

Hula, Haka, Hoko! An Introduction to Polynesian Dancing, by Ad and Lucia Linkels. Tilburg: Mundo Etnico Foundation, 1999. ISBN 90-72840-13-5, NUGI 924-925; 163 pages, notes, glossary, discography, bibliography, photographic data, acknowledgments. €27.30 in Europe; €36.40 outside Europe.

"As a *Papālangi*, *Haole* or *Pākehā* [different terms denoting white Europeans or Americans], I will never be able to fully understand the culture, and certainly will never be able to fully live amongst the people, but still I admire and envy the Polynesians and their natural and humane way of life, especially on the remote islands, which are less affected by tourism and other foreign influences from the industrialized world" (Linkels 1999).

In this day and age, more and more native peoples are exercising their right to tell their own histories and interpret their own cultures. Insider perspectives are greatly valued as they provide direct insight into how the aboriginal people themselves feel about their own culture. The manner in which they categorize their information and judge what they think is important helps others better understand who they really are. Were it not for the disclaimer that appears in the third paragraph of the introduction of Ad and Lucia Linkels' book, *Hula, Haka, Hoko!* it would have been very difficult for me to assess the value of this book. However, the Linkels' many years of dedication in the study of "world/ethnic" music and dance, their impassioned efforts in arts education through Mundo Etnico, and the joy that shines through their work

are compelling reasons to engage this unassuming yet informative look at Polynesian performing arts. Ad Linkel is the author, but because his experiences were shared by his wife, Lucia, the terms *I* and *we* are used throughout the book.

As they explain in their introduction, each of the three terms in the title represents one of the apexes of the Polynesian triangle: *hula* is the general Hawaiian term for dance, *haka* is the general term for the New Zealand Māori posture dance, and *hoko* is the Rapanui term for rocking the body back and forth while singing, according to the authors. Ad Linkel introduces the book as "the result of my love affair with Polynesia." He and Lucia have traveled to various regions all over the globe, including Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, and now the Pacific, to study and record the dances and songs of native peoples.

The publication is geared to an audience unfamiliar with the Pacific region and Polynesian cultures. With this in mind, geographic, ethnic, and historical background is presented along with Pacific maps. Also covered are the peopling of the Pacific, the arrival of Europeans, and brief comments on foreign influences. An interesting chapter on the authenticity of Polynesian dancing raises issues regarding stereotypes and what Adrienne Kaeppler terms "airport art."

It was a pleasant surprise to see sections devoted to poetry and music and their crucial roles in many Polynesian dance forms. A significant portion of the work is devoted to function and style with respect to dance form and classification by cultural ori-

gin. There is also a brief commentary on colors and costumes.

Over the course of their travels in the Pacific, the Linkels managed to capture dancing and dance contexts on film. Distributed over the 188 pages are 275 photographs, both color and black-and-white, which add tremendously to the overall work—in fact, they are one of the main attractions. Events such as the Festival of Pacific Arts are important venues for observing a wide range of artistic genres performed by the Pacific people themselves. Also included is an impressive and diverse discography that includes the Linkels' own recording work.

Concluding remarks are presented in the final chapter entitled "Comparisons." This closing section is as interesting as it is curious. The Linkels explain that learning about the cultures and dances of Polynesia has helped them become aware of their own Dutch heritage and particularly the peculiarities of the traditional dances of the Netherlands; comparisons between Polynesian and non-Polynesian dances "provide new and additional information all the time and gradually open the doors to a better understanding." The authors compare Polynesian dance (assuming we accept that such a category exists and is useful) with Melanesian, Micronesian, Asian, ballet, and western-style social dancing. However, it is not immediately discernible what "new and additional information" is being ascertained from this comparative exercise.

From one perspective, force fitting the depth and breadth of "Polynesian dance" under a single convenient rubric is problematic. Whenever this occurs in the study of indigenous peo-

ples, there is an unfortunate tendency to overgeneralize. Over the course of several millennia, Polynesian cultures have not only maintained certain traits, they have also developed attributes and characteristics that are unique and distinct. Representing all of Polynesia in a single category and then comparing it with other cultures that have been similarly marginalized for the purpose of comparative analysis raises questions: How does this "open a door to a better understanding"? What conclusions are we expecting to find when comparing "Polynesian dance" to ballet? To what audience are such conclusions meaningful or useful?

On the other hand, if it is possible to resist the temptation to overgeneralize, such analytical exercises can possibly help the uninitiated (Linkels' primary audience) to see Polynesia as a vibrant world worthy of consideration and discussion in forums of global discourse.

Halfway through my first reading of the book, the authors' message and purpose escaped me. By the end of my second reading, I found the work most valuable, especially for the many who seek to broaden their knowledge and deepen their understanding of Polynesian cultures but have no access to a user-friendly reference to help begin the necessary immersion into the world of Polynesian or Pacific performing arts. The Linkels provide windows into Polynesian "dance culture" that can be appreciated even by Polynesians themselves and are particularly meaningful as Polynesian cultures seek to reconnect with each other in contemporary times.

This is not a "how to dance" book.

It does not present itself as an exhaustive, comprehensive, authoritative resource on Polynesian dance (if such a thing could possibly exist). Rather, it is a “how to begin to appreciate the myriad and complex dance forms that pervade the dynamic Pacific region called Polynesia” book. In this regard, it can be greatly appreciated by all audiences.

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Breadfruit, by Célestine Hitiura Vaite. Sydney: Bantam, 2000. ISBN 1-86325-244-4; 324 pages. Paper, A\$19.95, NZ\$24.95, US\$22.50.

Célestine Hitiura Vaite’s first novel, *Breadfruit*, is an impressive debut for this Australia-based Tahitian writer. Vaite dedicates *Breadfruit* to her mother, “who taught me that love is the greatest motive of all,” and her godmother, “who taught me to believe in will power and to get up after each fall.” As a writer, Vaite illustrates in *Breadfruit* that their advice was not ignored. The reader is introduced to the challenges, complications, disappointments, and unbounded joy that love, romance, and day-to-day life in contemporary Tahiti presents for Materena and her extended family.

Told through the all-perceiving eye of the third person, this story unfolds, flows, and shifts through the weaving together of a series of anecdotes from an array of colorful unforgettable characters. The work is written with immense insight, warmth, and humor, her style and use of language refresh-

ingly simple and direct. This approach works well. It allows even serious social problems affecting contemporary Tahitian culture and life to be touched on without detracting from the story, diminishing the issues, or changing the relaxed tone of the novel.

The central themes in *Breadfruit* are universal: “Women who want romance, men who won’t commit, interfering in-laws, making ends meet.” Although the novel is set in Tahiti, I soon discovered that as a woman, and more particularly as a Pacific Islander, I could easily identify with, relate to, and laugh wholeheartedly at many aspects of the story. The work focuses on womanhood: the bonds between mothers and daughters, ancestral ties, independent women, absent fathers, and women who yearn for meaningful expressions of love from the men in their lives. We discover Tahitian families living on and under the breadline, and come to admire the ways in which the women characters strive to make ends meet. We find out how these women find value and satisfaction in the small treasures that come their way—treasures that are often other people’s throw-outs. Invariably readers are given a window through which to glimpse a different side of contemporary Tahiti that is not often enough exposed. Here, through light-hearted story, popular western notions and stereotypes of life in a “tropical paradise” are challenged. In addition, issues such as colonization, dislocation, migration, identity, class, gender, sexuality, and religion shape and inform the stories within the narrative.