

Oceanian Journeys and Sojourns. Home thoughts Abroad

Andreea R. Torre

While clearly initiated with the intent of celebrating Murray Chapman and the legacy of his work in the fields of human geography and mobility in Oceania, this theoretically and methodologically inspiring volume greatly contributes to the current literature on migration in the Pacific region and globally in more general terms. The collection strongly advocates for what Chapman himself called the need for “alternative manners of thinking” (Chapman, 1995, p.254) about Pacific Islanders’ practices of internal and/or international mobility. An alternative thinking which should centre around the idea of movement as an *embodied experience* and incorporate *local knowledge* and *socio-cultural relations* within its investigation of the determinants and implications of migration in Oceania.

As such, human experience is the thread that weaves together narratives and analytical enquiries within the different chapters of the *Oceanian Journeys and Sojourns*. Most chapters in the volume include authors’ ethnographic observations and encounters while conducting fieldwork in their own societies or communities they have longstanding connections with, as well as their personal reflexive journeys revolved around understanding and voicing local knowledge and ways of knowing and learning in Oceania.

Without attempting at providing a summary of each chapter, as this would not give justice to the richness and depth of the analysis developed by the contributors, this review mainly focuses on the core theme of the book, mobility in Oceania, that also constitutes the object of inquiry of the present Special Issue of the Journal of Pacific Studies. Judith Bennett’s introduction, *Seeking the heart of mobility*, besides tracing Murray Chapman’s intellectual journey and providing a comprehensive portrayal of his approach to people’s mobility as inclusive of a “better articulation of the context” (p.11), introduces the ten different contributors to the collection and their articles. Six of the authors are women and seven of them are Oceanian themselves and they have all been somehow influenced by Chapman’s work in their research. Despite the thematic differences between the two main sections and within Part Three itself, the introduction succeeds in creating a narrative thread that holds contributions for the following two parts of the book together. Chapter two in this first section, which consists in a transcription of a conversation between David Gegeo and Chapman himself, also helps in this intent. Besides giving more insights on Chapman’s work and how his methodological interest in narratives and understanding of mobility via personal stories developed, it also provides a way into Part Three of the volume through the discussion around Solomons’ “intellectual revolution” (p.64) closely tied to its long and tortuous independence journey.

The core and the strength of the collection stay with Part Two, *Pacific People in Movement*. Essays in this section jointly argue for the incorporation of an emic perspective to explain migratory behavior based on valuing the meanings migrants themselves attach to their own journeys – be them long term journeys and across great distances, or short term, circular movements and/or to

nearby locations. To use Lola Quan Bautista's words, the discussion carried out by the authors in this volume builds on "nuances and sensitivities of many small acts" (p.125) as well as on *atoll epistemologies* to capture ways in which subjects conceive mobility and their own positionalities.

One feature of this book that certainly needs to be highlighted is the plight for greater attention to the multiplicity and diversity of socio-culturally mediated reasons for movement which are tied to gendered social and spatial relationships as well as to life stages of those who move and those who stay. This implies also a high degree of articulation of the context within which mobility takes place, including a socio-political understanding of household (Lilomaiva-Doktor's analysis) and extended family ('aiga') dynamics and practices of reciprocity, as well as situated and relational interpretations of work, and mobility for work, beyond its functionalist explanation through concepts of "commoditised service and transactions" (Asenati Liki's chapter).

Furthermore, essential to the collection is also an emphasis on the need to think about *malaga* or journey/movement/migration "more socially and less geographically" (Lilomaiva-Doktor's, p.82). From this perspective, the act of moving, acquires tight links to life-cycle ceremonial activities, relational practices and routine activities which are all strongly mediated by their cultural meanings. The significance of territorial boundaries acquires a certain degree of relativism while migration away from your "home country" becomes an activity aiming at "enlargement of the homesite" and to processes of "establishing and re-establishing relations" within the metaphorical, relational and therefore fluid context of the *va* (social space).

Raymond Young contribution enriches this conversation with its conceptualization of the "embodied geography of movement" (p. 165). Within this framework, "the focus is on the mover" (Liki 1997 cited by Young) while migrants' everyday and lived experiences in the wider social universe of home and diaspora become central features of the research. Migrants' relationship with kin through blood and land are emphasized as culturally defined conceptions of belonging. Rootedness in the home place and kin connections – the maternal clan as in the case of Tearcisious Tara Kabutaulaka – are therefore essential identity markers. Yet journeying and sojourns in places other than "home", and *forced movements* and returns (Jully Makini's essay on the impact of the ethnic tensions in Solomon Islands) enact new connections enabling new and multiple identities, while imparting appreciations for relationships beyond blood ties and genealogical claims to ancestral lands.

While dealing with topics only partly related to mobility, Part 3 usefully complements the volume. Chapters develop insightful discussions about "the meaning of culture" (p.10) by looking at the interconnections between gendered practices of knowledge and their emancipatory and empowering potential for Oceanian women (Yvonne Underhill-Sem's contribution), the journey of indigenous material culture in colonial and post-colonial times (Judith Bennett's chapter), and the challenges of reclaiming the value of indigenous epistemologies and of conducting institutional research in unfriendly environments lacking a research culture as well as the political will to developing one (Gordon Nanau's and Eric Waddell's essays).

Oceanian Journeys and Sojourns therefore helps our appreciation of the complex character of social practices and experiences embedded within Oceanian migration processes. A comprehensive

reading of those processes calls for a shift in the researcher's habitual standpoint allowing her to grasp the cultural and embodied meanings of migration which too often scholarly accounts, focused on economicistic perspective over internal and international mobilities, have excluded. Yet, as Jully Makini in this volume reminds us, events and dynamics happening in Pacific Island countries are "very much part of a global village" (p. 221), and despite, their cultural differences, they may be experiencing also similar processes and "trouble" (ibid.) as other parts of the world. I share this view as I note in the introduction of this Special Issue that the researcher needs to be able to "move between a sensitivity to context and culturally embodied lived experiences and global pressures [...] while being attentive to complex interactions among social, economic, and political forces" (Cangiano and Torre, see in the Introduction to this Special Issue).

As an ethnographer with training in literature, social anthropology and migration studies who works in the field of transnational migration and more recently migration and development in Oceania, I very much welcomed the collection's conceptual approach to research on human mobility. Yet what I felt missing from this collection, at least in its slightly long-winded introduction, was some, even brief, discussion around the impacts the transnational migration and transnational families scholarship which, since the beginning of the '90s has also contributed (and not only in "western research") to shifting the focus from a macro and purely economic way of looking at mobility to a more nuanced and diverse socio cultural analysis of transnational communities that inhabit the "home", "away", and the multi-directional social fields in-between. Through a multi and interdisciplinary approach, the transnational migration literature has built on the intersection of knowledge, perspectives and belonging of researchers who have imploded precisely that dichotomy between the emic and the etic, and have revealed the limitations of "methodological nationalism" by shifting the focus from the country of arrival to the *transnational social space* and situating the analysis within the lived migratory experiences. Use of ethnography, narrative and life history methodologies as well as the ability to move between disciplinary boundaries has allowed for the exploration of questions of cultural values and identity, intergenerational and kinship transformations through mobility, of cross-border exchange, within regular transnational gendered family networks, of wealth and ceremonial possessions as well as social and cultural remittances. Certainly the growing attention to indigenous epistemologies and work by indigenous academics have greatly contributed this literature, yet there is still much scope for an integrated disciplinary approach which can "enrich a variety of disciplinary methodologies", as the editor of this collection briefly mentions on page 21, and for the indigenous approaches and transnational studies of migration to fertilise each other without remaining encapsulated within the "boundaries" of their own thinking. While Teaiwa (2006: 83) warns us against the "tempting rhetoric of Pacific exceptionalism", Eric Waddell also concludes the journey of this volume with a plea for creatively benefitting from synergies of research and learning in this interdisciplinary context.

Ultimately, the richness of insights into the diversity of cultures and social practices of Pacific Islanders, makes this volume appealing to readers not only in human geography, Pacific Studies and cultural studies in more general terms, but also in anthropology of migration, of material culture, as well as political science for those interested in colonial and postcolonial socio-cultural dynamics of the region.

REFERENCE

Teaiwa, T. (2006). On Analogies: Rethinking the Pacific in a Global Context, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 18 (1), 71-87.