

## **JUST marginally POSSIBLE** **the making of *Matagi Tokelau***

*Judith Huntsman*  
*University of Auckland*

*ABSTRACT. The innovative enterprise—initiated and supported by the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific—which called for Pacific Islanders to write their own histories, has been a laudable but not simple or unproblematic one, as anyone familiar with the nature and practice of history in the societies concerned must realise. Together with Antony Hooper, I was involved for 10 years as an advisor/editor/translator/facilitator in the production of the Tokelau-authored book *Matagi Tokelau* (1990, 1991). At year four, in 1985, we reported and reflected on that project at the Pacific History Association Conferences in Suva. Our narrative ended with our dilemma of having been instructed to put together an uncontroversial Tokelau national saga from diverse and differing contributed tala anamua ‘accounts of ancient times’. This essay tells the whole story, summarising the earlier narrative and completing it. How the Book was written and produced is related and explained, and Tokelau reactions to it are discussed. The very political nature of the whole enterprise is highlighted in narrating the events connected with its production and its reception.*

---

Pacific people are certainly not, *pace* Eric Wolf, a ‘people without history’ and this particularly applies to the so-called Polynesian peoples among them whose histories unfold from their origins to the present day, told as a series of stories calibrated to genealogies. The complaint that foreign scholars have appropriated their history is quite absurd. Certainly histories have been written about them (which for very good reason they may resent), but these cannot take their history from them, though they themselves can lose it if they do not remember it (Wendt 1987). There is a lot of rhetoric on this issue, which will not be rehearsed here but has been touched upon because it forms the basis of an enterprise that called for Pacific Islanders to *write* their own histories—to *write*, as it was said, ‘insider’ histories.<sup>1</sup> This, on the face of

it, sounds like a laudable agenda, but was not very well thought through, or perhaps those proposing it did not have much familiarity with the nature and practice of history in the societies concerned. To them perhaps it seemed simple enough: (i) identify ‘insiders’ willing and able to produce written accounts; (ii) get them together in workshops to show them how it is done; (iii) reach agreement with the selected writers about what goes in and who does what; (iv) give support and editorial assistance as they write; (v) take what they write away, put in a little work editing and pulling it all together—and publish.

This ‘insider’ history enterprise is associated with the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific and is not perhaps the most successful part of what has been on the whole a spectacular and formidable publishing venture.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the Samoan volume, edited by Malama Meleisea, all of the books were written with the help of ‘outsiders’, in the role of ‘facilitators’. Antony Hooper and I were initially requested to assist with the proposed Tokelau volume and we indicated that we would be willing to help. When we spoke to Tokelau people about the possibility and they said that they were pleased we had been asked, we accepted with alacrity. However, as we began to think about how the project might proceed, we became mindful of the difficulties. We had a good idea of where the basic problems lay—but not of exactly when and where they would surface. Anyway we went ahead. It’s a long story and I should say now that I have mercifully abridged it in this telling. Before embarking upon my narrative two matters should be addressed: my position (or reason) in telling it, and the particular circumstances of the project.

To come straight to the point: I do not think the visionaries of ‘insider history’ were fully aware of how intrinsically political local history is. In some cases the politics were simply ignored (or perhaps went unrecognised) by naive academic facilitators. However, for those with knowledge of the local and national situations, the politics of them cannot be ignored. Recognised or not, I suspect that in each case there were political concerns specifically with language, authorship, audience and authority, and more broadly with exclusion and inclusion.

Several aspects of the Tokelau Book project made it unusual if not ‘unique’.

1. Hooper and I had been doing ethnography in Tokelau for over ten years before the project began. We knew the people of the three atolls and were well-known by them; we were 'ungrammatically fluent' in the language and well-informed about past and present social events and relationships.
2. The whole project was undertaken through a committee structure (rather than a collection or group of authors) to the extent that in one atoll the elders (as the voice of their village) dictated in concert to their scribe (at least for a while). Following on from this, no authorship was assigned to any Tokelau text. Their Book was to be presented as a truly communal endeavour.
3. Whatever was written by the 'insider' authors was written in Tokelauan. This was because at the time the project was begun (in 1981) nobody in Tokelau was comfortable writing in English (the most academically qualified contributors had trained as a Native Medical Practitioners in Fiji), and so nothing would have been written, if it had not been written in Tokelauan.<sup>3</sup> This contrasts with all other cases, as far as I know, where most, if not all, manuscripts were written in English by people with at least some tertiary training, edited by facilitators, and then usually, but not always, translated into the local language.
4. As editors-facilitators having some fluency in Tokelauan, we could engage in meetings and discussions about their Book, and could comprehend, and eventually translate, what had been written. Furthermore, we were familiar with the history and culture that was being written about, and in some areas were as informed as (or even better informed than) the 'insider' authors.<sup>4</sup> Also, we were well acquainted with the politics of it all. Within Tokelau, as anyone would expect, there are differences of opinion about what happened in the past and about practices of the present, and these differences are highly charged between the three atoll communities, which are continually engaged in normally muted competition for renown and resources, each trying to gain a slight edge while at the same time upholding absolute equality.
5. It was not just the writing of history that was politically charged, but the whole enterprise was caught up in wider political agendas phrased in terms of 'development' and 'modernisation'. Those that were writing their Book wanted their work to be recognised as a service to their society. Although

they eschewed recognition as authors, for several reasons, they wanted to be remunerated for their work just as other people working as ‘public servants’ were being remunerated for theirs. After all, they were working for the ‘development’ and good of Tokelau, just as the teachers and nurses and construction workers etc. were. It was a particularly difficult time in Tokelau!<sup>5</sup>

*The story begins in 1980.*

Over the years Hooper and I had accumulated a couple of file drawers of published and unpublished European documents on Tokelau, and saw our first task as making some of these accessible to the potential authors. The result was a 300-page book containing accounts of early voyagers, members of the United States Exploring Expedition, missionaries, administrators etc. written between 1765 and 1925. It was a very limited edition of 12—a source book—and not translated (though we hoped it might be). The books, two per atoll, were graciously received, but only a handful of people in Tokelau could really comprehend them, and they were generally treated as ‘family books’, i.e. put safely away. We are quite unsure where the books got to; they never appeared at meetings and their contents were never discussed until five years later (see below).

The Book project was put forward at a General Fono (formal meetings of representatives from the three atolls) in mid-1981. We were in Tokelau at the time, but not at the meeting. People who attended came away somewhat confused about what had been proposed but the Fono had given the proposal some kind of vague approval. In the following couple of months, we explained the proposed project to groups formally convened to consider it and spoke informally with many others about it. People were intrigued with the idea, but somewhat tentative. In the course of these talks, two things became absolutely clear: (i) there could be no selection and training of a special group of writers—rather, this was to be a collective venture, done by local committees, ultimately under the authority of the elders; and (ii) we both had to be fully involved because of our long-standing associations with separate atolls. Furthermore, there was a lot of anxiety that the project might go awry, and repeatedly expressed concern that the Book be true and correct. Nevertheless, each of the three atolls set up a local Book committee in rather different, though characteristic ways, and it was agreed

that the first meeting of the pan-Tokelau Book Committee would be held in January 1982 in order to *fakavae* 'lay the foundation' for their Book.

We were in the atolls for several weeks before the 'founding meeting' and we observed (and were consulted about) the complex negotiations that preceded it. After numerous conference conversations via wireless between the atolls, it was agreed that the meeting would be held in Fakaofu, that each atoll would have five voting delegates, that non-voting observers could be 'invited' to speak, etc. The occasion was being finely programmed; clearly it was not going to be a 'workshop'. In the event, this first Book meeting had the formality of diplomatic negotiations—equanimity and courtesy on the surface covering undercurrents and manoeuvrings of diverse interested parties. Nonetheless, an outline of the Book was agreed to, writing assignments were made and a schedule set, and these decisions and resolutions recorded in comprehensive minutes.

#### *A vexing matter and its resolutions*

At that 'founding meeting' all delegates concurred that 'history', both ancient and recent, was an indispensable part of their Book and would comprise one of its two major sections—but how the ancient 'history' was to be written was an extremely sensitive issue.<sup>6</sup> Some local committees had produced beforehand texts based on *tala anamua* 'accounts of times past', which they gave to us; but they were not circulated, and not a word was ever written or said about genealogies. The agreed procedure was that each local committee would collect and record 'accounts of times past' and these would be reviewed and discussed by the pan-Tokelau Book Committee at a future meeting. This never happened.

Two years later the Book Committee convened again in Fakaofu with only slightly less formality. There had not been much writing done in the intervening years, so procedures were revised and Book Committee representatives were assigned particular topics on life in Tokelau, including explanations of fishing techniques, which occasioned some delicate negotiations among the exclusively male representatives.<sup>7</sup> We were given a few more 'accounts of times past', but again they were not circulated. In fact, there was no open discussion of the indispensable section on Tokelau's ancient history. When the subject was finally brought up, the delegations quickly agreed that we should take away the texts we had, and that local

committees would have six months to write further texts, which would be posted direct to us in New Zealand (thus by-passing the full Committee). We were instructed to put them together to the best of our judgement. Further, albeit with good humour, they said directly: ‘Then if we do not agree, we can blame you two!’

At this point, I need to clarify what was going on, or what their dilemma was, which they had made our dilemma.

1. When Tokelau as a whole accepted the idea of writing their Book, with us as advisors/facilitators/editors of it, they knew that we knew their stories about their past, their genealogies etc.—after all they had been telling them to us for over a decade. They also knew that we knew that they had conflicting versions of these narratives and genealogies.
2. Yet, their Book had to contain ‘the Tokelau national saga’, even though they were very uncertain about how this might be done. Their uncertainty was twofold. How could their discrete ancient stories and ‘accounts of times past’ be presented in their Book as a connected historical saga of Tokelau, and, even if the discrete narratives could be connected, how might a non-controversial rendition of this saga be composed? They had to recount their common past to confirm and celebrate the unity and identity of Tokelau, but they did not want to discuss or debate their conflicting versions of that past because they feared that this would spark quite violent disagreement, which would compromise that very same Tokelau unity.
3. The solution was to get us to do it and avoid a confrontational situation among themselves. They would record their separate ‘accounts of times past’ and we would construct from them a non-controversial Tokelau saga. If we failed to do this, it would be our fault. If we succeeded, authorship would be assigned to ‘the elders’. If anyone was offended, we could be blamed.

The matter of ‘copping the blame’ was not of great concern to us, but the task set us was.

How might one arrange a bunch of ‘accounts of times past’ into a non-controversial saga? We had the advantage of having heard the controversial narratives in several versions—in fact, the oral versions we had recorded as ethnographers were richer in detail and exposition than the texts we received from the local Book committees—and we had recorded

relevant genealogy too. Thus, we could draw on our own prior knowledge and understanding in order to avoid or evade matters we knew to be contentious. Further, we reasoned that we should include in the saga we had been asked to compose only material provided us by the local Book committees. In other words, the content of their saga would be constructed exclusively from material that they provided.

As it turned out the task, when we got round to it, was not a particularly difficult one. The separate texts provided were not radically different, and they enriched more than they contradicted one another. What might have been controversial could be glossed over by being made less specific. The text we put together was accepted without comment by the Book Committee, so I suppose they deemed it satisfactory.<sup>8</sup> We were neither condemned nor praised.

### *Getting and putting the pieces together*

To return to the narrative. The pan-Tokelau Book Committee met several times in 1984–85 in our absence, and, judging from minutes of the meetings forwarded to us, did not make much headway. In early 1986, a meeting was attended on our behalf by the Tokelau lexicographer, who had shortly before completed compiling the *Tokelau Dictionary*, and he took along some Tokelau translations he had made of texts in the book of ‘outsider’ accounts we had put together five years before. He reported upon his return that most of the meeting was devoted to his reading aloud his translations, and consequently a decision was unanimously made that the entire 300 pages of that book should be incorporated in their Book! Now this was the very antithesis of what the whole ‘insider history’ enterprise was supposed to be about and not what we had intended at all. At mid-year we were present at another meeting of the Book Committee and we advised that the earlier decision should be reversed, while allowing that some excerpts might be incorporated. The reversal, fortunately, was readily agreed to.

At this point we had enough material in hand so that we could identify what was still required and start putting the texts we had in order. The long-standing Committee members discussed what still needed to be written and assigned writing tasks among themselves. We were to be in the atolls for three months and agreed to help the writers. Although there were still some necessary texts outstanding at the time we departed, we took with us

two large notebooks of a provisional Tokelau manuscript (most with rough English translations) made up of texts arranged chronologically or grouped thematically. In Apia everything was photocopied three times and one copy dispatched to each atoll so that the local committees and others could read and review the proposed contents of their Book. We returned to New Zealand and awaited some kind of reaction.

We had been meticulous in keeping records of everything we had received, and regularly updated lists of what texts we had and what texts were not yet received. Nonetheless, during our months in Tokelau there was lengthy worrisome discussion about writings supposedly sent to us and not received, and how they might have gone astray. As the Book came closer to completion the whereabouts of various texts increasingly became an issue.<sup>9</sup>

It was just such a matter that abruptly broke the silence of over a year that had followed the despatch of the collated texts in 1986; some texts supposed to have been included were not in evidence. All at once there were cables and phone conversations, and the long-standing chairman of the pan-Tokelau Book Committee suddenly appeared in Auckland to confer with us—all in all much consternation. This uproar had come about when a member of the committee in one atoll, claiming that their contributions had been excluded, threatened to boycott of the whole project. We again made a list of what texts had been received and when, what texts were still outstanding, etc. (As it turned out, the texts concerned had been carefully put away, and owing to happenstance never sent.)

This apparent crisis served to enliven the project again. While the chairman was in New Zealand we arranged a demonstration to show him how their Book might be produced using a computer. He reported these marvels back to members of the Book Committee, they approved everything and funds were allocated, thereby allowing us to begin to arrange book production.

At this point we became production managers: employing Tokelau residents of Auckland with appropriate skills to enter and edit the texts, keeping track of their work, arranging payments, getting estimates of costs, etc.

By August 1989 we had very rough first proof sheets, simple runouts from the disks in book-like type, in which the texts in hand were provisionally arranged, except for texts latterly received, which had been added in the



order they arrived. With these in hand, we went to Apia for a meeting with three long-standing members of the Book Committee so they could see how what they had written would appear in their Book, could write anything that needed to be added, and remove anything they felt to be inappropriate. We also planned to confer with them about the title, cover and illustrations, and how the publication would be distributed. The title *Matagi Tokelau* was quickly endorsed, the proposed cover design and illustrations were greeted with delight, and they were quite unconcerned about distribution. What we had not anticipated was the lengthy discussions about how and where their Book would be launched—a matter that we felt was a bit premature and to which I will return.

A meeting of the Book Committee members with the Tokelau editor followed our own, and when he returned to New Zealand, he brought with him the corrected and amended galleys, and all the outstanding texts. Anyway, that is what we thought. It turned out our trip to Apia (at considerable cost) was quite unnecessary because those who had travelled from Tokelau to Apia came on to New Zealand, paying their fares with their consultants' fees. And, again, we soon discovered that the corrections and amendments were hardly complete.

The meeting, however, had confirmed the general structure of *Matagi Tokelau*. It had come to be made up of 100 discrete texts varying in length from ten lines or so to five or six pages, as well as seven extracts from 'outsider' accounts translated into Tokelauan, and the epic that we had composed as requested. These many pieces were grouped into chapters, which were arranged in four sections. The proof corrections had to be entered, bits of text inserted, bits of text deleted, bits of text shifted, and the whole thing carefully edited. We became fully involved in the production of *Matagi Tokelau*.

Second proofs were to hand by the year's end and we proceeded to write short introductions to each chapter (which were then translated into Tokelauan by the Tokelau editor). No sooner were these completed than another bunch of texts arrived—ones that had been promised in August but had not been delivered because 'the children had torn them up'. They had to be edited, entered, slotted in, and then the chapter introductions modified to take them into account, all of which meant further adjustments to the edited manuscript.

At last, we thought, we had the final Tokelau manuscript, but when we sent the page proofs to the chairman of the Book Committee, he returned them with quite major emendations, and so we arranged a small meeting. We managed to moderate his excessive censorship somewhat, but nonetheless removed, at his request, ‘offensive’ sections of early published records. After all, we kept telling ourselves, it is *their* Book. The difficulty was that it had become, at least for the chairman, very much *his* book that was close to becoming a reality as *Matagi Tokelau*. He had indeed taken a major role in its creation, and was becoming anxious about its contents—about how his compatriots might react and how it presented Tokelau to the wider world. He was closely identified by others with the project, which indeed he embraced as something of a crusade, and its contents could well compromise his future social relations. So he was determined to expurgate anything that might be considered offensive to any person (dead or alive, Tokelau or other), and to expunge any passage that might reflect badly on Tokelau (past or present).

This, of course, meant another round of deletions and adjustments. But they were the last, for when the chairman again wrote to say that there were other texts he now thought should be added, we resisted, explaining that this would entail approval by other Committee members, editing, entering, revision yet again of introductions, etc., and that *Matagi Tokelau* would never be launched if its contents kept being changed. This observation won the day.<sup>10</sup>

### *Launchings*

A launching in New Zealand—at ‘the Beehive’ (Parliament), attended by invited guests and dignitaries, with abundant food and drink etc. —was being promoted by the chairman. We refused to get drawn into this matter, saying that we had undertaken to help them write and produce their Book, not to decide what to do with it thereafter. In December 1990 the Tokelau edition was in print; four months later it was still not available since it had not yet been launched!

For well over a year the ‘politics of launching’ had been a growing issue. People in New Zealand wanted *Matagi Tokelau* to be launched in New Zealand, arguing that it would attract good publicity, etc. But Tokelau officials in Apia insisted that *Matagi Tokelau* be launched in Tokelau,

arguing that it had been written and funded in Tokelau. The resolution was a typical Tokelau one. There were two launchings: the first—of the Tokelau edition—at a pan-Tokelau gathering in Tokelau with speeches and commemorative T-shirts, and the second slightly later—of both editions—at the Town Hall in the Wellington suburb of Lower Hutt, with many distinguished guests and, yes, lots of food and drink and dancing.

This was an enterprise involving two languages, three isolated atoll communities, and two very distant locales—Tokelau and Auckland, tenuously linked via the Tokelau Office in Apia, Western Samoa. It was an enterprise impinging upon countless other projects of persons and interest groups, few of whom had any notion of what is entailed in producing a book or what might be the implications of writing things for others, known and unknown, to read. And, in concrete terms it had to do with hundreds of texts in two languages, which had to correspond and kept changing. It was indeed ‘just marginally possible’, and that it was possible is largely due to the good humour and tolerance of a few dedicated Tokelau authors.

### *Reception*

How was *Matagi Tokelau* received by its Tokelau audience? What has been the impact of *Matagi Tokelau* in Tokelau?

The following observations were made in Atafu in mid-1991. Only a couple of months after the book launching, *Matagi Tokelau* was not very visible. Few people seemed to have copies, though copies may have been tucked away with other personal possessions. Nevertheless, I saw some people reading and heard them discussing it. The *papalagi* ‘outsider’ accounts translated into Tokelau were subject to intense discussion, particularly Harry Maude’s account of the Peruvian slavers’ depredations in 1863 (Maude 1981, 63–73). The cover and old photographs were gazed upon and speculated about for hours. I often wondered if it would not have been better to have just translated those 300 pages of ‘outsider’ accounts, illustrated them with old photographs, and left it at that—it certainly would have been a lot easier. But no. People were writing articles in the local newspaper setting out their interpretations and knowledge that differed from what was in *Matagi Tokelau*. These essays were presented as alternatives rather than as critiques, and by and large the authors were operating in a ‘scholarly manner’

by writing other texts. *Matagi Tokelau* had stimulated discussion and debate about Tokelau knowledge and traditions.

The Tokelau national epic seemed to be as non-controversial as it was designed to be, until it became implicated in inter-atoll debate. A Fakaofu man, taking up and elaborating upon its text in a local newspaper article, proclaimed Fakaofu's dominant position in the Tokelau polity not only in the past (with some quite offensive phraseology) but also in the present. This had its repercussions. His text was taken by Fakaofu reactionary super-patriots, as he probably intended, to argue for the reinstatement of Fakaofu political supremacy, and this stance, for a time, brought Tokelau political 'development' to a standstill. The elaborated text and political stance predictably brought indignant responses from the other atolls, repudiating the assertions made and, on the basis of Christian principles, taking the 'high moral ground'. The rebukes again appeared in their local newspapers. The uncontroversial Tokelau national epic had been taken up, it appeared, to provoke the very controversy and dissension its design sought to avoid.<sup>11</sup>

But then, on the other hand, *Matagi Tokelau* inspired young (and not so young) Tokelau people in New Zealand to compose and perform a musical drama based largely on the accounts of Tokelau history. That drama is an explicit statement, indeed performance, of Tokelau identity.

I have told a story of the making of *Matagi Tokelau* both to document its doing and to provoke discussion about history-making. Not wanting to preempt that discussion, I keep my commentary brief.

Oral narrative, or stories people tell about themselves to themselves, cannot be translated directly into history. For many people, as for Tokelau people, the narratives that have been *tutu ifo* 'handed down', whether of ancient, past or recent times, are of moments or happenings memorable for their intrinsic significance, rather than for their place in a causal or chronological chain of events.<sup>12</sup> Thus Tokelau *tala* do not comprise a 'history' of Tokelau because they are not connected to one another. With work they can be made into a 'history' of sorts, but often the connections are vague and forced. An oral narrative stands on its own, while a fragment of 'history' is just that. Oral narratives in their telling are transitory, each time they are told they are a bit (or a lot) different—sometimes fortuitously and sometimes on purpose. Inevitably diverse versions arise, yet they too are transitory. Written 'history' is something else altogether, and a matter of contestation because it stays around in the same form, and furthermore is

accessible to all kinds of people. There was a wariness in Tokelau about their Book because people were aware of how what is written (especially in a book) differs from what is spoken (in a narrative), and, despite commitment to the Book project, there was an undercurrent of disquiet.

Right through its own history, *Matagi Tokelau* was embedded in the politics of Tokelau: the politics of inter-atoll relations, the politics of Tokelau villages and the Apia-based administration, the politics of atoll Tokelau people and New Zealand Tokelau people. The question might be asked: Would advisors uninformed of these political currents have been better able to guide the project? I rather think not; in truth I believe that the project would not really have been possible.

### *Acknowledgements*

This essay in different guises has been presented in several venues, and I have benefited from the reactions of diverse listeners. Antony Hooper and I gave a version of part of it at the Pacific History Association conference in Suva in 1985. I updated that story a couple of times and told it to students at the University of Auckland. A full draft was composed in 1991, when I thought the story had come to an end, but after three months in Tokelau in that same year the end was extended. By then the story was too long to be told as a conference paper, so the version that I gave at the Pacific History Association conference in Christchurch in 1992, as an update of our 1985 paper, was radically abridged. I repeated something like that version in the University of Auckland Department of History the following year. One can give only so many oral performances of the same story, at least to historians, but no publication venue seemed quite right until Doug Munro solicited a version for this journal. I trust that my narrative shows what a central role Antony Hooper played in the enterprise recounted, and doubtless several sentences will sound familiar to him. He, however, should not be held responsible for anything written herein. I have adopted a sometimes ironic voice for this story—a voice that is common in Tokelau story-telling, especially when stories are about contemporary events and happenings. In truth, this bit of contemporary history was full of ironic events and situations. If this mode of narration offends anyone, I apologise in advance.

## Notes

1. The interrelated objections to ‘outsider’ histories are: (i) it is an affront (of both personal and national dimensions) that a people’s history be only written by foreigners, (ii) who too often write them as only colonial histories, more concerned with the steady cumulative impositions of the institutions of foreign domination than with the social history of indigenous peoples, (iii) using obscure sources in arcane archives located at the other ends of the world, and (iv) completely lacking ‘an insider’s point of view’.

2. Eight books of ‘insider’ history have been produced, aside from *Matagi Tokelau*. The brief characterisations below hint at their problematic nature, and also serve to place the Tokelau project in perspective. I am grateful to Doug Munro for correcting and expanding my original listing on the basis of his own (Munro 1995, fn.29).

*Rotuma: split island* (ed. by Chris Plant, 1977) was revised, enlarged, and re-titled *Rotuma: hanua pumue, precious land*, in a new edition (Anselmo Fatiaki et al. 1991). Both publications are in English only.

*Kiribati: aspects of history* (Alaima Talu et al 1979) was ‘prepared for the occasion of the Independence of Kiribati 1979’ and published as two separate books, in English and in Kiribati, with the title *Taruana Karakin Kiribati*. It is primarily historical, beginning with origins.

*Vanuatu: twenti wan tingting long taem blong independens* (Walter Lini et al. 1980) appeared as ‘part of Independence celebration’, and focused upon aspects of Vanuatu cultures and recent history. It is unique in being a single volume in three languages all the way through—Bislama, English and French—in parallel columns.

*Niue: history of the island* (ed. by John Broadbent 1982) was printed in a two-part format of Niuean and English. It is not altogether composed of ‘insider’ texts—in the view of an ‘outsider’ research student.

*Tuvalu: a history* (ed. by Hugh Laracy 1983) appeared some five years after Tuvalu became an independent nation. There was little local enthusiasm at project’s outset, and each atoll’s history has its own chapter and author. The volume is quite heavily edited and presents some difficulties for scholars. Munro (1986, 394) noted that it ‘was not a case of the authors explaining their country’s past to outsiders . . . but often quite the reverse’; and Besnier (1995, 37) pointed out that the parts of the book dealing with Christianity ‘bear suspicious resemblance to the type of discourse one finds in the journals of the more rigid and ethnocentric missionaries of the Pacific in the nineteenth century’.

*Atiu: an Island community* (ed. by Ron Crocombe 1984) was first proposed during the summer visit of a prospective advisor about 1980, but people were not very interested so he did not pursue it (pers. comm. the late Garth Rogers). Nonetheless, the project did get pursued and after some time was also published in the Maori language as *Atiu: e enua e tona iti tangata* (Tatuava Tanga et al. 1993). Quite diverse essays by several local named authors comprise the volume.

*Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands: the past four thousand years* (ed. by Hugh Laracy 1989) is based upon material gathered by a team of Solomon Island researchers with an informed historian as 'ghost writer' of the history they wanted (*NewZealand Herald*, 7 Aug 1989).

*Lagaga: a short history of Western Samoa* (ed. by Malama Meleisea and Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea 1987) was produced in separate English and Samoan manuscript texts, but only the English is published. The Samoan government withholds the Samoan one. Aside from the editors (both academics and one Samoan) only one 'contributor' stayed with the project to the end. It's a long story.

*Matagi Tokelau* (ed. by Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman 1990) appeared first in Tokelauan and shortly thereafter (1991) in English.

3. If the project had been delayed ten years, the situation would have been very different (though we could not have anticipated this at the time). There would have been a handful of Tokelau people with tertiary degrees living in the atolls who might have contributed, and even taken leading roles in the project. There were, in 1981, a few people in New Zealand with tertiary qualifications, but the feeling in Tokelau was that their compatriots residing in New Zealand should not contribute to the Book, because they were not in the atoll communities. A few did, however, help with its production as editors, word processors, etc.

4. That we were, in some respects, better informed is not a statement made lightly. First, we had done a lot of archival research and had read most of the 'outsider' documents concerning Tokelau. Second, between us we were privy to the oral historical narratives of all three atolls: some local versions of well-known stories and others stories so local as to be told only in one atoll.

5. See Hooper 1982 and 1993 for an analysis of the socioeconomic situation in Fakaofu at the time. In the latter phases of the project some remuneration was forthcoming for the major writers, and we as editor-facilitators literally cashed in on this when we were paid, with funds from UNDP, as consultants at \$70 per diem, just as four Tokelau writers were, during a final meeting in 1989. Otherwise, our involvement was gratis.

The connected issues of the composition and remuneration of the Book Committee are a topic for another essay. Suffice it to say here that aside from two members, it was not constant. Competing responsibilities, e.g. of schoolteachers, and what seemed to us an offhanded selection and rotation of delegates by elders' councils, meant that what continuity there was came from the real involvement of a few. So the Project progressively became more a crusade of a devoted few than the joint community project envisioned at the outset. Not surprisingly, the devoted workers increasingly felt that they should receive some financial recognition of their commitment in these 'modernised' and monetised circumstances.

6. The compound word used for 'history' in Tokelauan is *tala fakaholopito*, which is cognate with and derived from the Samoan *tala fa'asolopito*. Both are rather cumbersome expressions and might be more literally glossed 'story composed chronologically', suggesting that they are

coinages probably introduced by missionaries teaching biblical history. In Tokelau, people speak of a *kala o te kaloa* ‘ancient story’, *tala anamua* ‘account of times past’, *tala taku* ‘narrative handed down’, and *tala o na aho nei* ‘account of recent times’. *Tala* in all these phrases, glossed ‘story/account/narrative’, is a recounting of a happening some time in the past, a discrete past event, perhaps placed in time by the named actors in it, but rarely linked in time—as before or after another *tala*. What makes a *tala fakaholopito* different is that it is a series of chronologically connected happenings—one following another even if they are not causally related. The *tala* as they would appear in their Book were necessarily *fakaholopito*, because they had to be linearly ordered—one after another.

7. At the first pan-Tokelau meeting there had been one woman delegate, but never again was a woman directly involved. On several occasions, I urged the inclusion of women, and the suggestion was respectfully received but disregarded. Their absence is reflected in the contents of the Book—nearly 25 pages are devoted to types of fishing but women’s activities are totally unreported. One text was contributed, but never returned after a requested revision. The absence of women was caused in part by established practice whereby local elders’ councils had oversight of local committees, and selected delegates to the pan-Tokelau Committees.

8. An elder, from one atoll, provided a very full and authoritative version of significant parts of the saga, which were closely derived from an earlier account by an elder of another atoll, which he had transcribed from an ethnographer’s tape in New Zealand. This was a great help in evading controversy!

9. The mysterious ‘loss’ of significant pieces of paper is a general and recurrent issue in Tokelau. In one instance a bundle of manuscripts had been entrusted to a relative visiting from New Zealand, for delivery to us. It had not been passed on, but it was strategically ‘found’. In other instances, texts disappeared into secure storage places only to be discovered some months later or, conversely, texts not so secured were said to have been torn up by children or otherwise damaged by them.

10. I have said very little about the English edition, which necessarily lagged slightly behind the Tokelau one, even though we were working on it at the same time. In many cases, as the Tokelau manuscript was altered, the same alterations had to be made in the English one. So, once the Tokelau edition was out, the English edition proceeded expeditiously because nothing further could be changed, and appeared a couple of months later.

11. The offensive article, entitled ‘Alas the truth has been hidden for the sake of peaceful relations’, appeared in the May-June 1991 issue of the Fakaofu newspaper, *Vainui mai Fakafetu*. The article rehearses the story of Fakaofu’s ancient takeover of Atafu in particularly bloody terms. The following quotation captures the essence of the text: ‘A land of chiefs—Fakaofu’s pre-eminence is founded on bloodshed and trial, on wars waged by our ancestors for our [Fakaofu’s] benefit’. Several articles in response appeared in the September 1991 issue of the Atafu newspaper, *Kalaga Lua*.



The following quotations are from one entitled 'There is only one Paramount': 'What chiefly land are you going on about so? What about the "upward branch"?'; 'What about dignity? Are you taking thereto heaven?'; 'You celebrate a land of axes and spears. Atafu is different. WHY? Because of the "Good News" [Christianity]'. (Translated from Tokelauan with the assistance of K. Kalolo.)

12. These are not like an Icelandic saga or Greek epic, nor indeed like the chiefly narratives of Tonga or Hawai'i. Whether they might have been at some time is unknowable.

---

## References

- BESNIER, Niko, 1995, *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: reading and writing on a Polynesian atoll*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- HOOPER, Antony, 1982, *Aid and Dependency in a Small Pacific Territory*. Working Paper, no. 62, Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland.
- HOOPER, Antony, 1993, 'The MIRAB Transition in Fakaofu, Tokelau', *Pacific Viewpoint*, 34(2):241–264.
- MATAGI TOKELAU, 1990, Tokelau edition, Office of Tokelau Affairs, Apia / Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, Suva.
- MATAGI TOKELAU: *HISTORY AND TRADITIONS OF TOKELAU*, 1991, English edition, Office of Tokelau Affairs, Apia/Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, Suva.
- MAUDE, H. E., 1981, *Slavers in Paradise: the Peruvian labour trade in Polynesia, 1862–1864*, Australian National University Press, Canberra.
- MUNRO, Doug, 1986, Review of *Tuvalu: A History*, edited by Hugh Laracy, in *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 95(3):392–95.
- MUNRO, Doug, 1995, 'Pacific Islands History in the Vernacular: practical and ethical considerations', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 29(1):83–96.
- WENDT, A., 1987, 'Novelists and Historians and the Art of Remembering', in Antony Hooper, Steve Britton, Ron Crocombe, Judith Huntsman and Cluny Macpherson (eds), *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*, Centre for Pacific Studies of the University of Auckland, Auckland, & Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, Suva.
- 
- 
-