

*The Pacific Festivals of Aotearoa New Zealand: Negotiating Place and Identity in a New Homeland*

Jared Mackley-Crump

University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu (2015)

ISBN 978 0 8248 3871 3

Reviewed by Fuli Pereira

The formation of cultural identity within the diasporic Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand is the central concern here. Multi-layered in nature and riddled with incongruities as lived realities, identity negotiation is as complex and dynamic as the fieldwork site selected for the research basis of this publication – that is, the two major Pacific festivals held annually in Aotearoa New Zealand; Wellington’s Positively Pasifika Festival and Auckland’s Pasifika Festival.

Wellington’s Positively Pasifika Festival is a comparatively recent phenomenon, eventually established as an annual event in 2008. It did however have a powerful precursor in the ‘Tu Fa’ataasi’ festivals held bi-annually between 1994 and 1998. Wellington Civic Square’s refurbishment, which saw the building of a new central library and the conversion of the old library into the Wellington City Art Gallery, had been completed in 1992 and what better way for the community to embrace and ‘own’ civic spaces than to hold festivals in them. Auckland’s Pasifika Festival on the other hand was established as an annual event from its inception in 1993, and has been hosted for all but one of its 24 years within the 64 acres of Western Springs Park, Western Springs. The only time the festival was held at an alternative venue was in 2015 when an altogether other migrant (the Australian fruit fly) was discovered in the area. The threat it poses to New Zealand’s horticultural industry is such that restrictions regarding the movement of fresh produce in the surrounding suburbs, caused the festival to be moved to Hayman Park in Manukau, South Auckland.

The book is well organised and clearly set out. Presented in two parts, the three chapters of Part One outline the cultural, social and political histories that have shaped Pacific communities and lives in New Zealand. Chapter 1 explores how New Zealand has come to have such a large diasporic Pacific community; what were the local and international factors that compelled this migration, and where did the migrants come from? The author backgrounds the historical ties and familial links between Pacific people and the Māori of New Zealand, but takes as his starting point the “great migration” of the mid-twentieth century. It was an era of unmasked paternalism, although with largely socially-stable relationships with the Pākehā majority, which a time of economic stability usually affords. It was also a time of ambivalence and prickly adjustment as Māori and Pacific people sought to negotiate a mutually respectful relationship. This relationship would be founded on the recognition of tangata whenua rights and obligations and the corresponding rights and obligations of a migrant ‘older sibling’ under the rubric of whānau ‘family’. The economic downturn of the 1970s had a devastating effect within these communities, and a new kind of familial relationship took shape between Māori and their migrant kin, a ‘kinship of the marginalized’. It is a superficial ‘kinship’ that continues to this day, however textured by time and community, and binds forged on a visceral level to do with mutual support, intermarriage and dual ethnicity of successive generations.

Many migrants of the 1950s and 1960s did not speak English and had low skill levels but they knew that their children’s future lay in a Western education. For them the foreign replaced the familiar, the nuclear family replaced large extended families and networks, and the church replaced the village as the axis of social engagement. The 1960s and particularly the 1970s were crucible years for the children of the Pacific diaspora, the 1980s and 1990s saw a generation of children of this diaspora come of age. This new generation was socialised and

politicised in New Zealand during a heightened period of social unrest. They were better educated than their parents' generation, and had accrued the skills and experiences to work to better the lot of their people and communities. Attaining positions in local government and in other social agencies enabled them to facilitate and support new initiatives to enable their communities to operate in the social and political spheres, and as this book shows, as well, in the creative industries.

A history of Pacific festivals in Aotearoa New Zealand is traced from the early International Exhibition of 1906 in Christchurch, which featured Pacific people from Rarotonga, Fiji and Tonga. There was the later 1925 New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition in Dunedin, and the Auckland South Sea Festival of 1943 that showcased performances by early migrants from Samoa, Tonga and Niue. Useful tables are included which list chronologically from the watershed moment in 1976 of the inaugural Auckland Secondary Schools Māori and Pacific Islands Cultural Festival, 'Polyfest', to include dates and locations of other Polyfest-style competition based festivals, One-off Pasifika festivals, including the comparatively new Multicultural/Community Festivals.

An ethnomusicologist by training, Mackley-Crump applied an interdisciplinary approach which borrowed from diaspora studies, festival studies and anthropology for the gathering, interpretation and presentation of his findings. But a sense of academic cringe permeates those sections regarding the approach and theoretical grounding of the book, perhaps an aversion to anthropology and its methodologies. Mackley-Crump claims: 'I adopt a functional approach, as opposed to one rooted in musical analysis' (19). However, he also asserts that 'ethnomusicology...offers a unique approach to viewing diaspora and cultural change' (6), and 'this work is an ethnomusicological study of diaspora situated within the site of festivals' (19). However, despite these jolting qualifiers, the framing of the thesis and research methodology is clear, coherent and consistently carried through the book.

The fieldwork, carried out over two periods in 2010 in Auckland and Wellington, includes clearly many hours of interviews with festival organisers and festival participants. The final chapter of Part One outlines the four main themes that emerged out of these interviews: logistics, leadership, and development; performance and material culture; community; and place, identity, and belonging. Each of these becomes the four discussion chapters of the second half of the book. The ethnography has allowed as many of the interviewees' voices to be presented as possible, at apt moments, by judicious use of fairly extensive direct quotes.

As well as interviews with the majority of Pacific islands people involved in the organisation of both the Wellington and Auckland Pacific festivals, Mackley-Crump has accessed the literature on cultural identity amongst New Zealand's Pacific communities authored by Pacific people. University lecturer Dr Melani Anae, academic Dr Anne-Marie Tupuola and sociologist Dr Karlo Mila-Schaaf are major contributors. Their works are insightful both for their academic rigor and because they are themselves the children of the diaspora. They contribute concepts respectively such as 'identity journeys' for the processes and encounters on the road to identity formation; 'edgewalkers' in reference to those with the wherewithal to mediate between local agencies and their Pacific communities; and 'polycultural capital' the social capital or the agency accrued by Pacific people as they operate in the middle ground between their Pacific communities and external agencies and institutions.

These abilities to operate appropriately in the middle ground between their Pacific communities' aspirations and needs and the policies and procedures of local government departments are expressed in institutional speak as 'cultural competencies' and 'community

capabilities'. Such competencies and capabilities have increasingly become reflected in job descriptions, included as Key Performance Indicators and underpin many a 'Strategy' paper within local government operations. So there is recognition within the work place that the appropriate servicing of those communities is a desirable goal, at the very least a civic duty.

This book will appeal to a broad readership as it is an easy read for non-academics and academics alike. The structure and layout is effective and coherent, it is informant-led and largely unburdened with endless theoretical dissection that is the scourge of academic writing. There is a helpful glossary of commonly used Polynesian words at the front, many of which have become acceptable colloquialisms in twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand. The book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the nature of identity and identity formation. The explorations of the diasporic condition, the meaning-making of adaptation and adoption, and the influence of place and history that so fundamentally influence identity formation is a must read for all those interested in cross-cultural histories of Aotearoa New Zealand.