Book and Media Reviews

Pacific Islands studies, long the domain of Euro-American writers and researchers, has for decades challenged its practitioners to tell different kinds of stories—localized stories that shed light on the daily lives of its native inhabitants—while at the same time remaining mindful of the global contexts of these local experiences. How to achieve this, given the dearth of written accounts that convey Islander perspectives, has itself been a topic of thoughtful commentary and lingers as a worthy and worthwhile goal. In *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba*, Katerina Martina Teaiwa displays artfully the powerful potential of interdisciplinarity as an approach toward gaining a richer and deeper understanding of Pacific pasts and peoples. She matches her deep digs into the historical archives with a reflexive and reflective care of collected oral testimonies, as well as a nuanced treatment of a variety of films, poems, songs, dances, photographs, and memoirs. A chapter on the chemistry and history of phosphorus perhaps best exemplifies this work’s interdisciplinarity, spanning centuries and continents to reveal an interwoven mix of scientific, agricultural, geological, and cultural issues before firmly grounding the narrative on the two-and-a-half square mile island of Banaba.

At the most basic level, *Consuming Ocean Island* tells the history from 1900 to 1980 of the land and people of Banaba, formerly part of the British Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony and presently within the national boundary of the Republic of Kiribati. Named Ocean Island by early nineteenth-century European voyagers, Banaba was profoundly exploited by Australian, New Zealand, and British mining companies for its 22 million tons of phosphate reserves. As an essential ingredient in fertilizer, phosphates played a key role in the success of Australia’s and New Zealand’s agricultural industries, while at the same time their extraction destroyed the land from which they were mined.

Teaiwa’s account of Banaban history includes the oft-repeated, almost comical story of a large rock that was being used as a doorstop in the Sydney office of Albert Ellis. An official in the Pacific Islands Company, Ellis and company manager Henry Denson tested the rock in 1899 and found it to be made of pure phosphate. Because the rock had been procured from Nauru, then a German territory beyond the reach of his mining company, Ellis headed out to Banaba, a nearby island, which he thought would be of similar geological formation. *Consuming Ocean Island* retells the history of Ellis’s Banaba negotiations and of questionable contracts and other egregious misdeeds by colluding mining and colonial officials from Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. The forced relocation of Banabans to Rabi after World War II is but briefly described, as are details...
of the court cases heard in London, lodged by the Banaban people against the British Empire. The work continues to present-day Rabi, a contested space because of two peoples who call it home—the displaced Banabans and the indigenous Fijian Rabeans who had lost their island in a regional war involving Tongan chief Ma’afu several decades prior to Banaban settlement there (18).

This is a story of the political and corporate machinations that fueled the mining project, a story of lucrative profit making alongside ecological destruction, and cultural resilience and revitalization amid oppressive dispossession and grief. Yet, as Teaiwa notes, much of the earlier scholarship on mining in Banaba reads like a “celebratory account” of the British Phosphate Commissioners, with much less attention given to Pacific Islander actors, particularly after the phosphate supply ran out. While never losing sight of the histories and identities of Banabans, the author also attends to a plethora of other actors and their contributions to the “multiple, layered, and diverse experiences of the mining venture and the island itself” (19). Readers unfamiliar with the history of phosphate mining in the Pacific will find this work highly informative, albeit dispiriting.

As heart-rending as the phosphate mining aspect of Banaban history reads, Consuming Ocean Island is much more than an anticolonial rant against global, corporate, and colonial greed. A range of stories emerge as Teaiwa moves gracefully between Banaba and Kiribati, between Banaba and Rabi, between Rabi and Fiji, and between Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. She sensitively addresses complex and sometimes subtle issues of race, not simply between white and Islander, but also between Banabans and Gilbertese mining laborers, between Islanders and Asian laborers in the mining camps, and between Banabans and Fijians within the postcoup nation of Fiji. Her narrative includes memoirs written by wives of mining company employees, women whose accounts of daily life on Banaba offer vastly different kinds of information than those that fill the pages of dry company documents.

In Consuming Ocean Island, Teaiwa plays with multiple notions of consumption, most significantly the exploitation of Banaba’s land and resources for phosphates. Ocean Island is, moreover, consumed by the investors and industrial agriculturalists who profited from the island’s excavation, as well as by peoples around the world in their literal consumption of the resulting produce. The author, herself a native Banaban, comments on her emotional consumption by this intensely personal research topic. Through it all, this work is also significantly autobiographical. Katerina Teaiwa’s story, as well as the stories of her father, John Tabakitoa Teaiwa, and her elder sister, Teresia Teaiwa, infuse this volume in ways that enable the reader to understand the circuitous ways in which Pacific genealogies, histories, and futures can operate, even among the most dispossessed of Islanders.

Inasmuch as Consuming Ocean Island is about the Teaiwa communities and their deep genealogical, intellectual, political, and emotional roots in Banaba, Consuming Ocean Island
is at once history and anthropology, cultural studies and critical studies, discourse analysis and geopolitical theorizing. This volume provides scholars and students with a highly readable model showcasing some of the ways in which a researcher’s personal journey can serve as a useful roadmap to the past.

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The Pasifika Festival, the largest Pacific festival in the world, is held annually in March at Western Springs, Auckland. In 2012, it attracted between 100,000 and 200,000 people, including visitors, community members, and performers. In *The Pacific Festivals of Aotearoa New Zealand: Negotiating Place and Identity in a New Homeland*, Jared Mackley-Crump provides a welcome genealogy of this event, as well as other Pacific festivals, within the global context of “festivalization” and the specific sociocultural formations of race and migration policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The author adopts an interdisciplinary framework, making use of his ethnomusicology background, ethnographic fieldwork methods, and conceptual innovations drawn from Pacific and Indigenous scholarship. The key question guiding this wide-ranging book is: “Do Pacific festivals reflect the ways in which the Pacific diaspora is constructed, is imagined, and has evolved in New Zealand?” (4). *The Pacific Festivals of Aotearoa New Zealand* demonstrates this evolution through analyses of festival organization, musical performances, and interviews with key participants about identity, place, and belonging.

Part 1 provides a historical context for Pacific festivals in Aotearoa beginning with an overview of Pacific migration focused on the period from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s. Major sociocultural and political policy changes during this time, such as the dramatic Dawn Raids of the mid-1970s, saw the deportation of thousands of Pacific people—many of whom were legal residents—and created widespread fear and mistrust. From this environment, the first festivals emerged as a creative response to marginalization. In subsequent decades, and as the New Zealand-born Pacific population has grown, new forms of cultural and political organization have emerged in concert with Pacific festivals around the country. Chapter 1 covers the origins of these and other multicultural festivals, in text and with tables, before moving on to an analysis of the Pasifika Festival and Wellington’s Positively Pasifika Festival in subsequent chapters. While this in-depth documentation will no doubt be a very useful historical record for interested parties, it contains a level of detail that may not appeal to more generalist readers. This could also be said about the analysis of logistics, infrastructure, and event management of the festivals. Nevertheless, at various points throughout