As with any writing, it is difficult to convey through words on a page the sound of language, the rhythms and cadence, the tone and inflections, the way words take on deeper, more profound meaning through body language and facial expressions, and in some cases, the mispronunciation of English words. What is obvious in some of the poems is the struggle the poets have with the English language, clearly not their first: “Lest a despise in the eyes of men” (90) or “There’s a piece of cue to wisdom” (90) and “On walls and dust engased shop windows” (54). I am puzzled by Aigilo’s poem “Memorial Park” in which a graveyard, complete with an archangel, moss-covered wrought iron, and perhaps, strangest of all, “griffins” (56) appear. This is a cemetery located in northern climes, cold, damp, and grey, not in a lush, tropical landscape.

There are no poems in Tok Pisin, which, in my opinion, is a shame and a serious omission. Tok Pisin is such a rich and expressive language, which has grown out of Papua New Guinea. It is the lingua franca of a people who have not only created a way of communicating with each other for practical reasons but have also invented a completely new and unique way of expression.

Most of the writers convey what it is to be New Guinean, to be part of a community that includes those who remain in the village and those who have moved into the towns and entered Western institutions of learning, politics, and business. Life is varied and complex, as the cover suggests. Savannah Flames is a celebration of this community as much as it is an offering of critical and creative writing. Perhaps even more importantly, as Regis Stella states, there is a desperate need “for indigenous people in the Pacific to study and read works by Papua New Guinean writers, by Pacific writers, instead of reading works by expatriate writers” (15). Perhaps the most important function of the journal is that it provides the opportunity and the space for Papua New Guinean writers and academics to publish their work.

Steven Winduo is widely acknowledged as an important and influential poet and scholar in the region and in the ten years of editing Savannah Flames he has encouraged and promoted writing from one of the world’s most richly diverse countries. The journal also introduces the next generation of writers, allowing them to share their talents, ideas, and dreams, all of which are unique in the world.

REINA WHAITIRI
University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

***


This volume started out under the title “Worlds of Song.” Though this was subsequently widened to embrace additional aesthetic genres and
emphasize interactions with changing historical processes, song in fact remains the main subject, especially (though not exclusively) in the New Guinea Highlands. The majority of chapters, predominantly by anthropologists based in the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia, present accounts of specific sung or chanted genres arising from the authors’ own firsthand research—“song” in the broad sense of the term.

Across a large region of the Papua New Guinea Western and Southern Highlands, stories are told with special intonational or rhythmic patterns, or both, which are different from those of ordinary speech. Alan Rumsey’s impressive chapter discusses and illustrates this from three cognate forms of what he terms “chanted tales”: Ku Waru tom yaya kange, Duna pikono, and Huli bi te. He provides a well-evidenced description of their similarities and differences in thematic content and stylistic form (lineation, rhythm, pitch, melody, prosody, use of repetition), with comments on the performers and excerpts from their texts. His particular focus is the relationship between the imagined world evoked in the stories and the contemporary lived world within which they are performed—a fascinating and sophisticated analysis of the interpenetration as well as the disjunction between the two.

Two further chapters on Highlands sung genres are by the volume’s editors, anthropologists from the University of Pittsburgh with a remarkable record of joint research across many of the areas covered in the volume. Returning to the Duna pikono—in their terminology, “ballads” rather than “chanted tales”—they draw on their own substantial collection to illustrate further the stylistic features and plots of these lengthy sung forms and clarify the context in which pikono tales of cannibalism and humanity (among other things) both keep alive and creatively rework themes of the Duna past. Their chapter on Melpa courting songs and ballads in Mount Hagen brings out the emotional tenor running through many of the region’s song genres—the sense of being sorry, feeling regret, feeling sympathy—and explores how this complex of feelings is both rhetorically conveyed in song and can incorporate revitalized elements from the past.

Lisette Josephides’s discussion of myth and song among the Southern Highlands Kewa shows how such cultural texts can change according to context and narrative intent: myths get transformed into origin stories, laments into pig killing, and courtship songs into the expression of male politics. The German linguist Volker Heeschen takes a more comparative perspective in considering the dancing songs of the Eipo and Yalenang in the West Papua Eastern Mountains. He reflects perceptively on the relation between individuality and the personal expression of emotions and opinions, and provides illuminating ethnographic detail about the style, functions, and themes of the songs. Once again courting songs are prominent, as are images of sorrow and mourning.

Anne Schiller’s chapter on sacred songs and the revitalization of indigenous religion among the Indonesian Ngaju describes traditional song
genres (ritual chants, praise songs, sung myths, ballads), mostly performed in restricted language unintelligible to many Ngaju, and contrasts these with the vernacular songs and hymns of newer forms of religious worship being enthusiastically adopted by the youth. Janet Hoskins treats violence in Indonesia, showing how traditional rituals in Sumba were used in government propaganda—while the words of songs could express subtle resistance to state authority. These “worlds of song” offered new ways of mobilizing people in an arena characterized by both the potential for democracy and the continuing threat of violence.

As in many similar analyses, these chapters include extensive quotation from the songs, basically reproduced as verbal text (only Heeschen attempts to chart tonal structures). Typographical reproduction of course captures only limited dimensions of sung performances and the ontological models rooted in the long-entrenched and arguably ethnocentric privileging of printed text are now rightly in question. Given the powerful social arrangements associated with print, the authors’ practice here is understandable. But it is worth mentioning that publications are now increasingly starting to exploit opportunities offered not only by audio and video recording but, more especially, through linked material on the Web, giving a more multimedia take on the multimodality of performance. What is good in this volume, however, is that most authors get beyond the older preconception that songs exist primarily as textual content, and comment insightfully on stylistic and to some extent performance qualities, on audience interaction, and on the emotion (not just cognition) of the oral forms they discuss.

The joker in the pack is the chapter by the Taiwanese film maker Tai-li Hu, “The Camera Is Working: Paiwan Aesthetics and Performances in Taiwan.” This seems incongruous with the rest of the book, both thematically (film not song) and geographically (Taiwan). Nevertheless, Tai-li Hu has produced a scintillating paper in its own right, reflecting on the nature of “reality” in film. She notes the determination of those she filmed to dress up in their best for the camera—a “distortion” of “ordinary life”?—and relates this in a subtle and convincing analysis to Paiwan mythology and aesthetics and their experience of “thoughtful sorrow” as captured in filmed images.

Many interesting chapters, therefore—but is the volume more than the sum of its parts? Certainly the discussions of New Guinea Highlands song complement each other quite well. But there is little if any cross-reference between the chapters, little sign that contributors had read each others’ work or recognized each others’ terms. The editors’ introduction is rather a disappointment here, for after an engaging start it then seems to disperse rather than sharpen the focus, elaborating certain arguments at great length and chasing off after a number of hares in turn without conveying a clear sense of the central points and issues that emerge from the volume. At times indeed it reads less like an introduction to a collaborative endeavor than a slightly ungenerous showcase for the editors’
own joint publications (cited on most pages and accounting for 40 of the Introduction’s 76 references). Given the potential interest of the material—not just regionally but in global comparative terms—this would seem an opportunity missed.

The photographs are a good feature (some more relevant than others admittedly), but the publishers’ editorial processes seem a little slapdash, and the total absence of any proper maps in a volume of this kind is deplorable. That said, there is much to welcome in this collection. One cannot help but be moved by the expressions of sorrow and of love that run through many of the songs and tales—universal themes of human poetic art perhaps, but formulated in wonderfully specific ways in the examples here—by words and song artistically delivered, and by the interpenetration of new and old actualized by singers and listeners in the contemporary world.

RUTH FINNEGAN
The Open University,
United Kingdom

***


This book, like each of the objects that are its subject, has a number of different potential meanings and uses. It is a catalogue of most of the Niuean barkcloth—hiapo—the authors were able to track down over a ten-year period. It is an ethnography of what is known about hiapo. It is a personal response to the barkcloth by both authors, but especially by John Pule. It is also a reflection by Nicholas Thomas about this very issue: the varying nature of responses to objects. In material culture, museum, and anthropology of art studies, Arjun Appadurai’s insight that objects have social lives and social histories has become a truism. The insight is often framed as an understanding that the same object can mean different things at different times to different people. Having the insight is one thing; knowing how to manage or express that insight in considering objects is often another. This book is a kind of multiple layering of different perspectives on Niuean hiapo.

In the introduction, Thomas proposes a specific aim for the book “to reveal the power of a remarkable art” (9). Acknowledging that the written and illustrative sources relating to Niue are sparse, the authors have, he says, “tried to turn this poverty of facts to advantage” responding to hiapo in ways that are “personal, impressionistic, and maybe idiosyncratic” (15). The book’s specific aim is undoubtedly met. The photographs powerfully demonstrate the vigor and visual complexity of hiapo painting. The ordering of images makes it possible to recognize distinctive styles that may well be the work of individual artists, underlining the skill they embody. Pule’s own etchings and paintings in response to hiapo are included, forming another kind of consideration of the artfulness of hiapo painting. Hiapo imageries