

The book offers a valuable and timely analysis of the role of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in postcolonial Vanuatu. Created in the 1970s, the centre is one of the most important and respected institutions in the country. Always innovative, it created a network of local men to work as volunteers in their own islands, documenting and reviving *kastom*. Bolton and Tarisesei were also instrumental in developing the women's fieldworkers program in the 1990s; their extraordinary achievement has promoted indigenous women's research. The Vanuatu Cultural Centre, with its emphasis on *kastom* and local practices, has also provided a fulcrum for nation building. Bolton's account of the centre, a unique cultural institution in contemporary Oceania, underlines the value of creating a cultural forum at the national level to link islanders in contemporary Oceania.

If the book is about the agency of women in Vanuatu, it is also very much about the agency of Bolton, the anthropologist who came to Vanuatu, under VCC aegis, with the express objective of making changes through the Women's *Kastom* Project. Rather than participant observation, Bolton characterizes her role as "participant engagement" (xv). Bolton's work was undertaken in partnership with key individuals, such as the late Grace Molisa, who passionately articulated the need to enlarge women's participation at both local and national levels (66). Bolton and her ni-Vanuatu collaborators forged dynamic and long-term relationships to produce ethnographic knowledge that privileged women's knowledge and practices. It is in this context that *kastom* can be usefully understood as "the

product of the interaction between expatriate ideas of culture and custom and ni-Vanuatu conceptualizations of their knowledge and practice" (52).

The book's clarity and comprehensive discussion of conventional anthropological concerns (material culture, land, lineage, marriage, grade taking, and rank) as well as contemporary concerns (postcolonial nation building, gender, *kastom*, politics, Christianity, and development) make it valuable for both specialists and non-specialists. *Unfolding the Moon* provokes creative ways of thinking about ethnographic projects and the possibilities of collaboration with indigenous researchers. Bolton's commitment to collaborative research and her emphasis on the practices and enactments of place, person, and objects offer an inventive approach to the production of ethnographic knowledge. It is an approach that creates spaces for agency.

JEAN MITCHELL

University of Prince Edward Island

* * *

Akekeia! Traditional Dance in Kiribati, by Tony and Joan Whincup. Wellington, NZ: Susan Barrie, 2001. ISBN 0-646-41554-9; 168 pages, in English and the Kiribati language; photographs, glossary, list of additional readings. Cloth, NZ\$89.95.

"when you are getting ready for the dancing and you have your arms out on the shoulders of two different women and they're tying different things on and somebody's behind you and someone's fixing your hair, it's just building all that excitement and usually I try to kind of close my eyes

and capture it, hold on to it, . . . but it's really intense" (127).

I recently watched a Kiribati group perform in the middle of winter at the Police Academy in Porirua just outside Wellington, New Zealand. It was freezing and there was a noticeable absence of shine on the dancers' bodies. I recalled that coconut oil coagulates in anything less than about twenty-one degrees Celsius. Yet the performers sang and danced enthusiastically, bare armed in the cold, and their costumes—te etete (the head-dresses), te kabae (the mens' dancing mats), and te karuru (the arm and chest ornaments)—certainly looked "authentic." There were no substitutes of Christmas tree decorations for woven pandanus flowers or girl's dancing skirts made of VHS videotape. This Micronesian group seemed to be seeking recognition in a land dominated first by bicultural Maori-Pakeha politics and second by a triangle of Maori-Pakeha-Polynesian "PI" (Pacific Islander) discourses. International exposure for their stunning televised millennium performance aside, the small islands of the central Pacific and their inhabitants seem to be absent from regular scholarly or popular attention. But in the absence of popularization, Kiribati dance and musical practices remain powerful.

Akekeia! lovingly reveals the dancing bodies that inhabit some of the thirty-three atolls that make up Kiribati. The book brings together Tony Whincup's powerful photographs, Joan Whincup's interviews, and the couple's research, arranged in a stunning layout by freelance graphic designer Julia Parkinson. The book won the illustrative category at the

prestigious Montana book awards in New Zealand in 2002 and is a welcome addition to a still tiny body of work on Kiribati performance.

Tony Whincup is the head of photography at the School of Fine Art at Massey University in New Zealand and Joan Whincup teaches in early childhood education. The authors have a relationship with Kiribati that spans two decades and this collection is the third of their publications on the island group. *Te Katake* (1981), *Kiribati* (1981) and *Nareau's Nation* (1979) were also mainly photographic and focused on traditional chant, the atoll environment, social issues, culture, and history.

Akekeia! is arranged in the panoramic with pages of deep bronze, coal, and white on which images of dancers in color and black-and-white seem to float and shimmer. There are no poses; all bodies are caught in motion and you expect them to dance right off the page. There is also a lot of breathing space—long pauses marked by dark blank pages or white open spaces—as if to allow the reader time for reflection between visual encounters. Between dances are shots of crimson skies at dusk, copra drying in the sun, te mwaneaba (meeting houses), ruani mate (graves), the lagoon at low tide, and rainbows reaching from ocean to sky. An artistic feat, the book powerfully combines text and image, appealing to multiple audiences, including scholars of Oceania, Kiribati, and dance.

While the high cost of the book will limit its reach, one of its central features is bilingual text in English and the Kiribati language. It is clear that the intended audience is I-Kiribati

and the foreword by then President Teburoro Tito indicates a national endorsement of and pride in the project.

The main sections focus on Ake-keia!—the vocal signal to prepare the dancers and set the pitch for the accompanying singers in particular Kiribati dance genres; Te Tabo or Place, exploring the atoll environment; Te Katauraoi or Preparation of costumes and dressing dancers; and Te Kamataku, Performance, including the experiences of participants. Each chapter includes photographs, the authors' research and personal observations, and interviewees' comments, with a glossary and short bibliography at the end. The Whincups admit that the aim of the collection is to provide an overview, emphasizing the generic qualities of dance; not an in-depth exploration, but rather a sensory experience.

In Kiribati, little takes place in any context—government, church, village, town, or family—without music or dance. Most things begin or end with these and prayer. In a country with few resources to develop other art forms like painting, carving, or photography, the body remains the primary expression of cultural continuity and creativity. Here and in the large I-Kiribati community in Fiji, and among the small but growing diasporic groups in the Solomon Islands, New Zealand, Australia, and England, dance is the central vehicle for history and identity.

Kiribati performance usually occurs in contexts where audience, singing group, and dancers are all familiar with the dance forms and the energy and rhythms that accompany the fluid

but strong bird-like poses that form the basis of all movement. It is an electric space in which the distance between audience and performers is minimal; where the performance feels participatory rather than presentational.

Visually, the Whincup's collection skillfully relays the kinesthetic and emotional relationship between people, place, and performance, but some readers may wonder why the all-important quotes by I-Kiribati are anonymous. We do not know which composer, choreographer, dancer, educator, government official, or parent is speaking. From an I-Kiribati perspective, however, this may be an important strategy. Kiribati culture is widely described by both I-Kiribati and anthropologists as egalitarian. Few would like to be seen to be promoted over others (though this equality is rarely gender sensitive). The individual is usually secondary to group achievement or opinion and often only in the context of dance is one allowed to shine or compete against another.

In her doctoral dissertation, "Tradition, Change, and Meaning in Kiribati Performance," the first such comprehensive study, Mary Elizabeth Lawson wrote about how people described dance as "bai n abara, a 'thing of our land . . . '—something which originated with and was passed down from the bakatibu, or ancestors" (1989, 79). The topic of this book, "traditional" dance, presented as so emblematic of a nation and people, is problematic if seen as the only kind of performance that takes place. One gets a sense of rootedness, timelessness, and continuity that is not

entirely representative of the Kiribati musical or dance repertoire. You would not know from *Akekeia!* that people in South Tarawa love rock, country, and techno music and performing te twiti in both mwaneaba and night-club (te twiti, or the “twist,” is the generic term for western-style dancing). You would not know that people on many islands perform and enjoy Cook Islands, Fijian, Tuvaluan, and Tahitian-style dances to taped music. Yes, “traditional” dance is very important, but people practice and consume a whole range of musical forms in addition to the “things of the land.”

Similarly, if Kiribati dance is bai n abara, what is Kiribati dance in Fiji, or in Aotearoa New Zealand in the middle of winter at the Police Academy at Porirua? Like in any diasporic community, I-Kiribati practice their culture on new lands and in new social, political, and cultural environments. This emphasizes the growing recognition that while culture and identity are rooted in specific indigenous locations, they travel and live on in similar and different ways through the bodies, voices, and practices of peoples living in all kinds of places.

KATERINA MARTINA TEAIWA
University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

* * *

Seksek ‘e Hatana / Strolling on Hatana: Traditions of Rotuma and its Dependencies, with excerpts from an archaeologist’s field notebook, edited by Aubrey L Parke. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001. ISBN 982-02-0323-6; 308 pages, map, photographs, Rotuman and English, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper, US\$37.00.

Kato‘aga: Rotuman Ceremonies, by Elizabeth K Inia. Edited and typeset by Alan Howard and Jan Rensel. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001. ISBN 982-02-0341-4; 266 pages, Rotuman and English, pronunciation guide, map, photographs, appendixes, notes, glossary. Paper, US\$14.00.

These two books offer readers glimpses of Rotuman narrative and ceremonial practices. *Seksek ‘e Hatana* begins the task of creating a cultural geography by tying oral traditions to the landscape of Rotuma and its off-shore islets, while *Kato‘aga* details the occasions and customs associated with collective celebrations. Both works contain some materials in the Rotuman language with translation into English and provide a glossary at the end of the volume. Each work also provides an overview of indigenous spiritual beliefs essential as an encompassing framework for interpreting the descriptions of events and translations of the verbal arts. Parke opens with this section, while Inia appends it to her chapters.

Inia herself is a Rotuman, who is reporting from extensive personal experience and a review of pertinent literature (although a conventional