

JPS

The Journal
of the
Polynesian Society

VOLUME 124 No.2 JUNE 2015

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND



REVIEWS

Mallon, Sean, Kolokesa Mahina-Tuai and Damon Salesa (eds): *Tangata o le Moana: New Zealand and the People of the Pacific*. Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2012. 392 pp., biblio., illustrations, index., photos. NZ\$79.99 (softcover). ISBN: 978-1-87785-72-8.

MICHELLE SCHAAF
University of Otago

Despite Pacific peoples' lengthy association with New Zealand, their social histories, local knowledge and knowledge vital to their "identity" exist on the margins of wider New Zealand society and as a mere footnote in academia. *Tangata o le Moana* gives voice to and validates the experiences of our Pacific communities and their contribution to the society of New Zealand, which has seldom been acknowledged.

Edited by Sean Mallon, Kolokesa Mahina-Tuai and Damon Salesa, this publication is the outcome of a four year research programme for the "Tangata o le Moana" exhibition which opened at Te Papa in 2007. There has been no one publication that has woven together multiple strands of the Pacific story in New Zealand; this is the first type of book to do so.

What caught my initial attention, as *Tangata o le Moana* was reviewed, was the vivid aesthetics of the book cover and how it would fit nicely among the books on the coffee tables of any New Zealand home. While reading this book, I did so as a member of a peripheral Pacific community in the South Island, and this review is written from this perspective.

The text features 15 essays on the history of Pacific peoples' interaction with New Zealand and the impact it has had on its Pacific neighbours. A major appeal for this vibrantly illustrated historical publication is that it incorporates archival records and oral histories, and numerous historical and contemporary photos. These complement 50 years of individual and academic-based research by leading New Zealand academics.

Most importantly, the book presents uniquely Pacific perspectives which validate the voices of Pacific peoples who have contributed to the fabric of New Zealand society. Key events and occurrences that have influenced the shape of Pacific life and identity in New Zealand are examined. These events point to a number of Pacific peoples who have made significant contributions to New Zealand over the past century, and who have rarely been documented or acknowledged.

The collection of essays provide a chronology of themes, moments, people and events that centres Pacific people as active agents in their histories with New Zealand. The chapters present, trace and highlight specific areas of achievement (politics, business, arts and sports) and of concern (health, unemployment and education). While this publication mentions individuals, "community", which is a central feature of Pacific cultures, cannot be overlooked.

A prominent theme discussed in detail is Pacific people's inter-twined and shared past with Māori. The origins of today's indigenous Pacific peoples and their connections as ancestors of Māori is established through voyaging and discovery accounts, oral history and archaeology.

Then the epic story of Polynesian voyaging is conveyed through a Māori lens and through Tupaia who led James Cook's expedition, piloted the *Endeavour* and was the first Pacific Islander on record to visit New Zealand. Both Māori and Pacific communities share similar experiences of colonisation. New Zealand's colonial aspirations ignored Pacific peoples' contribution to the New Zealand's war effort. Cook Islanders and Niueans were committed to the war effort. They were dedicated members of the New Zealand (Māori) Pioneer Battalion.

Both peoples formed New Zealand's Pacific peripheral domain, as part of the postwar boom. They lived in poorer areas of New Zealand cities and worked in the least desirable and low paying jobs. This proximity nurtured public and private bonds, which have been maintained in sports clubs and political arenas, and in the creative arts of music, literature and art.

A Pacific brotherhood in the form of the Polynesian Panthers was supported by CARE and Ngā Tamatoa as part of the protest movements during the 1970s. It was a politically volatile era of the dawn raids, as a result of New Zealand's foreign policy in the Pacific during that era.

A primary focus of *Tangata o le Moana* is on Pacific success and the influence in all areas of New Zealand society, including sport, politics and broadcasting, and in the creative and performing arts. While particular individuals were mentioned, the driving force of Pacific community spirit was central to shaping the Pacific presence in New Zealand. That story echoes the experiences of the first Pacific voyagers to settle in New Zealand and their struggle to adapt to a new land. The 20th century has been one of overcoming hardship and trials for Pacific migrants to New Zealand to establish their own unique culture in New Zealand.

This book briefly comments on the debate surrounding explanations for Pacific peoples' sporting success, in particular, the representation of Pacific peoples as sporting heroes and the impact on Pacific peoples in general. Whether viewed negatively or positively, sport has provided a cultural bridge for Pacific peoples' inclusion in New Zealand society. More than any other institution, sport has brought Pacific peoples to public attention and within the "national" frame. In doing so, sport has created many Pacific role models necessary for New Zealanders to overcome their own prejudices evidenced during the "dawn raids", and for Pacific peoples to be able to see their own succeed on the national and international stage. Since the 1970s, Pacific peoples have, disproportionate to their overall population, achieved remarkable sporting success and contributions.

The discussion of Pacific art making is comprehensive and informative. The pervasive issue of identity and sense of place continues to be prominent in the lives of Pacific peoples. This issue has also influenced the works of Pacific artists, writers, film makers and musicians. Pacific artistic pioneers created their work within Western constraints and genres. The Pacific artists from the 1990s were less likely to follow traditional conventions. Contemporary writers, performers and artists are

no longer constrained by Western conventions. They exhibit, dance, paint, act when and where they please.

In addressing and challenging the troubled histories of Pacific peoples in relation to New Zealand, *Tangata o le Moana* not only fulfils its purpose, it also acts as a vehicle that contains invaluable images, histories, memories, artefacts and knowledge for future generations, in particular Pacific peoples.

Shore, Cris and Susanna Trnka (eds): *Up Close and Personal: On Peripheral Perspectives and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge*. New York: Berghahn, 2013. 271 pp., index, photos. US\$120 (hard cover), \$34.95 (soft cover).

RICHARD HANDLER
University of Virginia

According to Cris Shore and Susanna Trnka, anthropology is “arguably the most reflexive (some would say neurotically so) discipline in the social sciences” (p. 14). They might have added that anthropological reflexivity is closely related to anthropologists’ interest in their discipline’s history. Indeed, anthropology is also, “arguably”, the only one of the social sciences (history included!) that takes its disciplinary history seriously as a source of critical perspective on current theoretical and methodological issues. And an important source for the history of anthropology is, it goes without saying, interviews with the elders. Interviewing the elders is something about which anthropologists are *not* particularly neurotic; to the contrary, we rather enjoy it. One certainly has the sense that Shore and Trnka enjoyed bringing into being the 12 interviews collected in this volume, material that will be a boon for future historians of anthropology.

The interviewees (some less elder than others) were Gillian Cowlshaw, Nelson Graburn, Michael Jackson, Joan Metge, Howard Morphy, Nicolas Peterson, Christopher Pinney, Nigel Rapport, Anne Salmond, Marilyn Strathern, David Trigger and Susan Wright. Because the editors were looking for more than “unmediated autobiographical musings”, they led these subjects “through a set of semi-structured questions... to tease out the connections between personal history, intellectual influences and disciplinary formation” (p. 3). While the questions for each interview are not identical—the interviewers followed the contour of each particular conversation—Shore and Trnka asked everyone (among other questions) how they discovered anthropology, how their writings have grown out of various kinds of fieldwork encounters and how their professional work led them to involvement in wider social issues. Their ultimate “rationale” they tell us, was “to examine the relationship between knowledge production and anthropological location”, with particular attention to the question of how the anthropology produced in the peripheral nation-states of Australia and New Zealand “differs from its counterparts in Britain’s mainstream metropolitan centres” (p. 4). The resultant interviews are wonderfully lucid and informative, though it is not clear that one can produce a general answer to such a question from the stories collected here.

For one thing, this is hardly a “peripheral” group of scholars; most anthropologists, wherever located, will know the work of at least some of these people. For another thing, these anthropologists, like many of us, work in multiple settings and countries, as, indeed, Shore and Trnka note. Thus it is not clear, perhaps, how to connect the “knowledge production” of any one of these practitioners, or of anthropologists generally, with singular places in our biographies. Still, the obvious starting point (as the editors and many interviewees note) is the place of indigenous peoples in post-colonial settler societies and, in particular, the difference—to anthropology, to global human rights—that the past half century of struggles over land claims and cultural appropriations in Australia and New Zealand has made. As Shore and Trnka note in their concluding remarks, compared to Canada and the United States, these “peripheral” nation-states have taken major strides “towards recognition of the responsibilities of contemporary governments for the damage and suffering inflicted by the laws and policies of their predecessors” (p. 249). And many of the interviewees have interesting stories to tell about their participation in this world-historical process.

Some of those stories concern working with indigenous people to gather materials they can use both for legal claims and for community education; others concern particular individuals and incidents. One instructive type of story tells of anthropologists’ critics and even enemies in the communities where they were working. In some of these stories, community members defended the anthropologists; in others, the latter had to retreat or make do as best they could, having learned something, along the way, about how arguments are conducted in the worlds they were studying. Another type of story that several interviewees tell concerns how to work with bureaucratic organisations like courts of law, museums, government commissions and, of course, universities. Here the peripheral locations of some of the interviewees (during some phases of their careers) shed light on “the increasingly intrusive... normative ordering associated with neoliberal forms of governance” (p. 248). As some of these interviews remind us, the working conditions of anthropologists both inside and beyond the academy are changing rapidly, and we need all the guidance we can get as to how to survive and prosper.

There is much guidance, amusement and pleasure to be had from these dozen interviews. Each of them is, in its own way, a “good read”. As I think the editors must have hoped for at the outset, the results of their project have transcended the conceptual framework (about knowledge production) the volume as a whole seeks to articulate, while nonetheless speaking tellingly to the editors’ central concerns.

Twenty five years ago, I undertook an interview with David Schneider, with the intention of publishing it as an article in a scholarly journal. Four years and more than a dozen interviews later, the project appeared as a book, *Schneider on Schneider: The Conversion of the Jews and Other Anthropological Stories* (Schneider 1995, transcribed, edited and with an introduction by R. Handler). Many of Schneider’s students have since told me they not only hear their teacher’s voice in the interviews, they also find them to be among his most illuminating writings. Enterprising young anthropologists take note: the interviews published in *Up Close and Personal* are only the beginning; follow-up interviews are in order.