represents their 'most important identity marker' (Hicks, this volume).

The city plays a double game in terms of its influence. On the one hand it reinforces an awareness of cultural difference, on the other hand it facilitates a process of homogenisation (Agier 2015, 54). The 'ethnic' mix of cities (such as inhabitants from different islands, migrants from other Pacific countries, descendants of Asian migrants, European and Australian development workers) and the easy access to media (in contrast to

parts of the rural Pacific where people do not yet have electricity) have led to increased openness towards international cultural practices and popular culture.

While recently, anthropologists have begun focusing on Oceanic cities, few examine the 'foreigners' living there: Chinese, Vietnamese, Australians, Europeans or other Oceanians. Yet, as we have been arguing, Pacific peoples' influence on and in the city has been significant. Although one can still find segregation between some of these communities, such as those between Europeans and Kanaks in Noumea, or ni-Vanuatu and Asian communities in Port Vila (seen, for example, in the hierarchical relationships between Asian, Australian and European shop owners and their Indigenous employees), these barriers are never impermeable, and their influences and exchanges play an essential role in the development of cities as heterogeneous places.

Music, dances, advertisements, graffiti, and museum exhibitions are also all examples of homemaking in the city. These are not, of course, purely urban practices (most of them also exist in villages), but the way they are carried out, the material means at their disposal, and the extended networks (local and global) that they mobilise, are uniquely urban in character. It is a process of creolisation, where rural, urban and global elements become entangled (Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017:17). The result is a lively pluriculturalism, found in many contexts such as in the graffiti in Nouméa, in the Oceanian artworks in Australian cities, in the circulation of music through digital means, and in the uptake of reggae music across the Pacific.

Scholars have pointed to the close link between urban culture and national culture (Wittersheim and Dussy 2013, Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017: 17). Indeed, historically, governments of young independent states had the difficult task of unifying their region's culturally, linguistically, politically, and religiously diverse micro-societies into a single nation. This was facilitated by constructing and promoting ideologies such as *kastom* (for many Melanesian countries), and slogans such as 'unity in diversity', biculturalism, or multiculturalism.

While the city borrows and is influenced by village cultures, it also forms a space for constructing national culture. It is in the cities that the structures for urban creativity, such as performance halls, theatres, cultural centres, museums, recording studios, and exhibitions are located. These places often become meeting places for inter-ethnic and linguistic encounters. Such mixed collaborations make the city 'the main engine of cultural production and where new urban styles and practices readily flow back into rural areas' (Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017: 17). Cities increasingly offers people opportunities in the cultural industry sectors. Faced with social and racial inequalities, many inherited from colonisation and the marginalisation of certain segments of the population, or with uprooting, the cities also engender creative responses and practices (Goddard 2005, Kraemer 2013).

Making oneself visible in one's own way, in response to the "Unseen City", to use Michael Goddard's expression (2005), in the face of otherness, indifference and mixity, is perhaps the strength of many urbanites. Re-inventing themselves as 'taggers' in Nouméa, for example, is one way people participate in imagining a multiple urban culture and enact agency in the face of criticism of inauthenticity (Gagné and Trépiéd 2016). In her contribution to this collection, Stéphanie Geneix-Rabault explores how urban dwellers in the city of Nouméa express their plural identities through street art, particularly graffiti and tagging. Using a sociolinguistic approach, she examines urbanites' multilingual street expressions. She also demonstrates the ways urban street artists 'transgress social linguistic norms' to create new language expressions and images. She suggests that through these practices people of different origins express and display their plural belongings in the face of a dominating French colonial heritage. Moreover, although they are officially outlawed in the city, taggers and graffiti artists employ the practice of graffiti and tagging to become "visible" and build up their sense of self-value in society. Such contemporary valorisation of cultures, previously denigrated, is also described in the articles in this volume by Géraldine Le Roux and by Estelle Castro-Koshy with Tokainiua Devatine.

#### **4 BELONGINGS AND NETWORKS CONSTRUCTIONS**

The mixed nature of the city engenders the construction of relationships other than those of kinship. People develop relationships through work, school, church, leisure activities, memberships in associations, and through their neighborhoods and communities. These networks are also often extended to more distant acquaintances or even individuals who do not know each other directly, forming 'imaginary communities' (Anderson 1983). The culture of Oceanic cities is thus a long-standing hybrid: 'the result of a process of creolization of rural, urban and global elements' (Lindstrom and Jourdan 2017: 17). The city develops, through its close relations with nearby peri-urban communities, rural areas, and through the influences of national, regional and global cultures, as seen, for example, in the constructions of independent provinces and states and in the constructions of national identities.

Broader regional affiliation is also being expressed. For example, Webb and Webb Gannon (2016) evoke the construction of a 'Melanesianism' - a Melanesian sense of belonging that Pacific peoples use to distinguish themselves from the West and also from Asia and Polynesia. The reasons given for the emergence of this kind of identification are mobility and globality, demographic and geo-politics, valorisation of their image and 'affinities of ethnicity and geography' (2016: 60, 61). Other affiliations intended to

encompass the entire Oceanic region are also emerging, such as the “Pacific Way” (since the 1970’s) and more recently “Pasifika”, which is used when referring to the Oceanic diasporas in Australian and New Zealand cities, as well as in the United States (see Le Roux in this volume). Festivals of Melanesian or Pacific arts are the most visible examples of such collective regional identifications. Finally, the “globalization of culture”, or more specifically, the incorporation of elements of international culture into local cultures, is strong in Pacific towns, enabled by urban infrastructures such as transportation and mobile networks. Large concerts and exhibitions, organized in cities, also provide opportunity for international artists to frequent the stage and share their cultural products with local residents.

But for a community to be “imagined”, its members must also be able to identify themselves as similar and experience the same sense of “belongings”. Reggae music, for example, is a musical genre that connects Pacific people to one another, in their local environments as well as regionally, nationally and globally. As Daniela Kraemer and Monika Stern’s contribution in this volume demonstrates, reggae is not an insignificant or arbitrary musical choice. Reggae resonates with Pacific peoples’ colonial past, unequal socio-economic present, with their identification with ‘black power’, and with their desire for a means of political expression. Kraemer and Stern’s contribution describe how young men in Port-Vila, Vanuatu generate local and international community connections through reggae music and reggae ideologies. They suggest that in the face of urban economic exclusion, reggae music and the practices it engenders, enables urban young men to sustain a unity of purpose, imagine a better future for themselves and their families, and connect with one another and the land in a way that “reterritorializes” them in the urban place.

It is also in the city that advertising is most visible. International telecommunications companies, wanting to increase their impact in local contexts, use local identifications specific to each capital city in their marketing campaigns. As Fiona Willans, Jim Gure, Tereise Vaifale and Elenoa Veikune’s show in this volume, incorporating local images, icons, slang phrases etc. helps the multinational company present themselves as a local network. Willans et al demonstrate how telecommunication company campaigns showcase the diverse types of urban networks and urban relationships that the mobile phone facilitates. Relationships such as those between family, colleagues, between people who share a leisure activity, a religion, and between the city and the village. Inundated by these images, these types of urban networks become well defined in the minds of city dwellers. Moreover, they become valued for their permeability which allows everyone to cobble together different types of relationships to fit different contexts.

Thus, to invest in the city is to play an active role in it. Urbanites do this by naming the streets, organising contemporary art exhibitions in museums, decorating or marking the streets with graffiti, to name just a few. All these activities demonstrate this investment. The city is a 'never-ending process', dynamic, a performance, always in motion (Agier 2015p,210), collectively imagined by combining the old and the new, the near and the far.

## **5 THE INDIGENIZATION OF INSTITUTIONS, TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION**

If the city is often equated with the state, it is because it is the location of government institutions, parliaments, law courts, ministries, as well as other bodies such as museums, cultural centres, headquarters of NGOs, national associations, and the media. This is particularly true of the capital cities. For many Pacific peoples, the 'indigenizing' of formal urban institutions is a crucial part of the process of making Pacific cities 'home'. Many of these structures have colonial origins and are still experienced as tools of the state and the elite classes (often expatriates). However, as contributions by Géraldine Le Roux, as well as Estelle Castro-Koshy with Tokainia Devatine show (this volume), these official structures are now garnering investment by artists from communities seen by the rest of the population as marginalised. Le Roux, for example, shows how racism, still prevalent in Australian cities, has excluded many Oceanic artists from participating in public spaces. She argues, however, that this is changing, that Pacific artists are now building and seizing opportunities to exhibit their works in museums and cultural organisations. In so doing, they are finding new ways to make themselves visible, express their points of view, represent their diversity as Pacific people (or *Pasifika*), and represent themselves in a positive light. In their contribution, Castro-Koshy and Devatine highlight, from a local and embedded perspective (Devatine is the current director) the role of the Centre for Arts and Crafts of French Polynesia (CMA) in promoting Pacific peoples' visibility. The Centre encourages Polynesian expression of culture through contemporary practices, and a reinforcing of positive representations of Indigenous Polynesians. Their art productions within city spaces have a political and cultural objective - to convey messages and values of Polynesian culture and replace the colonial practices that denied Indigenous creativity. Both contributions examine how official institutions are being appropriated by Indigenous artists to restore their culture to its rightful place.

Across the Pacific informal and more 'grass roots' practices of self-assertion are also well established. Anthropologists have highlighted, for example, the innovative ways Pacific peoples are using mobile phones (see Andersen 2013, Servy 2013, Kraemer 2015, Lipset 2017) and online social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp (see also Hobbs 2019, Foster and Horst 2018) to carve out both virtual and in person spaces for

themselves. These writings showcase some of the different strategies Pacific people employ to construct informal virtual networks of social exchange, both with close and distant relatives. They also show how these tools enable Pacific people to bypass social barriers of “real” life to express what is not “expressible”. As Lindstrom and Jourdan point out, Melanesian urban culture is now ‘translocal’ (2017: 17). Even if the urban organisation still sometimes reflects rural logics, the city produces new styles, and new practices that are gradually exported, particularly by digital means, to the villages.

Technology has become integrated into most aspects of urban life and urbanites use it according to their needs and fantasies. Radios, televisions, computers, mobile phones, memory cards, and the information they offer such as music, films, chats, circulate through the cities and through the virtual networks. Today, they are an integral part of the material and immaterial urban society. One example of the use of digital culture is presented in the contribution in this issue by Denis Crowdy and Heather Horst who examine how recorded music circulates through smartphones in PNG, especially in Port-Moresby. The authors highlight the role that recorded music plays in the building of social relationships. They suggest that urban dwellers are expanding their social networks beyond kin-based and *wantok* connections by building new forms of exchange and reciprocity through music sharing. They write that people are ‘identifying with an increasingly diverse range of cultural and regional origins, a phenomenon of growing significance in urban PNG’. These increased interactions between inhabitants of different ethnic, linguistic and cultural origins are engendering more diverse and complex forms of identifications and belongings.

But digital technologies are not just a matter of informal networks. For these to exist, it is necessary for infrastructures to be developed and for them to be attractive and affordable to local inhabitants. Telecommunications companies compete for users and subscribers and in order to sell more they adopt strategies that enable inhabitants to identify with them. Fiona et al’s contribution to this collection present an original discussion focused on this matter. Their paper examines the ways the multinational corporation, Digicel, inserts itself into the urban landscapes of Vanuatu, Samoa and Tonga. The authors are not foreign researchers, but inhabitants and long-term residents in these cities. They make longitudinal observations, and have themselves experienced many of the transformations they write about. They explore how Digicel, a foreign owned company, has manufactured a huge and visible presence in several Oceanic capitals despite entrenched local companies, many of which held monopolies before Digicel’s arrival. The authors describe Digicel’s strategies to establish ‘its own place and identity as a local network’. These include advertisements that juxtapose the local and the global. For example, although English is the most visible language in Digicel’s commercial landscape, tokens of national languages are frequently used to situate Digicel as provider of global communication technologies but in local and national contexts. Thus, with its bright

red branding, found across buildings and advertising panels throughout the cities, Digicel has become a daily presence in ‘all sectors of the urban public’ (Willans et al in this volume).

## 6 CONCLUSION

This collection, ‘Making the City ‘Home’: Practices of Belonging in Pacific Cities’, aims to unpack two principal points of analysis for understanding Pacific urbanites’ experiences of Pacific urban worlds. The first is their agency in constructing Pacific cities as “home”. Home being defined as the centre of their social, cultural and economic worlds and the place in which they see themselves living out their aspirations and future life course. Important to this definition is the construction of the town or city in a positive light, both in local imaginations as well as in national narratives. Maggio (this issue) writes that transforming the narrative of the city from “bad” to “good” is a strategy some residents of Gilbert camp in Honiara use to make their life in the city better. This collection is demonstrating the ways Pacific peoples are contesting negative stereotypes of Pacific cities; stereotypes that had previously impeded urban belonging, rootedness and city pride.

The second point is that in making the city ‘home’, urban dwellers are also emancipating themselves from the ideology of cultural authenticity that “confines indigenous people to the places imposed on them by the (post)colonial order” (Gagné and Trépiéd: 2016, 19). This too is an important shift enabling and mobilising urban settlement. As Gagné and Trépiéd discuss, Pacific cities as well as Pacific peoples living in other cities around the world, are continuously confronted by other urbanites’ desire for them to enact an ‘authentic indigenous identity’. This might take the form of continuing traditional social and cultural practices such as gender roles, kinship systems, or even dress, or being held to a stereotyped Indigenous ‘authentic identity’. As we have argued throughout the papers presented here, part of Pacific people’s urban home-making is freeing themselves from the limitations of these narratives of indigenous inauthenticity.

Across Pacific cities we are seeing people’s adoption of many new and ‘non-local’ media such as graffiti and tagging, international music genres, and technologies, to express themselves and build cultural belongings and identifications that they feel are truly their own. Influenced by global, local, diverse, innovative and positive framing of themselves, urbanites are building a stronger sense of belonging to their communities, their urban culture, and the broader world.



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<sup>1</sup> *Man blong taon* translated from Bislama to English means 'person belonging to / or from the city'.

<sup>2</sup> We choose to use "Pacific people" rather than "Pacific Islanders" a term that New Zealand scholars recently decreed as racist or neo-colonial. We also don't use the activist term "Pasifika" generally because of its nuance in specific contexts.

<sup>3</sup> Following the numerous debates on the ambiguity of the term "identity" (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000 for example), we choose to use the notion of "belonging" as suggested for example by Avanza and Laferté (2005), and by Dousset (2018: 13) who writes about "transitive social process" composed both through similarity and through being together. We do sometimes use the term "identification" to refer to more formal representational forms such as institutional or self-representative forms.

<sup>4</sup> Historically such meetings did occur on plantations and boats.

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