

Clothing the Pacific, ed. Chloë Colchester, Berg, Oxford & New York, 2003. 248 pp., illus., bibliogs, index. ISBN 1 85973 661 1 (cloth) £50.00; 1 859731 671 8 (paper) £15.99.

The Great Pacific Cover-up: Clothing and Identity in the Pacific 1797–1999
The collection of essays presented in *Clothing the Pacific* provides a four-part panoramic textual history of Pacific Islands, from early contacts with foreign traders, settlers and missionaries through to the present day ('Clothing the Body', 'Clothing and the Appropriation of Christianity', 'Clothing and Agency', 'Clothing in Diaspora'). The authors, who have contributed to a three-year project funded by the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council (UK), have collectively conceptualised clothing and cloth as a means for visualising the impact of European settlement and missionary activity on Pacific peoples and, conversely, for the understanding of the way in which these peoples have negotiated and interpreted their own cultures and traditions in the face of colonialism and post-colonialism. More specifically, *Clothing the Pacific* discusses ways in which missionaries on the one hand and Pacific Islanders on the other used both traditional cloth and introduced textiles in order to negotiate their identities. The book's eight essays comprise contributions by Alain Babadzan, Serge Tchekézo, Nicholas Thomas, Susanne Küchler, Lissan Bolton, Ping-Ann Addo, Chloë Colchester, and Rosanna Raymond. Two of the strongest papers are actually reprinted from other sources and, in one case, translated from French. Some of the papers are historical; others are concerned with contemporary issues and identities. Colchester's editorial introduction clearly contextualises the project and the papers, and introduces the papers in a way that draws out many of the book's diverse themes.

In his article, Serge Tchekézo concentrates on the recurrent misunderstandings that developed at first contact in Polynesia. Coherently with traditional custom, white explorers Cook and Rodriguez, foreign strangers but treated as high status guests, were presented with cloth (this is still a mandatory practice in areas of Pacific Islands). In the presentations, young women who had not yet borne children removed from around their bodies the great lengths of cloth to be presented, until they were, in the words of the startled Europeans, 'stripped bare'. For the participating European males, this was

interpreted as an explicit sexual offering; Tcherkézoff, however, insists that the diverse notions of 'nakedness' produced a gap between white explorers' and Polynesians' understandings. Even more specifically, while both explorers recorded their experience of completely exposed women, these women in fact most probably kept on their waistcloth, the *maro*, thus completely subverting the meaning of European appreciations of these occurrences.

On an anthropological level, *Clothing the Pacific* manages successfully to convey the influence and impact of European settlement and missionary activity by focusing on the changing uses and meanings of clothing to the indigenous populations in the Pacific. As Nicholas Thomas outlines in his essay, while the conversion to Christianity in various phases during the nineteenth century had a profound impact on the way in which 'Melanesians' and 'Polynesians' negotiated traditional cloth usage, cloth and introduced textiles could be regarded as a visual indication of their conversion to Christianity. Because of the continuously changing patterns of usage, Thomas follows Appadurai in suggesting that material artefacts do 'have "social lives"' (79). Of course, missionaries sought not only religious conversion, but also a conversion of the social habits of those they converted. His essay constitutes, then, an account of how missionaries (in particular missionaries' wives) encouraged the women of the Pacific to sew and create clothing that conformed to Christian notions of 'modesty'.

In her introduction to the book, Chloë Colchester notes that the missionary personnel endeavoured to help 'redemption' by placing ordinary objects within accepted and understandable definitions of evangelism, thus rendering these objects central to the conversion of Pacific Islanders (1). This, however, was a process and a *modus operandi* not practised only by the white missionaries. Thomas notes how Tahitian converts preaching in Samoa introduced the poncho (*tiputa*), an article of clothing that was originally part of their traditional heritage, as a way to cover-up the upper half of their hitherto proudly bare-chested converts (these ponchos would incorporate both European and Pacific influences in their pattern design).

Thus, quite literally, clothing the Pacific—clothing interpreted very widely, including cloth and fabric, covering, clothing, dress, body art and face paint, aspects of wrapping, folding and layering, revealing and hiding, etc.—becomes essential to the understanding of the ways in

which the Pacific Islands were integrated in and interacted with the wider world. *Clothing the Pacific* argues that this should also be the case in the analysis of the contemporary Pacific. This constitutes in the end the common theme of a collection of otherwise widely different contributions.

One disservice to the book, besides the differences in both scope and quality of the contributions, is a number of editorial mistakes that could have been addressed with a more thorough proofreading. Examples include, but this is an incomplete check, 'cross-cultural interaction Pacific' (xi); 'Babadcan' (xv); 'dubois historical accuracy' (5), and many cases of references cited but not listed or of discrepancies between citations and reference list entries (Gell, whose two books are noted as fairly seminal in the collection (7, 8, 9) but do not appear in the reference list; Hendrickson 2000 (8); Weiner 1991 (10); Gailey 1983 (17); Smith 1993 (20); etc.). This may seem trivial, but inaccurate citations subvert the purpose of referencing and frustrate the reader who may be interested in following up on aspects of the argument.

While older generations of Pacific peoples endeavoured to follow their understandings of missionary notions of modesty through what others now regard as old-fashioned styles of dress, younger generations are seeking to liberate themselves from oppressive styles of clothing and restricting notions of morality. Interestingly, the book highlights the ways in which Pacific Islanders are moving away from the 'traditional' cloth usages that were appropriated through the missionaries in the nineteenth century. One example of this is the ways in which Indo-Fijians have taken to importing 'island prints' (from Hawai'i and Southeast Asia, usually). These island prints employ motifs traditionally used on Pacific *tapu*, yet Fiji-Indian traders use them in bold colours on modern fabrics to make dresses, shirts, etc., in order to meet the demand of the market (1, 167).

New Zealand has witnessed a contemporary revival of a Pacific culture and identity. In this context, traditional cloth designs and patterns are being transferred into contemporary situations as a way to highlight and signify a re-emerging Pacific presence. Colchester's essay addresses the ways in which T-shirt designs are increasingly utilised by Pacific artists as a way to promote cultural pride and identity awareness while simultaneously acknowledging colonialism, migration, and urbanisation as constituent parts of a Pacific history they feel they belong to.

This book does not claim to be and is not a comprehensive study of the history of clothing in the region. Nonetheless, *Clothing the Pacific* is a stimulating and useful text for those interested in Pacific or anthropological studies, or those who have an interest in understanding the legacy of Victorian notions of clothing in modern Pacific cultures.

Clare Shamier
Griffith University
