

Book and Media Reviews

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As a Samoan Fa'afafine writer and artist, I was, unfortunately, disappointed in the essays on Fa'afafine. I saw too few references to the growing body of work by Fa'afafine themselves or at least to works focusing on our critical viewpoints, beyond what one might term the more entertaining aspects. In her essay "Representing Fa'afafine: Sex, Socialization, and Gender Identity in Samoa," Penelope Schoeffel concludes, "Although many fa'afafine are considered to do feminine work better than girls and women, and may be admired for their skill, men who conform to cultural ideals of masculinity remain the ideal sons of Samoa" (87). There is in this conclusion a reductionist view that cannot see that Fa'afafine have agency within Samoan society and may not wish to take the place of "sons"—or even of "daughters." The ideal for Fa'afafine is as Fa'afafine, in childhood, education, work, and life.

With essays covering Queer Pacific lives from Tahiti, Sāmoa, Hawai'i, Fiji, Tonga, Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Marshall Islands, and Papua New Guinea, the volume goes a long way toward the continuing redefinition of contemporary structures of experience and the interpretive analysis of Queer Pacific lives. The volume makes visible the continuing necessity for new interventions by scholars whose work includes Queer Pacific Theory.

DAN TAULAPAPA MCMULLIN
www.taulapapa.com

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Buveurs de Kava, by Patricia Siméoni and Vincent Lebot. Port Vila: Éditions Geo-Consulte, 2014. ISBN 978-2-9533362-3-8; 361 pages, maps, illustrations, figures, tables, index, bibliography. Cloth, US\$189.99.

At first glance, the format of *Buveurs de Kava* suggests a coffee-table publication—richly illustrated, glossy, big format, and broadly informative. It is thus a pleasant surprise to find that this turns out to be a book with a much larger ambition. The most comprehensive account of the kava plant and its cultural history to date, *Buveurs de Kava* draws together central cultural and historical materials for crucial aspects of Pacific history. Chapters take up kava's history and prehistory, its diffusion among the islands of the Pacific, a detailed picture of the commercial role kava now plays in its recent spread to Australia and Europe, and debates on kava's health benefits or use in medicine. In certain respects, the book is Vanuatu-centric, but this follows from the book's claim that Vanuatu has been the major center of domestication and export of the *Piper methysticum* plant throughout history. Many color photos from all over the Pacific beautifully demonstrate the centrality of the drink for the Pacific way of life. Moreover, Patricia Siméoni and Vincent Lebot also do their best for promoting a continuation of the enjoyment of this drink into the future. On the whole, their book constitutes an impressive synthesis of a century of research on "the Pacific drug."

The importance of kava as a cultural phenomenon was already outlined in W H R Rivers's monumen-

tal two-volume *History of Melanesian Society* (1914), and it is perhaps not coincidental that this new and important book is published in 2014, a hundred years later. This is thus a very timely publication. In the historical model developed by Rivers, the original inhabitants of the Melanesian islands, the so-called “betel people,” were colonized by an incoming “kava people” who practiced totemism, patrilineal descent, ranking rituals, a cult of the dead, and penis incision (see *The Ethnographic Experiment: A M Hocart and W H R Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*, edited by Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg, 2014). But the type of cultural historical analysis initiated by Rivers was rendered unfashionable shortly after the publication of his *History*. Surviving solely in the field of archaeology, cultural historical perspectives on the region of the Pacific have since been, with a few notable exceptions, separated from studies of contemporary culture and society.

Buveurs de Kava is thus a key text since it ties back together an account of cultural history and the spread of the kava plant with contemporary culture and language in the Pacific. It explains in a lucid and still scientifically tenable fashion the way the “Kava People” have come to live in and transform the islands of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia.

Through sophisticated analysis of species classification and dendrograms (taxonomic tree diagrams), we learn of the multitude of species classed under the all-too-general label of “kava.” It is of historical interest to note that the variety classed as *Piper wichmannii*, for instance, prevalent in Papua New

Guinea and Solomon Islands, contains much less of the sought-after psychoactive ingredients called kavalactones. In the *wichmannii* type, there is only 3–5 percent of the kavalactone dihydromethysticin, while in the “real” kava type, *methysticum*, there is 8–20 percent of the kavalactone kavaine—making the latter variety, physiologically speaking, a much more potent drug.

Through these types of observations, the authors make a good case for saying that the real, intensive domestication of the kava plant, as an effective means for inducing physical intoxication and as fully under the control of man, originally took place in Vanuatu. The eighty-three varieties of *Piper methysticum* that exist in Vanuatu, compared to the far lesser diversity in the rest of Melanesia and in Polynesia, also suggest the Vanuatu archipelago as the source for what we might call a cult of kava.

Whereas one used to think that the kava plant was introduced to southern Vanuatu from the Polynesian outliers, the authors make it clear that the plants present in southern Vanuatu are instead arrivals from northern Vanuatu. Here *methysticum* was cultivated into the potent drug that it is today and then exported to other parts of the Pacific, as far as Pohnpei, Tahiti, and Hawai‘i. And since the only form of reproduction of this plant is through cloning, all existing varieties today are offspring of the kava plant developed in Vanuatu some three thousand years ago. Notably, the authors show that linguistics also supports this analysis. It is suggested that the two words for kava found in the Vanuatu archipelago, *kawa* being

a proto-Oceanic term for “root” and *maloku* being the proto-north-central-Vanuatu word (possibly related to the curvy shape of the *methysticum* branches), have existed alongside each other from the start, with one indicating the early medical plant endemic to northern Melanesia (*P wichmanni*) and the other the domesticated drug variant (*P methysticum*)—but both words being present during the historical separation of the one kind from the other.

The big question is, did this initial domestication of kava in Vanuatu also mean the emergence of certain culturally specific institutions: patrilineal descent, male circumcision, and a keen attention to rank and perhaps sacred totems? And in this case, would this not be the final nail in the coffin of the Melanesia/Polynesia divide and call for a renewal of Rivers’s idea that Vanuatu was the site for an extraordinary cultural turn crossing over into Polynesia? Is it then possible to rethink Rivers’s notion of “kava people” through this new book?

Siméoni and Lebot report on the many colorful myths of the kava plant in northern Vanuatu, often illuminating topics of fertility and death, with the original plant being cultivated near or among the tombs of the dead, or being inserted into the vagina of a woman by a sorcerer, or being planted near the head of a dead ancestor. For researchers of Vanuatu, this is all well within the cultural dynamics of sacred male rank, ancestor burial, and a marriage ideology that figures women as carriers of male genealogies. But it could also be very tempting to see this as an original sprout for what has been perceived as Polynesian topics

of male hierarchy but combined with female dynamics of egalitarianism and horizontal and matrilineal patterns of regeneration (see Valerio Valeri’s chapter on “Marriage, Rank, and Politics in Hawaii” in *Hierarchy: Persistence and Transformation in Social Formations*, edited by Knut Rio and Olaf H Smedal, 2009). One would also have to account for a major transformation from a Vanuatu form of ancestor sacrality to the Polynesian split between man and god altogether. It is very interesting to read about myths from Tonga and Sāmoa in this light, highlighting especially the origin of kava inside the constitution of a division between man and god (see myth from Sāmoa, 85). And whereas the brew was ingested as a means for communication between men of high rank and ancestors in Vanuatu, especially inside what is termed “a cult of the dead,” it is transformed in Polynesia into a drink enjoyed at social gatherings and for marking important moments such as war or political ceremonial. *Buveurs de Kava* goes a long way in offering a complete model for these transformations, and it offers very important food for thought.

The strength of this volume is its synthesis of a massive amount of material, drawn together from such diverse fields as biology, archaeology, anthropology, and folklore, which again cast light on the cultural history of the Pacific in the spirit of the project that Rivers initiated a century ago. Siméoni and Lebot conclude that the “kava people” were of insular origin and emerged in a process of cultural development that took shape in between Polynesian and Melanesian islands. So far published only in

French, it would surely interest an English-speaking audience.

KNUT RIO
University of Bergen

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Native Nations: The Survival of Fourth World Peoples, edited by Sharlotte Neely. Vernon, BC: J Charlton Publishing Ltd, 2014. ISBN 978-0-9919441-9-4, vii + 185 pages, map, notes, references, index. Paper, US\$32.00.

History has often been written, understood, and remembered through the interpretive lens of so-called First World nations. One of the dangers and deficits of history making from such privileged perspectives is the way it becomes the dominant understanding, often ignoring and silencing the experiences of Indigenous peoples. As the activist Arundhati Roy once noted, “There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless.’ There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (Sydney Peace Prize lecture, 4 Nov 2004). Many scholars and policy makers ensconced in colonial and postcolonial nations continue to understand and thus interact with Indigenous peoples as groups who should remain deliberately silenced or preferably unheard. Effective work to redress the injustices brought by First World nations against Indigenous peoples, and particularly those of the “Fourth World,” begins with addressing the ignorance and lack of deep understanding of the brutality and traumas that characterize Indigenous peoples’ past and present experiences with First World nations. Character-

ized as a needful restorative process, this move toward redress through scholarly engagement is at the heart of the work that Sharlotte Neely and seven contributors offer in *Native Nations: The Survival of Fourth World Peoples*.

A professor of anthropology and director of Native American Studies at Northern Kentucky University, Neely defines the term “Fourth World peoples” for the purposes of the book as “the surviving Indigenous (Native, Aboriginal) minorities within the wealthier First World nations” (iii). Gathering an impressive group of scholars to engage comparatively with seven Fourth World peoples, the volume offers significant insight into contemporary Pacific contexts, with chapters on Native Australians by Robert Tonkinson, Māori by Margaret Mutu, and Native Hawaiians by ‘Umi Perkins. Other chapters address Native North Americans, Ainu in Japan, Sámi in Scandinavia, and Breton Celts in France. The book serves as an important source of diverse Indigenous histories, discusses key legal cases and policies that directly affect the current situations of Fourth World peoples, and highlights the strength, resilience, and success of Indigenous Pacific Island communities that continue to negotiate, resist, and contest centuries of colonization by their First World colonizers. Identifying variously as Fourth World person, anthropologist, geographer, linguist, or political scientist, each of the authors works to provide a fuller picture of the situations of Indigenous minorities than has previously been provided.

Though there are common themes that link the experiences of Fourth