

*Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds*

By Anne Salmond

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*Tears of Rangi* is, says Anne Salmond, an exploration of ontology, defined as “the study of the nature of reality, along with the basic categories of being and their relations” (18). For Salmond, relationality structures te ao Māori, as expressed in whakapapa, but also the hau (the wind of life). Practices, such as giftgiving, bore hau and when exchanged entangled people in relationships, creating obligations and responsibilities. But as Salmond notes, “hau drives the whole world, not just human relations” (10). Relationships are forged across time, space, and worlds, which are enacted and reinforced through ritual and exchange. Repurposing Richard White’s concept of the “middle ground”, Salmond positions the pae as expressive of where “recursive exchanges, identity takes shape, and shifts” (13). In this dynamic liminal space past, present and future “intermingle and change places” as people, ancestors, and cosmologies meet (13). In this space people, land, sea and sky, and the world of the gods are connected across space and time. Moreover, these are dynamic interactions, subject to change at any moment. Density and adhesiveness of relational networks, which require constant maintenance, are not timeless, but can be disrupted through certain actions.

Salmond seeks to explain and elucidate the worldviews that underpinned Māori and European life at the moment of encounter, how these ontologies structured cross-cultural engagement, and also shaped the grounds upon which communication could take place. Structured in two parts, the larger section, of eight chapters, focuses on the years 1769 to 1840 and “early encounters”. Here Salmond returns to familiar territory, revisiting her earlier work, but with contemporary questions in mind. These contemporary matters are explored in the four chapters that constitute the second section of the book: Rivers, Land, Sea and People, and are drawn from a series of public lectures. In Part II, Salmond draws together historical reference points with contemporary debates, using whakapapa, in particular, as an ordering analytical framework. Whakapapa is “a way of being based on complex networks that encompass all forms of life, interlinked and co-emergent, might assist in exploring relational ways of understanding the interactions between people and the land, other life forms, waterways and the ocean” and these may, argues Salmond, “help in devising non-linear, recursive ways of investigating the dynamic interactions among different life-forms” (3). Hau animates phenomena, and whakapapa connects these phenomena together across space and time. This relational and networked world where cosmology, space, time, people and place are interconnected. In Part I, this dynamic world is set against a European one defined by linearity, scientific classification, stadial thinking and a separation between nature and culture.

Through a fine-grained set of case studies into histories of early encounter and exchange, mainly located in the far north of Aotearoa, *Tears of Rangi* explores these “experiments across worlds”, and asks if Māori and European ways of being and knowing were so different as to prevent communication, connection, and relationality. Salmond begins with the worlds of Tupaia and Cook, examining scientific thinking, with its grids and hierarchies of knowledge, classifications, and taxonomies. This is followed by chapters on Christian ideas about the creation of the world and the role of stadial thinking in the evangelical enterprise. The order and structure of mission life is explored too, particularly the discipline of British models of education. Given the stress on the connectedness and relationality, Salmond makes expert use of the relationship forged between Ngāpuhi chief Hongi Hika and the missionary Thomas Kendall to question the extent to which they could inhabit a shared reality or a “one world ontology” (196). She suggests that this was possible. Of early encounters, Salmond argues

there was a “rough intelligibility” forged in relation to concepts and practices but, just as networks of connection could be dense and highly adhesive at certain points, they were also subject to challenge and disruption, and thus “efforts at engagement often backfired, thwarted by different assumptions about how the world works” (17). This was the case in particular areas of life where ideas about land and resources differed markedly, as well as understandings of family life and gender too, among others.

In Part 2, Salmond looks at the ways engagements and experiments across worlds have shaped approaches to waterways, land, the sea and people. Having drawn from historical encounters centred mainly upon the Bay of Islands, in the second section, Salmond ranges wider, touching upon Whanganui, the East Coast and the South Island. To what degree can the “experiments across worlds” that took place in nineteenth century Bay of Islands with very specific histories of people and place, be useful frameworks through which to explore contemporary debates? Salmond, however, expertly draws together the specific histories of particular locations and people and makes a compelling case for the interconnected lineages of the past and present, between the human past and contemporary social and environmental challenges.

*Tears of Rangi* is the work of a scholar who has been deeply immersed in te ao Māori. With its emphasis on networks, connections and relationships *Tears of Rangi* represents the culmination of decades of research and collaborations across worlds and disciplinary boundaries. It is a rich, compelling and original work that offers the reader an immersive methodological, conceptual, and philosophical encounter across worlds.