

Mothers' Darlings of the South Pacific: The Children of Indigenous Women and US Servicemen, World War II. Edited by Judith A. Bennett and Angela Wanhalla. Dunedin, Otago University Press, 2015. 379 pp., maps, illus., notes, bibliog.

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Mothers' Darlings of the South Pacific: the children of indigenous women and US Servicemen, World War II (2015) is written 74 years after the arrival of United States servicemen to the Pacific Islands during the Second World War. The cover image of two servicemen flanking an unnamed indigenous woman holding a baby was taken r months after the arrival of US forces in Tonga in 1942. The work of the editors and co-authors Judith Bennett and Angela Wanhalla alongside the contribution of seven authors has culminated in an important text. This book acknowledges a gap in the military history of World War II which it proposes to fill, that of women, Pacific Islanders and the intimacy of encounter.

The war stories of relationships formed between indigenous women and US servicemen stationed in the Pacific are lived experiences retold by their children, many of whom for various reasons were left behind. As the epilogue states “[t]hese children, however, are the embodiment of the human cost of war. Like their mothers, their lives are marked by war, and they live with its legacies. For them, the war never ended, it is still unfolding as they search for their American father. The ‘always after’ of their stories continue” (p.308). The geographic coverage is extensive with case studies in Bora Bora, Sāmoa, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Uvea Island, Tonga, Fiji, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands and Kiribati. Some common themes throughout the region relate to the state and US immigration policies which restricted marriage based on race. However as some of the stories recall, a few were able to break through these barriers in order to return to the Pacific Islands or to join their GI abroad.

The Introduction asserts that “[f]ull identity longs for the history of blood and the geography of bones” (p.30). Thus these first-hand accounts reveal some of the lasting legacies of war which brought about tremendous change in a short space of time. In many ways this book offers a reconciliation of sorts, mainly as a bridge for the ‘GI babies’ seeking to find information on their fathers, and to understand their place in society and the world.

In Chapter One, Bennett (pp.31–41) describes Bora Bora, and the local admiration for the Americans who were seen as ‘attractive’ and ‘irresistible’ (p.35). Alongside the building of new infrastructure for the community, the servicemen also forged new relationships; as a result about 130 children were fathered by Americans. One amazing story centers on Fred Giles and Tetua’s marriage against the odds, and their subsequent migration to America where they raised their children.

Sau’i’a Louise Mataia-Milo’s chapter titled ‘There are no commoners in Sāmoa’ (pp.42–82), depicts a different picture of local responses to the ‘maligi’ invasion. While Mataia-Milo draws out the cultural structures that inform Sāmoan identity, often times the child of the maligi experienced hardship, discrimination and shame. Many were harshly treated as children outside of these spaces of identity. Perhaps the most vocal demonstration of this experience is through the well-known song ‘Outou Teine o le Atunu’u’ which criticized local women who associated with the Americans (p.71).

The author argues that the change in values as a result of the encounter revealed how society attempted to cope with the tide of new goods, products, services and ideas.

Kathryn Creely's chapter on 'New Caledonia: The Experiences of a War Bride and Her Children' (pp.83–117) was a compelling account about the life of New Caledonian woman Isabelle Pezron in America with her husband Robert Melina and their children. Her journey and the struggle of coming to terms with a new place and people contrasted their initial optimism. Consequently their children endured a traumatic experience of loss and struggle. This heart-wrenching story ends with a meeting between Pezron's two children left behind in New Caledonia and their Melina siblings in America.

Bennett's chapter on New Hebrides (Vanuatu) (pp.118–145) centers on Tom Harris, a European who was considered an ambiguous figure. His dubious multiple identities included his role as a father figure to Rosalina Marie Boetovo (p.133). In the next chapter, Bennett describes Uvea (Wallis) Island (pp.146–164). Similarly in place of his parents who had passed, Father Bertrand Soucy became a father figure for Petelo Tufale. Not so much in his search for his father's family but as a guiding hand. However as Tufale was to later explain 'he already had two fathers, his Wallis one and Father Soucy. So why would he need another?' (p.164).

In chapter six 'Tonga in the Time of the Americans' (pp.165–182) Bennett writes that, 'silences, although they can liberate, also often imprison' (p.182). However for local woman Louisa Raass of mixed ancestry, she was able to marry and migrate with serviceman Warren Scott since her father was a US citizen. About 400 children were born as a result of the war in various circumstances. For many this period of encounter was 'best forgotten' since like Sāmoa it saw the departure of Tongan society from its usual Christian norms.

Jacqueline Leckie and Alumita Durutalo's chapter 'Kai Merika! Fijian Children of American Servicemen' (pp.183–201) follows the story of two women Adi Romera Drodrovakawai and Martha Naua. For Adi and Martha, the construction of their identity as 'Kai Merika' impacted their lives and sense of belonging. The authors attest that for Adi and Martha, '[i]dentity goes beyond securing a belonging within the fractious ethnoscape of contemporary Fiji' it was about a journey to find 'unknown kin' (p.200).

For New Zealand, Angela Wanhalla and Kate Stevens' chapter 'I Don't like Maori Girls Going Out with Yanks' (pp.202–227) outlines some of the encounters brought about by the presence of 100,000 servicemen stationed in mainly the North Island. The mobility of Maori women from rural to urban areas increased public health and church interventions to curb sexual behavior. However cultural groups also became enclaves providing social support. As experienced elsewhere, US immigration laws enabled the breakup of families, and left many questions unanswered, for some until now. It also demonstrated local resentment towards the Americans by young Maori men.

In the Solomon Islands as Bennett explains through the story of Letisia and her relationship with serviceman Paulo Cruz, a daughter Basilisa was born. Their stories are a reminder of the 'global war' even in some remote places within Guadalcanal (p.242). Just as the command areas were active in the war, smaller outposts endured cross-cultural encounters that have had lasting legacies.

The Cook Islanders as Rosemary Anderson writes saw the American presence as a 'friendly invasion'. Relationships formed were largely approved since the population was already of mixed ancestry on Aitutaki and Penrhyn atolls. The locals were grateful for American protection. Thus the small number of servicemen who returned were greatly admired. Although the GI babies were

accepted into the family network, many continue to seek answers about their American fathers and kin.

The final chapter on Kiribati (pp.270–299) follows several women such as Ellewies Foon and Norah Talanga both children of servicemen. Many of the US troops had been stationed in Tarawa, Butaritari and Abemama. However very little information is known about the men who have left permanent memories of their time in Kiribati. Due to federal restrictions, religious differences and family anxiety some of the documents or mementos were destroyed or discarded out of fear or resentment. However genuine attempts were made by some of the American fathers to support their children by sending parcels and providing money for their education. Yet as Bennett writes ‘secrecy and social practices, all created barriers for these wartime children seeking their American families’ (p.299).

This important text with its insightful images and maps contextualizes with empathy some of the lived experiences that have not been documented in this way. With its attached resource guide to assist people searching for families, Bennett and Wanhalla’s book goes beyond the limits of academia and reaches the hearts of those asking similar questions.