REVIEW

HIGGINS, Nancy and Claire Freeman (eds): *Childhoods: Growing Up in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013. 344 pp, colour photos, $49.99 (paper).

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In popular myth, Aotearoa New Zealand is often portrayed as a great place to be a child. However, the book *Childhoods: Growing Up in Aotearoa New Zealand* (hereafter *Childhoods*) complicates this view. As Keith Ballard notes in his foreword to the book*,* Aotearoa New Zealand has the dubious distinction of being the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) country with some of the highest rates of child poverty and child suicide and some of the worst indicators of child health. Aotearoa New Zealand Ministry of Education (2010) statistics reveal striking disparities in children's educational outcomes. For example, Māori children are stood down or suspended from school at around three times the rate of Pākehā and Asian children, and Māori and Pacific children gain university entrance at a significantly lower rate than other groups (Ministry of Education 2010). The book *Childhoods* addresses such disparities while emphasising the need to read them in relation to the bigger story of growing social inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand *and* children's resilience, agency and diverse perspectives.

In my view, the book *Childhoods* has been published at a critical juncture in Aotearoa New Zealand, given increased public concern about child poverty, the Government's 2012 publication of the ''White Paper for Vulnerable Children'' and associated legislative changes (see http://www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz). The book's 26 authors and 19 chapters problematise simplistic imaginaries of childhoods while stressing the value and importance of listening to children's perspectives on their own lives. *Childhoods* is wide-ranging in terms of the academic disciplines that it represents, the topics that it canvases, the kinds of research it discusses and the children/childhoods that it discusses. The book is carefully structured around three broad sections. The first provides a theoretical and ethical framework for thinking about children and childhoods in Aotearoa New Zealand and a contextual background for the remainder of the book. The second highlights the diversity of childhoods in Aotearoa New Zealand, drawing on historical, geographical, disability studies, indigenous studies, legal studies, social work, education and media studies perspectives, and addressing topics as wide-ranging as early twentieth century schooling, urban children's play, being Māori and disabled, multicultural childhoods, children and family law, the needs of adopted and fostered children, children and work and technology and children. The third section foregrounds children and young people's voices in relation to a range of issues, including early childhood education

settings, having parents in prison, understandings of success, building queer-straight alliances in high school contexts, and transitioning to work.

I found the first section of *Childhoods* to be particularly strong. In their introductory chapter (Chapter 1), Claire Freeman and Nancy Higgins provide a justification for the book's focus, problematising popular myths about Aotearoa New Zealand as a children's paradise and highlighting the diversity of children and childhoods in Aotearoa New Zealand from a demographic perspective. In Chapter 2, Anne Smith then situates the remainder of the book theoretically, discussing the key concerns of childhood studies, specifically, its understanding of childhood as "as a social construction rather than a natural state" (p. 30), its interest in how discourses of childhood (or beliefs about children) shape children's lives, and its recognition of children as social actors in their own right (rather than adults-in-the-making) whose "voice" or "point of view" should inform all policy and practice that affects them (p. 33). Smith also situates both childhood studies and the book's focus in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in particular, its focus on the need to recognise children as people, to broker their participation in matters relevant to them, to privilege their perspectives on their own lives, and to recognise their voices as multiple rather than singular. These threads are continued throughout the remainder of the book. Smith concludes her chapter by discussing a key debate in childhood studies as being between those who advocate for attention to the multiplicity of childhoods and those who advocate for a focus on "commonalities that cut through class, ethnicity and gender" (p. 42). She argues that attention to both issues is important, a view that is echoed elsewhere in relation to social research more generally (for example, see Fine and Weis 2005). The remaining introductory chapters provide an environmental and an ethical perspective on children and childhoods in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Chapter 4, Claire Freeman considers children's changing environmental worlds and the impact these changes have on children's everyday lives and opportunities for play. In Chapter 5, Jude MacArthur and Margaret McKenzie note the importance of recognising ethics as a process rather than a one-off matter of 'consent', and stress the need to recognise children and young people as "*having experience* worthy of our research attention" but as "*inexperienced in the research context*" (p. 87, emphases original). MacArthur and McKenzie emphasise the need for researchers to develop their awareness of ethical issues relating to research with children, their knowledge about "national and international legal requirements about consent and context" (p. 90), and their competence in working with children, including their capacity to recognise when children are exercising agency, for example, by signalling a withdrawal of consent. Taken together, the introductory chapters provide an informative and thought-provoking basis for what follows.

The chapters in the second and third sections of *Childhoods* are also richly informative and likely to appeal to wide audience, but I found several chapters particularly compelling. These included Nicola Taylor and Megan Gollop's account of children and young people's participation in family law decision-making (Chapter 10), Anita Gibbs' discussion of the needs of adopted and foster children (Chapter 11), Ruth Gasson and James Calder's chapter on being young and working (Chapter 12), Julie Lawrence's chapter on children of prisoners (Chapter 15), and Kathleen Quinlivan's

chapter on queer-straight alliances in high school contexts (Chapter 17). Each of these chapters provide a full account of the issues at stake, situate the Aotearoa New Zealand context in relation to the broader international context, connect children's perspectives with broader structural factors (in line with Smith's argument, earlier), and provide a full enough account of the research project and research "data" (where relevant) to ensure that the stated implications are both nuanced and compelling. Other chapters are effective for their foregrounding of children and young people's agency alongside broader structural factors that shape or have shaped their lives. Examples include Judith Sligo and Karen Nairn's consideration of children's understandings of success (Chapter 16) and Moana Mitchell and Hazel Phillips' chapter exploring *rangatahi* Māori (young Māori's) experiences of transitioning to work (Chapter 18). Helen May (in Chapter 6) and Christina Ergler, Robin Kearns and Karen Witten (in Chapter 7) provide rich historical insights into children's experiences of school and urban children's play respectively.

I have three criticisms of *Childhoods*. The first is that it would have been helpful if the editors had explicitly articulated who are included as "children" either near the beginning of the book or in its title. This may be self-evident for those familiar with UNCRC (which includes as "children" all those under 18 years of age), and the editors do make mention in their introductory chapter of the provision of "free" schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand "for children from 5-18 years" (p. 23), however, I worry that some people with an interest in older children or "youth" may not recognise the book's relevance to them. (In reality, *Childhoods* contains some very rich material that would likely be of great interest to those who work in secondary schools or other contexts involving older children). My second criticism is that a few of the chapters make extensive reference to research that the authors have already published elsewhere, or broad statements about research findings, without providing sufficient detail for the reader to judge the credibility of the analytic/interpretive judgments made. As a result they feel a little long on interpretation and short on "evidence". All of the chapters deal with interesting and important topics, but some are more comprehensive, compelling and convincing than others. Finally, given that in Chapter 1, the editors position Aotearoa New Zealand as "a Pacific country in location and increasingly in orientation" (p. 18), I was surprised that *Childhoods* contains no chapters that explicitly focus on Pacific children's perspectives or issues relating to Pacific children specifically.

Overall, however, this book is both timely and important. It offers a useful resource for students, scholars and practitioners working in areas such as health, education, law and social work along with anyone who is interested in matters relating to children and childhoods (including "youth" or older children) in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am currently using Anne Smith's theoretical chapter as required reading in a Masters level education course and I anticipate using other chapters as course readings in future. International readers will find that the book offers a comprehensive and informative insight into childhoods in the Aotearoa New Zealand context and that, in many cases the authors also make comparative links to contexts elsewhere. In addition, many of the chapters in *Childhoods* are likely to be useful from a policy-development perspective, providing refreshing and unique insights into children's perspectives on issues that affect them in Aotearoa New Zealand.

WANHALLA, Angela: *Matters of the Heart: A History of Interracial Marriage in New Zealand.* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013. 316 pp., bib., illustrations, index, notes. $49.99 (paper).

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Wanhalla has written an essential history of interracial relationships in New Zealand that begins from the first interactions between Māori and Europeans through to contemporary society. Throughout the book Wanhalla provides evidence from her extensive national and international research on this topic. This evidence allows her to articulate New Zealand experiences with an understanding and knowledge of interracial relationships that occurred within other colonised countries, although there may have been different outcomes.

Matters of the Heart covers all significant differing views on interracial relationships within New Zealand society, including views of acceptance, social disapproval, necessity for assimilation policies, and views that these relationships could not and would not last. The acceptance and disapproval of interracial relationships appears to have gone in and out of fashion. Wanhalla begins in 1769 with the arrival of European explorers, whalers, traders and missionaries, then European settlers and finally the arrival of other immigrant groups. She discusses the acceptance of temporary or permanent relationships between Pākehā men and Māori women. Of importance is her in-depth discussion explaining that sexual contact between Māori women and European men was not necessarily prostitution. Although prostitution did occur, Wanhalla explains that it was more common that faithful intimate relationships were formed between these couples, at least until the man was required to leave – a form of marriage, therefore, rather than prostitution. Wanhalla also discusses how during this same period it was uncommon and rarely accepted that there would be any type of relationship between Pākehā women and Māori men. Wanhalla writes of how some early interracial relationships were part of a process for acquiring Māori land, but she also provides evidence that these unions were more than a form of land transaction. Through her research on inheritances Wanhalla has discovered that many of these European men left provision not only for the children, but also for their Māori wives, providing some evidence that these were relationships between two people who loved and cared for each other.

Matters of the Heart also explores the importance, significance and treatment of the "half caste" offspring which resulted from interracial relationships. It was not uncommon for the European father to care for his children and raise them with an understanding of both Māori and European worldviews. As a governmental system developed in New Zealand some of these "half caste", especially those who were raised and educated within the European centres, became beneficial employees of the government. And the acceptance of Māori within the newly established European centres was observed so long as Māori were married to a European and conformed to European custom and mannerisms, such as dress and the use of the English language.

Wanhalla discusses the establishment of different assimilation and amalgamation policies that began from early colonial days through the 1960s. Interracial relationships

were encouraged as an essential process for the amalgamation of cultures and it was seen to be good for race relations, although largely supported so Māori could be amalgamated into Pākehā culture and way of living. These interracial relationships, however, were not always accepted within general European society. It was believed, especially in the twentieth century, that the notion of an interracial marriage would be doomed from the beginning.

Matters of the Heart covers a history of interracial relationships not only between Māori and Pākehā. Wanhalla has carefully and skilfully acknowledged and included the relationships between other immigrant groups and Māori or Pākehā. Even though these relationships were not as common as those between Māori and Pākehā, they are, nevertheless, still an important part of New Zealand history and contribute to a number of identities that exist in today's society. The relationships she discusses are both temporary and permanent, and involve other European, Asiatic, African, Indian and American immigrant groups. Wanhalla explores several issues that surrounded these unions.

Wanhalla has produced a well-written and easy to read book. She has incorporated a number of stories that reference some of New Zealand's prominent characters. Therefore, the reader who has some knowledge of New Zealand historical figures would understand the significance of their relationships and find this book most enjoyable. Wanhalla has also included a vast number of impressive images that have been placed into five groups within the book, almost like albums, for the reader to glance through. These images themselves tell interesting stories and Wanhalla has enhanced this by including excellent commentary with each.

Any person who has an interest in the social history of New Zealand would find this book most beneficial. This review has only touched on some of the many interesting and engaging topics that Wanhalla has researched. From the Preface to the Epilogue, Wanhalla holds the attention of the reader as she tells of intricate and intimate stories of interracial relationships that began with the arrival of the first Europeans to New Zealand through to relationships of today. She debunks the sensationalism of other historians whose writings of New Zealand history have focused on Māori women as promiscuous and used for prostitution. *Matters of the Heart* focuses on the significance interracial relationships had, and continue to have, on the formation of New Zealand society. Wanhalla does this through exploring personal stories, describing societal acceptances and disapprovals, and providing explanations and outcomes of government policies. *Matters of the Heart* is an excellent resource for any academic or student and is a book that anyone who has an interest in New Zealand social history should consider having on their bookshelf.

References

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