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‘... Souvlaki and a bit of lemon’: an Aboriginal Australian Greek story

Biographical note:

Bronwyn Fredericks (Cert IV Community Culture, Cert IV Training and Assessment, DipT, BEd, MEd, MEdStudies, PhD,) is Professor and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement) and BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) Chair in Indigenous Engagement at Central Queensland University, Australia. She is published in academic and community journals, including in *M/C Journal*, *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *Outskirts: Feminisms along the Edge*, *Cultural Studies Review*, *AlterNATIVE*, the *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues* and others. Bronwyn is a founding member of the Capricornia Arts Mob (CAM) which is a collective of Indigenous Australian artists, photographers, sculptors, mixed media artists and writers based in Central Queensland, Australia. She undertakes interdisciplinary research and is a member of the National Indigenous Researchers and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

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‘What do you Koories want to eat today? Seafood? Chicken? Lamb? I’ll take care of you. Your country is good to us Greeks.’

I may not be a Koori, but as an Aboriginal Australian woman – a Murri from south-east Queensland – I appreciated the sense of cultural connection and understanding that came with the waiter’s question. It reflects the intermingling that I appreciate between Australian Aboriginal culture and Australian Greek culture. And the food of the moment for me that I could taste in my mouth, despite just ordering, was seafood souvlaki, with a bit of lemon.

In Victoria, Aboriginal peoples are collectively known as Koories (Koori History Website 2014). It’s a name that most people are comfortable with, even though each Koori will also hold their own specific tribal affiliations (Horton 1999). For example, the people of the Kulin nation are the Traditional Owners of the land that is now known by the English name of Melbourne. I am an Aboriginal Australian woman who originates from south-east Queensland (Brisbane/Ipswich). In south-east Queensland, some groups are collectively referred to as Murries.

I often spend time in Melbourne, working with Koories in the inner-city suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood. These suburbs are known for their Aboriginal, migrant and refugee populations and working class heritage. They’re great cultural melting pots, and the Greek influence is strong.

Melbourne has the largest Greek-speaking population outside Europe, after Athens and Thessaloniki (Victorian Government 2013a). Although people began to migrate to Australia from Greece in 1827, most migrants arrived between 1945 and 1982. Melbourne has a strong Greek presence, with a Greek precinct in the city, Greek focal points in the suburbs, and a strong sense of Greek cultural pride. It’s easy to find Greek restaurants, cafes and cake shops, travel agents, music shops, bridal boutiques and religious shops.

My Koorie friends and I have our favourite Greek restaurants that we visit regularly – to talk and eat, and talk and eat some more. We know which restaurants satisfy our taste buds. We visit some restaurants so often that the staff know our names and know us as Aboriginal people.

Last week a group of us from Rockhampton, Brisbane and Darwin visited Melbourne for a meeting with the National Indigenous Researchers and Knowledges Network (NIRAN 2014). At the end of one of our working days a few of us walked from Lonsdale Street where we were staying, up Punch Lane into Little Bourke Street. Right in front of us was Kri Kri Mezethopoleion Greek Restaurant which none of us had tried before (Kri Kri 2014). We were unknown to this restaurant, and it was unknown to us.

Mezethes style is where everyone at the table shares mezethes or ‘small plates’ of individually prepared foods. There is no set entrée or main meal just a series of individual dishes served as they are cooked and in an order that would complement one another.

We ordered the dinner banquet that contained a large variety of mesethes, which could be shared between us not just in this Greek manner, but also in the Aboriginal way of sharing food (Foley 2005). Aboriginal people generally expect to share food with others and often experience the sharing of food as an affirmation of connections and relationships (Foley 2005, Fredericks & Anderson 2013). As we ate, we storied (Dulwich 1995) and yarned (Bessard & Ng'ando 2010) throughout the night about our research and as the plates of Calamari Lemonato (Fig. 1), Prawns with a tangy capsicum mayonnaise and rocket (Fig. 2), Keftethes, Kotopoulo Scaras, Armissia Paithakia (Fig. 3) and other dishes arrived, we savoured each one.

The food was delicious and it will now become known to us and connected to our memory of our time together in Melbourne.



Fig 1. Calamari Lemonato. Photo. Bronwyn Fredericks, 2014



Fig 2. Prawns with a tangy capsicum mayonnaise and rocket. Photo. Bronwyn Fredericks, 2014



Fig 3. Kefthetes, Kotopoulo Scaras and Arnissia Paithakia. Photo. Bronwyn Fredericks, 2014

The connections between the Greek community and the Australian Aboriginal community, extends back into the history of Greek migration. Over the years, there have been inter-marriages, common businesses, and support for each other's issues. One well-known Aboriginal-Greek couple, Merle Morgan and Alick Jackamos, did a lot to unite the two cultures. Merle Morgan is a Yorta Yorta woman who was born on the Cummeragunja Mission on the New South Wales side of the Murray River. Alick Jackamos was the son of Greek migrants who grew up in Collingwood. They married in 1951 and spent many years working in the local Aboriginal community – attending Pastor Nicholl's Gore Street church in Fitzroy and helping to develop and run the Aborigines Advancement League (AAL). Alick remains the only non-Aboriginal man to be awarded life-membership of AAL (Victorian Government 2013b). One of Alick's most lasting legacies is his photographic collection of Victoria's Aboriginal communities. As he travelled around the state with his work for the Victorian Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, or the AAL, he took many, many photographs (Broome and Manning 2006).

The children of these cross-cultural unions are making their way in contemporary times. For example, Kalliopi-Aspasia Koumalatsos expresses her Greek and Aboriginal heritage through her sculpture, painting and photography. Her work is vibrant and passionate in a way that is simultaneously Aboriginal and Greek. She was selected to participate in the first exhibition of Indigenous Australian art in Greece, at the Benaki Museum in Athens for the 2004 Olympic Games (Kanarakis 2011).

There's also a wonderful melding of Greek and Aboriginal cultures displayed by 'The Chooky Dancers' – ten young men from the Top End of Australia who blended Aboriginal dancing with Greek music. My guess is that, when 'The Chooky Dancers' got up to dance at the Ramingining Festival in September 2007, few expected that the group would go on to tour nationally and internationally. Their dance was filmed by Frank Djirrimbilpilwuy (2007) from Milingimbi, who is the father of one of the performers and has been involved in the Indigenous Media Industry for many years. He uploaded the

performance to You Tube, and with over two million viewers to date, the rest, as they say, is history. Six of the young men are now touring Australia under the group name of Djuki Mala offering performances in contemporary and traditional dance, along with and promoting healthy lifestyles (Hannaford 2014, Lallo 2014).

When the seafood souvlaki arrives, I squeeze on a bit of lemon and find myself reflecting on my own links with Greek culture. I've had wonderful times at *Paniyiri* (Paniyiri Greek Festival 2014) in Brisbane with my family and friends. *Paniyiri* is held every year in Musgrave Park, South Brisbane, on Jagara land and an original meeting place. The park is a remnant of a much larger former Kurilpa (South Brisbane) Aboriginal camping ground (Musgrave Park Cultural Centre Inc 2014). It is still a camping ground for some Aboriginal people. *Paniyiri*, now in its thirty-sixth year, is Queensland's celebration of all things Greek. For me it is a Greek celebration that is part of the landscape of Aboriginal Brisbane and a celebration for Aboriginal families too. It is always conducted with respect for the Aboriginal Land on which it is held.

I think that there are visual, auditory and physical sensations that come from the mixing of Aboriginal and Greek cultures. It is intriguing and stimulating – kind of like the zing you get from a Lilli Pilli (fruit) after a thick piece of bush peppered kangaroo or, right now, seafood souvlaki with a bit of lemon.

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Research statement

Research background

This work is written as creative non-fiction which moves from autobiographical to biographical through food, relationships and creative expression and reflects the relationship between Indigenous Australians and Greek migrants and where their cultures have influenced each other.

Research contribution

Establishing my creative writing as scholarship allows me to explore and extend my research focused on Australian race relations and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic 2012). This form of scholarship allows me to draw on Indigenous interests, methodologies and knowledges (Chilisa 2012) and position them as original contributions within the research domain (Australian Government 2012). The Indigenous research field within this process is the application of Indigenous knowledges in their various forms.

Research significance

This work positions existing and Indigenous knowledge in a new and creative way so as to offer new understandings, concepts and methodologies (Australian Government 2012). It offers new understandings as to how Indigenous peoples experience humanity and culture and contribute to cross cultural relationships within broader Australian society. This creative scholarship builds on previous research in the field and contributes to the growing body of work by Indigenous researchers that will assist in the understanding and knowledge development of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers of the future (Chilisa 2012).

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