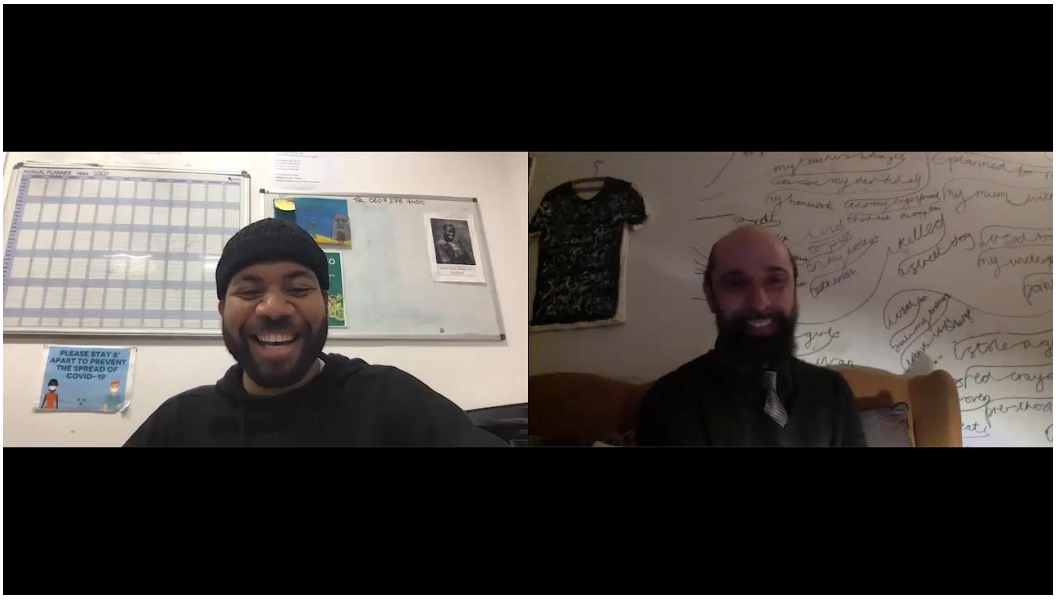
Forever Fresh Talanoa Series

Episode Rua/Two: u ok hun? (love + lockdown + London)

by Anne-Marie Te Whiu, Isoa Tupua, Lyall Hakaraia

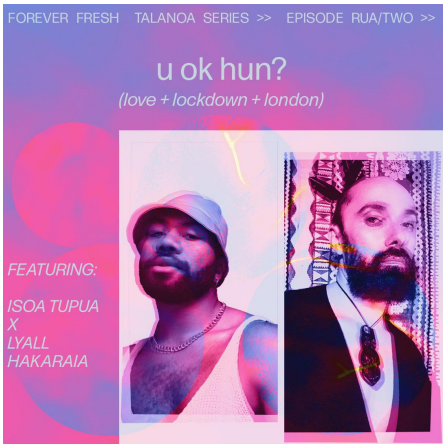
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Episode Rua/Two of our Talanoa Series features Lyall Hakaraia and Isoa Tupua, who are both part of the tagata Moana (Pacific/Oceanic peoples) and queer communities/scenes in London, UK.

Our second offering in this series (still recorded over Zoom) allows us to listen in on their discussion of queer spaces; their decline and erasure, as well as sharing their time as kids growing up in Fiji and Aotearoa. They compare their lives as part of the London diaspora, witnessing the bare minimum, gentrification and how to clock an invite to a sex party. As London and the rest of the UK (and world) struggle towards their Pan-iversary - where lockdown existed across 2020 and into 2021 - they muse on what the future will look like for queer communities and spaces in the 'new world'.

Click here to watch the second episode of the Talanoa series, and continue reading below for Anne-Marie Te Whiu's response to the video.



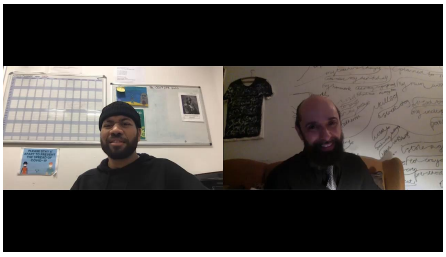
Forever Fresh Talanoa Series Episode Rua/ Two featuring Lyall Hakaraia and Isoa Tupua, 2021. Image courtesy Jessica Palalagi/In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series Episode Rua/ Two, 2021. Image courtesy Jessica Palalagi/ In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series featuring Anne-Marie Te Whiu, 2021. Image courtesy Jessica Palalagi/In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series Episode Rua/ Two featuring Lyall Hakaraia and Isoa Tupua, 2021. Image courtesy Jessica Palalagi/In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series Episode Rua/ Two featuring Lyall Hakaraia, 2021. Image courtesy Jessica Palalagi/In*ter*is*land Collective.



Forever Fresh Talanoa Series Episode Rua/ Two featuring Isoa Tupua, 2021. Image courtesy Jessica Palalagi/In*ter*is*land Collective.

“I’m Very Queer And I’m Very Happy Here” - Isoa Tupua

+

“I Came For A Cigarette, Not A Like, Thank you” - Lyall Hakaraia

When we say things like ‘don’t box me in’ or ‘it ticks a box’ or ‘they’re living life in a box’ are we imagining the four corners of a room? Or are we conjuring a six-sided, 3D box? Whenever I move house one of my favourite things to do, once all my stuff has been unpacked, is to slice through the tape and cardboard so that they

fold down to flat pieces, objects which become two-sided shapes. The satisfaction of reducing the box.

As I listened to and watched the delicious and expansive video conversation between Isoa Tupua and Lyall Hakaraia, I thought a lot about boxes and boundaries, about safety and sensuality, laughter and longing, fashion and freedom, drugs and drag-queens, art and the army, creativity and christianity, platforms and parameters, risk and returning to oneself and radical renaissance realness, about brothers and belonging, about energy and effortlessness and about how powerful and loving the 'hun' on the end of *are you ok hun?* is. I also reflected on how queer friends throughout my life have created queer spaces, moments, queer-scapes where I've felt that I've been able to be the most 'hun' I can be. How queer-ness is more riding waves than stepping in time. How being queer is mirrored by the moana[01] – ever changing, but always the ocean. How coming out can feel more like going in to ourselves and listening to what our wairua has always been saying – *you are multitudes*.

There was something so anchoring and dare I say hopeful about listening to Isoa and Lyall. Their generosity, humour and storytelling reminded me that it's true – we do get better, (or maybe should it be fuller or is it more rounded?) as we get older. This gives me a big boost of reassurance as I fast approach my 48th birthday. Reminiscing is one of the great privileges of aging and I so loved the warmth with which Isoa and Lyall painted pictures of their past lives, from their respective childhoods in Fiji and Aotearoa where the whole neighbourhood literally raised each other and being surrounded by artists, through to their moves abroad to England. Lyall shared how this relocation saw them witness gentrification, dealers at bus stops and crazy summer street fights; a time when they'd wear multi-coloured flared trousers, platforms, big pink fluffy coats, and no one cared. When both Lyall and Isoa reflect that "being different now is more noticeable that it was then" and "back then being different was normal", I yearn for a pre-social media past.

Lyall speaks about a time from their past – "I used to dress up, go out, there was endless champagne, there were no cameras, people just got on with it. Now people are *Can I take a picture of you?*".

This makes me question, is the social media realm as colonised as the physical world? Is Zuckerberg the Cook of these times?

Isoa shared how he and his friend stepped out into the sunshine one day, dressed in overtly queer outfits and white women responded to them by saying '*Yass Queen*'. This is overtly patronising from my perspective. It also speaks to Isoa's sense of body and aesthetic sovereignty – of dressing for no one but himself. I believe that Isoa is suggesting that if, in this instance, white women wanted to show support or behave as an ally, the best thing they could've done is leave Isoa and his friend alone – no snaps, no comments, no photos.

I remember when I was living in Brighton, UK in 1998, entering an Internet Café was a cutting-edge thing to do, but I was keen to try out this new technology I'd heard about – communicating via a thing called an 'email'. As someone who went to university during a period when there was a campus Computer Lab where thousands of students would patiently book in a week or a fortnight ahead to access one of the 12 computers for a 30-minute session, the concept of the Internet Café was radical and I felt very much out of my depth.

I held off creating social media accounts until 2012 and since then I've been a consistent scroller and uploader. Alongside this though, I do have shoeboxes and albums full of photos which I treasure, probably more than those which dot my digital timelines. These physical photos are so much more personal, more real to me in a way. I can touch them, they hold the scent of time, some curl at the edge, they are humble and have no expectation. Some are torn, some have biro cursive writing on the back with a date and names; their colour and shape help tell the story beyond the photo, which screens can only dream of. They don't seek to be liked or commented on – their only desire is to be, just as they are - which may sound "beige", but in our filtered, sculpted Instagram world, is actually fucking revolutionary. These photos are in a couple of old albums but mostly they're piled together in shoe boxes. I have masking-taped these boxes together many times to keep their shape and prioritised them with my every house move. Some boxes are worth keeping, for they hold pieces of the past.

Footnotes

01. If you'd like to understand an interpretation of the te Reo words used in this piece I encourage you to go to resources such as www.maoridictionary.co.nz/

Biographies



Anne-Marie Te Whiu (Te Rarawa) is a poet, editor, cultural producer and weaver based on unceded Gadigal lands in Australia. She has edited works such as *Solid Air: Australian and New Zealand Spoken Word*, *Whisper Songs* by Tony Birch and *More Than These Bones* by Bebe Backhouse. She is dedicated to platforming the creative output of Indigenous peoples around the world and is especially interested in the rigour of the artistic collective. She was previously the Co-Director of the Queensland Poetry Festival and was a recipient of The Next Chapter Fellowship through The Wheeler Centre. Her writing has been widely published in journals, books, sites and magazines such as *Another Australia*, *Sport*, *Te Whe ki Tukorehe* Volume 1, *Cordite*, *Rabbit*, *Australian Poetry*, *Tupuranga*, *Debris*, *SBS*, *Running Dog*, *Ora Nui*, *In*ter*is*land Collective* and *Contemporary HUM*. She is an Associate Editor of *Contemporary HUM*.



My name is Isoa Tupua. I am a Fijian queer who was born in Fiji but raised in the UK. The majority of my work has been with young people where I am actively trying to provide them with a perspective that is inclusive and provides care.



Lyall Hakaraia (Māori / Pākehā) is an artistic polymath and producer living in London whose work encompasses designing, curating, Art Directing, and programming a queer arts venue (VFD) in the East End. His work encompasses making communal ritualistic artwork, appearing in front of the camera and dressing celebrities for red carpet events. All of his work reflects his passion for working with marginalised people to create functioning communities. Lyall is proud of his diverse origins and is a founding member of Moku the first pacific arts collective in the UK and Fagamuffin the QTIPOC sound system.

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