

False Divides

By Lana Lopesi. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2018.

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Reviewed by Te Rina Warren

Written by Lana Lopesi, an Aotearoa based woman who connects to the Moana through Samoa, this book gives insight to the colonial formation of ‘false divides’ that impact indigenous and Moana peoples. The use of ‘Moana peoples’ is used by the author to describe the indigenous peoples of what is known as the colonial ‘Pacific Ocean’, Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa or more broadly Oceania. Throughout the book there are several conscious differentiations between the use of indigenous terms and colonising labels. However terms are used interchangeably, and the book includes a glossary for those unfamiliar with Māori and Moana common terminology.

False Divides consists of five chapters discussing the idea of ‘divides’ that seek to separate indigenous peoples and those of the Moana in many different ways; including land boundaries, political systems, and migration. The context of the book is introduced with a personal narrative describing the inherent need to connect, and concludes with another narrative that illustrates how we connect in contemporary times. Acknowledging the work of Moana scholars such as Hau ‘ofa (1998), the first chapter examines how the Moana or Oceania is connected and sexualised by the colonial project and its associated myths. Chapter two draws on the work of scholars such as Banivanua Mar (2016) which considers early contact with non-Moana people (Europeans, Palagi), the colonisation of the Moana, and describes major decolonisation efforts from across the Moana. This chapter also provides a political analysis of the Moana, and considers of the role of the United Nations in decolonisation efforts and critiques the attitudes and actions of settler colonies, such as New Zealand and Australia. The creation and recreation of borders for territories and nations are examined as ‘false divides’ that serve to keep Moana peoples separated, but state that these are divides that can be overcome. Drawing on more Moana scholars (for example O’Carroll, 2013; Salesa, 2017), the following two chapters of this book investigate the impact of colonisation on the migration and displacement of Moana peoples in the era of ‘globalisation’ and economic transnationalism. It would seem that many of the points made in this book are premised on an explicit knowledge that Moana peoples have always been a global people (migrating and trading well before the arrival of Europeans) and that Moana peoples have also always resisted colonial oppression in a myriad of ways.

This book explores the impact of both the internet and air travel as contemporary contributors to connecting Moana peoples. It provides an investigation of the internet and the uptake of digital technologies among indigenous peoples across the globe. Lopesi identifies that while there are issues of limited access to digital technology for indigenous peoples, including high costs and inadequate infrastructure, indigenous populations are among the earliest users of this technology. Furthermore, she states that contrary to the belief that indigenous peoples ‘have’ to adapt, indigenous peoples have willingly adopted and adapted digital technology for their own purposes in new and ever evolving ways. The exploration of the internet as a means of connection, despite its uses for neo-liberal globalisation identify that this space poses both benefits and disadvantages for indigenous peoples. There are myriad ways in which indigenous peoples (specifically Moana peoples) use the internet to connect, reorganise, revitalise, and support each other across spaces. These include: email groups, chat rooms, websites, and more recently social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. All of these spaces are described

by Lopesi as being used by Moana peoples to connect to each other and discuss pertinent issues that impact indigenous lives. More importantly, Moana people are creating and coopting spaces to revive, reclaim, and reaffirm cultural language, knowledge and practises. This book states that, for Moana people, one of the internet's significant roles is to maintain relationships across spaces, just as the Moana has connected people for generations.

Focusing on the establishment of imposed colonial boundaries, *False Divides* explores the partition of people, histories and futures. This book provides an artistic analysis of how the internet is being used as a connecting tool for indigenous peoples. It comes complete with personal narratives that provide context and shares experiences of connecting through the internet. Within these narratives, Lopesi makes a political statement throughout this book that reclaims the Moana as a connector rather than a separator. This point offers a potential answer to the question posed on the cover of the book 'how do we get to know each other again?'

While Lopesi cautions Moana peoples about the use of the internet this book largely focusses on the advantages of using online spaces. The consumption of mass media features in her writing as a means by which to create a new reality. The idea that mass media is a colonial construct that carries all associated colonising abilities is, however, not explored. Rather, *False Divides* delivers a key discussion about reconnecting through technology and it demonstrates how Moana peoples move through divides in unique and technological ways. With a limited amount of literature pertaining to indigenous peoples, technology and the internet, this piece of writing is a significant contribution for indigenous discussions about technology and the internet. *False Divides* highlights that there is a need to develop more critical conversations about both the intended and unintended outcomes of the internet for indigenous peoples. This is perhaps best summarised by Lopesi's concluding line in the book - 'It's complicated, it's messy. It's contradictory and it's exciting.'(p104).