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THE COUNTERFEIT SAVAGE

(Te Aviri a te Etene)

A Study of Cook Islands Migrants,
Class and Racialisation in New Zealand

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in Anthropology at the

University of Adelaide

1984

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	
Ethnographic Setting	1
Approaches to the Study of Race and Ethnicity	3
Marxist Perspectives: The Political Economy of Labour Migration	6
Racism and Ethnicity as Forms of Social Categorisation	9
The Problem of the Reproduction of the Racialised Fraction of Labour	14
An Amended Model of Classes and the Social Categorisation of Migrants	18
Polynesian Migrant Labour and the Cook Islander Social Category	21
Performance and Improvisation	27
Thesis Outline	29
<u>Part I</u> The Racialisation of Migrant Labour in New Zealand	
<u>Chapter 1</u> The Political Economy of Cook Islands Migration	
Introduction	32
Dependent Development and Labour Migration	34
The Development of Cook Islands Dependency on New Zealand	37
Cook Islands Migration Patterns	50
Remittances, Land and Return Visiting: the Reproduction of Homeland Links	55
Remittances	63
'Investments' in Land	65
Summary	67
<u>Chapter 2</u> Cook Islanders at Work: the Reproduction of the Polynesian Fraction	
Introduction	70
Classes and the Polynesian Fraction in New Zealand	71
The Class Position of Cook Islanders and the Polynesian Fraction	75
Capital Structure	

	<u>Page</u>
Resources, Disqualifications and the Fetish of Education	92
Structural Effects and Cook Islanders' Perceptions of Their Work World	98
Conclusions	103
 <u>Chapter 3 The Housing of Cook Islanders</u>	
Introduction	106
The Contemporary Cook Islander Housing Situation	110
Racialisation and Class Conflict Over Housing	111
The Intervention of Capital in the Struggle for Accomodation	122
(a) Rationalisation	122
(b) Valuation	131
(c) Collectivisation	135
Standard Improvisations in the Struggle for Accomodation	
Conclusions	145
 <u>Chapter 4 Racialisation and Cook Islander Ethnic Ideology</u>	
Introduction	147
The Historical Context of Polynesian Racialisation	151
Pacific Islanders as 'Overstayers'	154
The 'Overstayers' and the Maori/Pacific Islander Separation	156
'One Family' and the Wayward Delinquents	158
The Savage: Violent Crime and the Dehumanisation of the Polynesian	162
Cook Islander Identity and Ethnic Ideology	165
Conclusions	177
 <u>Part II Cook Islanders as a 'Social Force': Ethnic Organisation and Improvisations</u>	
 <u>Chapter 5 Cook Islander Social Organisation</u>	
Introduction	180
The Church as Community Centre and the Institution of Elder-rule	182

	<u>Page</u>
The Enea Associations as the Focus of Ethnic Identity and Organisation	192
Aitutaki Enea	196
Pukapuka Enea	199
The Enea Hall Controversy	201
Sports Clubs: Mapu-Elder Conflict and 'Secular Ethnicity'	206
Politics and Voluntary Associations	210
Conclusion	217
 <u>Chapter 6</u> Marriage Practices and Personal Networks	
Introduction	220
Cook Islander Marriage Practices	220
Marriage Exchange and the Reproduction of the 'Ethnic Community'	227
Cook Islander Marriage Preferences	231
Mixed-Race Status and Ethnic Identity	234
Personal Networks and the Significance of Kinship, Ethnicity and Class	238
Conclusion	247
 <u>Chapter 7</u> Social Dramatizations: Contexts of Reflexivity and Ethnic Improvisation	
Introduction	251
Dramatizations as Contexts of Reflexivity and Improvisation	256
The <u>Uapou</u>	260
The <u>Pakotianga Rauru</u>	273
The <u>Tere-party</u> Culture Troupe Performance	288
Ideology and Conflicting Interests in Performance Discourse	291
Spatial Arrangements and Symbolic Forms as Modes of Transcendence and Transformation	295
Conclusion	302
 <u>Conclusions</u>	305
 <u>Appendices</u>	312

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SUMMARY

Over the past century and a half, New Zealand has developed economically and politically as a semi-colony or 'white settler dominion' within the world economic system (Bedggood, 1980; Armstrong, 1978). Often overlooked in the history of that development has been the importance of the coalescence of modes of production between the South Pacific islands nations and New Zealand into one regional political economy. Within this framework, New Zealand has emerged as the regional metropole in a dominant relationship to its peripheral micro-state neighbours. Increasingly throughout the 20th century New Zealand's influence has been a crucial factor in the evolution of the islands economies.

While the role of the State and foreign capital proved pivotal for New Zealand's own economic development, unequal relations with countries like the Cook Islands provided conditions which underwrote capitalist growth in New Zealand. In the latter half of the 19th century the restricted scope for the expansion of domestic capital was partially offset by the establishment of mercantile operations in the islands. The operations were facilitated by the cooperation of local ariki (chiefs) through the institution of the trade store, and subsequently the resident trader. British and later New Zealand colonial administrations intervened on behalf of the indigenous population, blocking private overseas capital from exercising full expropriative control.

Following World War II, which seriously depleted New Zealand's manpower, the growth of industrial capital was held up by severe labour shortages. The demand for labour set in motion a fundamental

shift in the articulation of modes of production between the islands and New Zealand. Serious pressure was brought to bear on the previous balance between subsistence, petty commodity and capitalist forms of production in the islands. The new articulation took the form locally and regionally of labour migration from the outer islands to the main island of Rarotonga, and to New Zealand.

This study begins with an examination of those historical processes, paying particular attention to the post-war changes in the South Pacific regional political economy and migration patterns. I consider the structural determinants of continuing Cook Islander migrant investment, remittances and circular migration back to the islands. But since social structures and individual practice are constituted in dialectical relationship to one another (cf. Bourdieu, 1977), I also demonstrate how migrant homeland links comprise creative improvisations regarding their position in New Zealand society.

In New Zealand I explore developments in the relations of production and distribution whereby Polynesian migrant labour -- including the internal migration of rural Maoris to large cities -- was recruited into less skilled blue collar work and concentrated into slum areas and State housing estates. Subsequent to rising working class power and recent economic recession, I show how ideological strategies of racialisation and ethnic categorisation (cf. Miles, 1982) were employed by capital and the State to reproduce most Polynesians as a fraction of the working class juxtaposed against labour-in-general. I also consider how a handful of Cook Islanders came to be situated in the 'supervisory' fraction of the working class and others in the petty bourgeoisie, but how they identify as -- and are perceived as -- a 'social category' which in some contexts acts as a 'social force' (Poulantzas, 1978).

In particular I pay attention to migrant social organisation, marriage practices and personal networks, along with Cook Islanders' cultural rites and performances. I show how all these are influenced profoundly by the wider social order such that there are fundamental differences between the 'ethnic community' and the home islands. I focus on the tere-party culture troupe performance, arguing that such institutions and performances provide settings for corporate Cook Islander reflection and creative improvisation regarding their relations with one another and the wider social order.