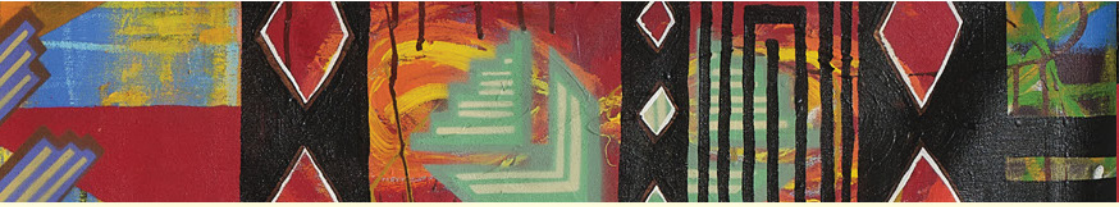

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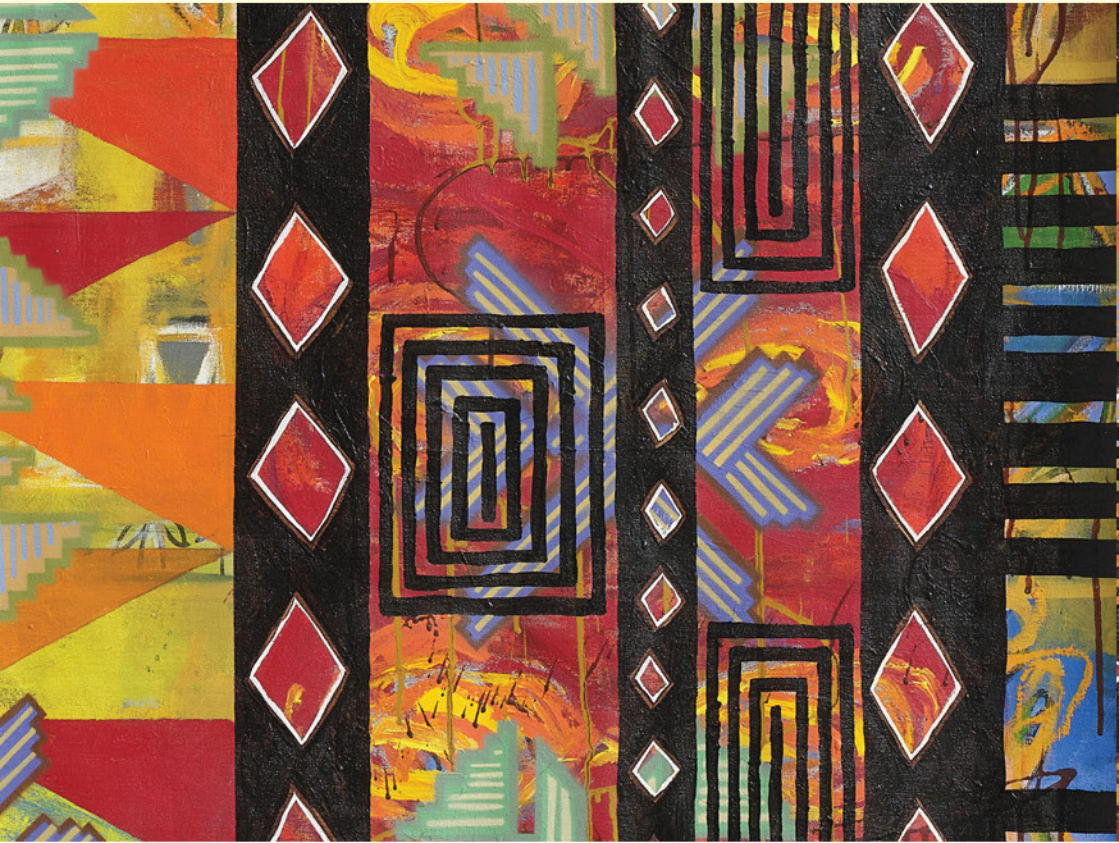
## Contemporary Pasifika Poetry from Aotearoa New Zealand

Edited by David Eggleton,
Vaughan Rapatahana and Mere Taito



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MASSEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Contents

Nau mai haere mai
ngā manuhiri mai i ngā takutai katoa.
Mātaki i ngā kupu,
whakaaroaro i ngā tirohanga,
whakamiha i ngā tāwara,
ako i ngā oro
o Te Moananui-a-Kiwa mārohirohi.
Tomo mai tētahi me te katoa
i roto i te whakamīharo
o *Katūīvei*.

Welcome welcome
visitors from all shores.
Consider the words,
contemplate the sights,
appreciate the flavours,
study the sounds
of the mighty Pacific Ocean.
Enter one and all
into the wonderment
of *Katūīvei*.

# Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand is home to many peoples of the Pasifika diaspora. We began gradually arriving in numbers from the Moana Nui — from the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Sāmoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and other archipelagos — as migrants after the Second World War, seeking a shot at the Western dream in return for our cheap labour. Now, there are first-, second-, third- and even fourth-generation descendants living here, in what the poet Courtney Sina Meredith has called 'Urbanesia'. Pasifika peoples represent almost 10 per cent of the population, are one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the country, and contribute profoundly to New Zealand society in all kinds of ways, including through a vibrant efflorescence of cultural activity, from music and dance to art, theatre, film and literature.

And within that literature, like a vital thread, runs poetry. *Katūivei: Contemporary Pasifika Poetry from Aotearoa New Zealand* is a celebration of one of the most exciting developments in recent New Zealand poetry. In bringing together this fresh compilation drawn from the past decade, our kaupapa has been to highlight something of the diversity and complexity of Pasifika heritage evidenced by poetic voices who write in the English language: from the South Auckland Poetry Collective to Polynation and slam poetry; from the individual successes and mana of John Puhiatau Pule, Selina Tusitala Marsh, Tusiata Avia, Karlo Mila, Courtney Sina Meredith, Serie Barford and David Eggleton to the burgeoning reputations of poets such as Grace Iwashita-Taylor, Rita Masae, Daren Kamali, Rob Hack and Mere Taito; and from the poems of former rough sleepers to the challenging poems of younger writers.

We follow in the wake of a succession of path-finding anthologies, and any anthology of modern Pasifika literature must acknowledge the central importance and early inspirational example of Albert Wendt, who has been committed to establishing the importance of Oceanic-Pacific

writing. Beginning with *Lali: A Pacific Anthology* in 1980, he has nurtured the vā, the interconnections between language and place, literature and belonging. He also edited *Nuanua: Pacific Writing in English Since 1980*, published in 1995, and then co-edited, again with Rena Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan, *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English*, which was published in 2003. In 2010, also with Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan, he co-edited *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English*. Albert Wendt remains a leading poet and writer of Oceania, of the Moana Nui and, by extension, of world literature.

The title of our anthology, *Katūīvei*, is a hybrid term, a combination of the Rotuman word 'kavei' and the pan-Pacific word 'tūī'. Kavei means to steer by or wayfind: to navigate. Tūī is the bird of Aotearoa that has a dual voice box and hence two voices, symbolic of the complexities Pasifika poets and peoples must negotiate every day. To write poetry in Niu Sila as a Pacific migrant is an act of wayfinding, a creative process of discovery and negotiation between cultural spaces.

This may be the first anthology of contemporary Oceanic-Pacific poets who live in Aotearoa New Zealand but it is not that these poets have all just leapt from an ocean-going, double-hulled vaka grounded on a beach in these islands. However, they do share genealogies, communal traditions and experiences and family memories and stories that are specifically Pasifika within a multicultural society that shapes their outlook. These are poets of the Pasifika diaspora who have settled here, or who were born and raised here, or who have lived here for substantial amounts of time, while toing and froing elsewhere. They are poets with modern lives who sometimes have a complicated relationship with their Pasifika heritage.

We wanted this anthology to be inclusive, to provide room for as many Pasifika poetic voices as possible. And we wanted to create a balanced anthology representative of many viewpoints and many styles, showing Pasifika poetry to be in a constant state of 'old and new', of haharągi and lelea' mafua, a lively and evolving continuum.

Because Māori are tangata whenua, the people of the land, they are not included as part of this recent Pasifika migration narrative. Māori literature has its own historical continuum in this land that goes back into the mists of time and forward into the future. ('Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua': 'I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past'.) Pasifika peoples are new arrivals, tauiwi or manuhiri (guests who share in the bounty of the land), with separate but related cultural practices. However, Māori poets who have Pasifika migrant heritage have been included, of course.

*Katūīvei*, which is intended to be a record of what is happening now or in the immediate past, capturing poems on the wing, came about through talanoa or conversations between us, and other poets and writers were also consulted and expressed their views. As editors we bring similar as well as diverse points of view, although every anthology is inevitably a product of its time and circumstances and historical context. Many community-led and small-press publications played an advocacy role in bringing Pasifika poets to our attention.

We wanted to present a sense of excitement and transformation and confidence about the present moment: for example, it is both appropriate and serendipitous that the first poem in this book, by Marina Alefosio, was written for and performed at the official ceremony for the New Zealand government apology for the infamous dawn raids of the mid-1970s, held at Auckland Town Hall on 1 August 2021.

We have worked on this anthology for a number of years, endeavouring to locate all poetry by Pasifika poets in this country that has appeared since 2012, with more emphasis on very recent work up to the end of 2022. David Eggleton is a former Aotearoa New Zealand Poet Laureate of Pasifika heritage who spent some of his formative years growing up in Fiji. His maternal grandmother was from Maʻufanga on the island of Tongatapu, and his maternal grandfather was from Mofmairo on the island of Rotuma. Vaughan Rapatahana (Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Te Whiti), who has been involved with editing various anthologies, including a 2023

compilation of Māori writing and a recent anthology of Cook Islander poetry, brings this experience to bear, as well as his understanding as tangata whenua. Mere Taito (Rotuma: Malhaʻa ma Noaʻtau) brings her Pasifika perspective as an interdisciplinary creative practice scholar and poet based in Kirikiriroa Hamilton. She is originally from the island of Rotuma in Fiji and has lived in New Zealand for the past fourteen years.

Naturally, these backgrounds, interests and approaches produced an enormous number of possible poems, which we had to make manageable. We chose more poems from established poets, but with an upper limit of three, and sometimes choices were difficult. Because of the diversity of narratives and themes, which were often echoed, interconnected or intertwined with other mahi in complex and nuanced ways, the poems appear in the alphabetical order of their poets' surnames.

Some poets published here — Gina Cole and Victor Rodger, for example — are better known in other genres, but they have also produced strong, inspirational poems in recent times. Among our poets, too, are a number of Pasifika tamaiti — school students — including Kalisolaite Fonongaloa and Sakaraia Nasau, and we confidently expect the numbers of young Pasifika poets to grow in the future, emerging from the generally supportive Pacific studies and creative writing educational environments in this country.

We read and researched with the joy of discovery as we encountered some extraordinary talent. Wananavu! We worked both together and independently as editors in order to arrive at a consensus for each and every poem included here, sometimes after much debate and reconsideration. Above all, as an editorial panel, we sought to provide a sense of the oceanic sweep of accomplishment of Pasifika poetry in this country now, in all its liveliness and variety.

Vinaka vakalevu. Malo ʻaupito. Fạiákseʻea ma ạlạlum. Ngā mihi nui.

*David Eggleton*
*Vaughan Rapatahana*
*Mere Taito*

# A brief history of Pasifika poetry in Aotearoa

The first Pasifika poet of the modern diaspora to emerge in Aotearoa New Zealand was Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, who was born in Rarotonga in 1925 and who died in Wellington in 2009. His father was a trader from Dunedin and of Scottish ancestry. His mother was from Tongareva in the northern group of the Cook Islands.

Campbell came to New Zealand at the age of eight with his siblings, after the death of both of his parents. The children grew up in an orphanage in Dunedin. Campbell began writing poetry at high school, and in 1950, after graduating from university, he became the first Polynesian poet to have a collection of his poems published in English. This book, *Mine Eyes Dazzle*, published by Pegasus Press, was critically acclaimed and led to Campbell being acknowledged as 'a master of language'.

For those of the Pasifika diaspora, there is the Pacific we carry in our heads and there is a Pacific which is the site of various contestations. Campbell encountered racism in his daily life in mid-twentieth-century New Zealand, and subsequently downplayed his Polynesian identity, but his early poems are lyrical and rhythmic and animistic in a way that draws directly on his Polynesian background and intuitions. One of his best-known early poems, 'The Return', is full of foreboding as it speaks of 'the surf-loud beach', 'mats and splintered masts', 'plant gods, tree gods', and 'fires going out on the thundering sand'.

Campbell's sense of alienation from his Polynesian roots — 'the Polynesian strain' as he called it — contributed to a series of nervous breakdowns that took him years to overcome, and the healing process as a creative writer involved his return to Rarotonga for the first time in 1976. This led to a new creative efflorescence, beginning with his

collection *Dark Lord of Savaiki*, published by Te Kotare Press in 1980.

The Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau have a special relationship with New Zealand, established in the colonial era. As a result, their citizens are New Zealand citizens and have the legal right to live here. Those from Sāmoa, Tonga and elsewhere in the Pacific require visas. The mid-1970s are now remembered as the era of 'dawn raids', when heavy-handed immigration officials targeted Pacific Islanders in their homes in the early morning in search of those whose visas had expired.

But by the mid-1970s New Zealand had also become a country with a sizeable Polynesian population, and a new cultural assertiveness had begun to manifest itself. Pacific Island groups, such as the Polynesian Panther Party and members of various church denominations, established themselves as community activists, aligning with other political activists such as the Nuclear-Free Pacific movement and the anti-Springbok Tour movement, as well as with protesters seeking Māori self-determination and recognition of land rights. Colonial legacies began to be questioned and challenged.

In 1976 Albert Wendt, recently appointed lecturer at the newly-established University of the South Pacific in Fiji, produced his landmark declaration 'Towards a New Oceania', which called for the recognition of an Indigenous Polynesian literature. It was printed in the inaugural issue of *Mana Review: A South Pacific Journal of Language and Literature*, produced by the University of the South Pacific Press. In this manifesto Wendt stated: 'Our quest should not be for a revival of our past cultures but for the creation of new cultures which are free of the taint of colonialism and based firmly on our own pasts. The quest should be for a new Oceania.'

Wendt was born in Apia, Sāmoa, and moved to New Plymouth, New Zealand, as a scholarship student in 1953, when he was thirteen years old. The publication of his acclaimed first novel, *Sons for the Return Home*, in 1973 was a defining event for modern Pasifika literature, establishing Wendt as a pre-eminent Polynesian writer. In 1976, the

publishing firm Longman Paul in Auckland released Albert Wendt's first poetry collection, *Inside Us the Dead: Poems 1961 to 1974*. Like Alistair Campbell, Wendt had begun writing poems at high school.

In 1980 a weekly poetry reading event called Poetry Live, open to all, was established by the Pālagi poet David Mitchell at the since demolished Globe Hotel in inner-city Auckland. This lively and popular performance space featuring established poets as guest readers soon attracted a variety of younger Pasifika poets to read their work, including David Eggleton, John Pule, Albert Livingston Refiti, Serie Barford and Gina Cole. David Eggleton was already producing self-published broadsheets of his poems, while John Pule produced his first self-published poetry pamphlet, *Sonnets to Van Gogh*, in 1982.

Eggleton and Pule began occasionally performing together, busking their poems at venues such as Cook Street Market. In 1983 they launched a national poetry performance tour as *Two South Auckland Polynesian Poets* (Eggleton grew up partly in Māngere East, while Pule grew up partly in Ōtara), supported by what was then the Māori and South Pacific Arts Council. Later that year, both poets took part in a key series of readings by Indigenous writers entitled 'Māori Writers Read' at the Depot Theatre in Wellington, alongside Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, Witi Ihimaera, Apirana Taylor, Patricia Grace and others.

Like Campbell and Wendt, as Pasifika poets and storytellers Eggleton and Pule were products of the colonial classroom, having its stereotyping and profiling drummed into them and consequently struggling to deal with a sense of cultural diminishment and imbalance. As Albert Wendt stated in the *Mana Review* manifesto, it was necessary 'to free ourselves of the mythologies created about us in colonial literature'.

Other Pasifika writers, too, felt the pressure. In an interview with Maryanne Pale on Creative Talanoa, Serie Barford described how she struggled to cope with the New Zealand university system: 'I was brought up the old way with the church and with chaperones and found myself alone in a strange place at the height of the feminist movement in the late 1970s. Every time I opened my mouth in a tutorial I felt like I was being mocked and that my world view was being ridiculed.'

Gradually, though, things began to change, especially after the 1984 election of the progressive Fourth Labour Government under David Lange and the subsequent declaration of a nuclear-free New Zealand, which helped establish a new sense of identity based in the South Pacific. However, overcoming conservative prejudices remained a work in progress; Pacific Islanders continued to be treated as political scapegoats in the media and continued to be confronted by urban alienation, economic disadvantages and a precarious migrant status. For the dominant Pākehā settler culture, the Pacific persisted as an exotic 'elsewhere' and Britain remained 'the mother country'.

But by the early 1990s, evidence of the cultural turn towards Aotearoa New Zealand's geographical location as a South Pacific nation was being acknowledged more and more. David Eggleton's first collection of poems, *South Pacific Sunrise*, was published by Penguin Books in 1986; it was co-winner of the Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry the following year. Albert Wendt returned to New Zealand as Professor of New Zealand Literature at the University of Auckland in 1988. Samoan poet and artist Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche, then living in Northland, became notable in 1989 when New Women's Press published a substantial collection of her poetry, *Tai — Heart of a Tree*. John Pule's first novel, *The Shark that Ate the Sun (Ko E Mago Ne Kai E La)*, was published by Penguin in 1992.

Pacific Islanders were now becoming prominent in many cultural areas of endeavour in Niu Sila, from dance and theatre to art and music. The rock band Herbs, founded in 1979 by Samoan vocalist and songwriter Toni Fonoti — who said he wanted 'to put Pacific influences into music, make Island culture more available, give it a modern soul' — produced a number of anthemic recordings, including the era-defining, anti-nuclear-testing protest song 'French Letter'.

In the 1990s there was a surge of Pasifika musical artists creating highly articulate rap lyrics and song lyrics commenting on social issues — from Sisters Underground (with Brenda Pua) and OMC (Pauly Fuemana) to King Kapisi, Che Fu and the group Nesian Mystik. In

Papatoetoe, South Auckland, the recording label Dawn Raid Entertainment, repurposing traumatic memories of the dawn raids, signed up a raft of Pasifika hip-hop artists and released their party and dance music.

Community-activist Pasifika poets of the 1990s included Reverend Mua Strickson-Pua, an ordained church minister who mentored Pasifika youth at the Tagata Pasifika Resource Centre in Auckland, encouraging them as poets and performers. Rosanna Raymond was another artist, writer and poet who came to prominence in the mid-1990s in Auckland as a founding member of the Pacific Sisters art collective, celebrating mana wāhine.

In 2000, Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa was appointed the inaugural programme director of Pacific Studies at Victoria University in Wellington. A poet, theorist and academic, Teaiwa grew up as part of the resettled Banaban community on the island of Rabi in Fiji and undertook postgraduate university studies in the United States. Like Albert Wendt earlier, in the 1990s she became a pivotal figure in connecting Pasifika literatures across Oceania as a regular presenter at conferences and other events, using the concept of the vā.

In his 1993 essay 'Our Sea of Islands', published in the book *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* produced by the University of the South Pacific Press, Tongan writer Epeli Hau'ofa, a leading light based in Suva, pointed out that nineteenth-century imperialism erected boundaries that led to the contraction of Oceania, 'transforming a once boundless world into states and territories'. A return to Indigenous concepts was needed to re-establish a sense of unity and interconnectedness, he wrote. The vā is just such a concept; it's the traditional dynamic space that holds Pasifika peoples together as a group; it is the sea between islands.

In his 1993 novel *Ola*, Albert Wendt wrote about the vā as a metaphor for connection, integral to Polynesian thought, serving to define relationships:

> Our vā with others define us.
> We can only be ourselves linked to everyone and everything else in the Vā, the-Unity-that-is-All and now.

Wendt proposed the vā as acknowledging a vast interconnecting faka-papa, recognising the interrelational spaces between people and their environment as an act of imagination. As he wrote in 1976 in *Towards a New Oceania*: 'Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope — if not to contain her — to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain.'

Teaiwa echoed this sentiment, stating in an 2015 interview with the journalist Dale Husband for *E-Tangata*: 'It's my job to remind people of the complexity [of the Pacific] and not let them try to paint us with a single brush stroke.' The Moana Nui is a complex hybrid entity, and we have sought to represent this paradoxical reality through the editorial mix of contemporary poems in *Katūīvei*.

In 2001, poet Doug Poole produced the first issue of *Blackmail Press* as an online poetry journal, with special emphasis on Polynesian creative writing. Even with its slightly erratic publishing schedule, *Blackmail Press* today remains an important internet platform for showcasing new talent, an integral part of the Pasifika digital vā.

In 2002, Tusiata Avia, recently returned from a decade travelling overseas, created the first iteration of her solo poetry show *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt*, and in 2004 her debut collection of poems under the same title was published by Victoria University Press. Over the next few years, *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* was presented by Avia at arts festivals around the world. In 2019, a multiple-actor version of *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt,* produced by Victor Rodger, won The Fringe Encore Series Outstanding Production of the Year at the Soho Playhouse in New York; once marginalised, Pasifika poetry had stepped onto global centre stage.

In 2003, when *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English*, edited by Albert Wendt, Reina Whaitiri and Robert Sullivan, appeared, it was described as 'the first anthology of contemporary Indigenous Polynesian poetry in English edited by Polynesians'. It catalogued and celebrated poets whose work had been published over the previous twenty years, revealing common themes and concerns

around dispossession, displacement, marginality, adaption, negotiation — and the process of reclaiming the Indigenous voice.

In 2006, Karlo Mila's first collection of poems, *Dream Fish Floating*, won the Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry at the Montana New Zealand Book Awards. This collection mapped the psychogeography of Oceania as a work in progress, and being 'Tongan' as a state of mind as well as a 'bloodline thing'. Mila was one of the nine poets in the Pasifika Poets Collective who took part in the 2008 Polynation show, created by Doug Poole and directed by Tusiata Avia, and she presented first at the Queensland Poetry Festival in Brisbane and then at the Going West Festival in Auckland. Other poets performing with Polynation included the Reverend Mua Strickson-Pua, Serie Barford, Daren Kamali and Selina Tusitala Marsh, who performed her now-canonical poem 'Fast-Talking PI'.

*Fast-Talking PI* became the title of Marsh's debut collection of poems, which won the Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry in 2009. Over the past decade, Marsh, who was New Zealand's first Pasifika Poet Laureate (2017–19), has become known for her energetic and inspiring poetry performances, as well establishing herself as an influential figure through her teaching of Pasifika literature at Waipapa Taumata Rau University of Auckland, where, succeeding Albert Wendt, she is a professor in the English and Drama Department.

In 2008, the South Auckland Poets Collective was founded by Grace Iwashita-Taylor and Daren Kamali, with Ramon Narayan, as part of a Youthline initiative, and it remains active today with around fourteen members and a large Pasifika component. Other Pasifika writing groups have since sprung up in many communities, towns and suburbs.

By the beginning of the second decade of the millennium, Pasifika poetry had undeniably become a major presence in New Zealand literature, helping to illuminate our understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand and its place in the world on a number of levels and in a variety of ways. Spoken-word events, poetry slam nights and performance poetry presentations have all been enlivened by Pasifika writers, while local Pasifika poets such as Leilani Tamu, Courtney Sina Meredith, Simone Kaho, Grace Iwashita-Taylor, Daren Kamali and Faumuina

Felolini Maria Tafunaʻi have all brought out significant and substantial debut collections of poems over the past decade to present the variety of moods, atmospheres and concerns of Pasifika life in Niu Sila Aotearoa New Zealand today.

*David Eggleton*

# Poems

Marina Alefosio

## Raiding the Dawn

Who is worthy of the first light?
The break of day?
A new beginning?
If our value is measured by the pigment of our skin or the origin of our story — who gets to decide how that story is analysed? Captured in text? Bound in history books? And resold to generations and generations?
Citizenship is a process, but people are not products.
Our value is not in the factory hand gripping the pen, signing the immigration paper, breaking the border or picking up the new language.
We broke borders with broken accents to break the chains of fear, a fear of the future.
We worked and we work in these factories, these systems with values seamed into our pockets, written in the tablets of our hearts with joy because we had the future in our foresight.
We signed the papers with the faith of tomorrow.
And we woke up
And we wake up every day with the promise of that first light for our children, our grandchildren, the children of our neighbours, of our hosts, our brothers and sisters — tangata whenua.
The livelihood of a nation is found in our waking.
So when the dark moved in and the light moved out and we were faced with another separation, we became like soil — marred by the dirt written and campaigned about us — stigmatised for daring to dream — daring to voyage — daring to wake up next to our loved ones.
Again citizenship is a process, but families are not products.
So when our dawn was raided and the blue hues and the red hues came in and that palette in the sky was shaken by the sounds of cracked eyes, heart palpitations, a brother hidden there, a pregnant woman waiting in the cells over there with no milk to feed her child, a cousin looking for coins to call his family to tell them he was found out and waiting at the departure gate, ready to go back while his Papa hid in the room praying.

We went back to those values seamed into our pockets, pulled out our roots and remembered who were were
And we went back to work, we went back to serve, to do the thing that we came here to do
And if you ever measured our value by our service, you would be amazed at the stars you cannot count like the nations Abraham in the Old Testament could not account for with his human eyes or his servant heart
Who is worthy of a quality life?
Who gets to determine what that looks like?
Let it be known that healing is a process and forgiveness is not a product — it's a promise.
We are looking for a true Genesis
Standing at the arrival gates,
Taking back our dawn
Handing it down to our descendants
Along with our values
Our servanthood leadership
Warm housing
A higher education
Life abundant
Village on the hills
Valleys no longer drying us up
Of our Moana
Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa
We are all worthy of that first light
We are all worthy of that first light
We are all worthy of that first light!

## The Local Theatre

It is true
they CAN make fire with their hands
rubber boys and black tight bandits
fast paced lip service
birthed from leaky homes
holding the heads of their elders
they chant,
*ONE OUT, ONE OUT*
their adolescent tongues become ropes
tied up in the sizing up of
their own necks
*STEP, brother, STEP*
stomp, footloose,
free musicals followed by
free media press
I start to foresee it,
one affidavit stapled
to the other
*just another day when the word gets around*
and when word gets to platform 2
they rush up like crazy 88
with tin can weaponry
this time
my son and I are watching stage left
I feel his forehead
and his temper has heightened too
so much I have to forewarn him
that these boys have mothers too
they're on stage somewhere too,
fighting just as much
to push the blood back down their children,

praying
that this synthetic sight is temporary
I promise him
that bandanas become bibs
any minute now
and it's his time to live
and I honestly cry for years
because I know I can't put it off
just listen out until the day
and continue watching Manurewa erupt
a boil up of almost men

Aziembry Aolani

## Parking Warden

My colleague says my skin colour shows that I like rugby.
I tell him, 'I don't follow rugby . . .'
He says, 'Your skin tells *me* though . . .'
My skin has never spoken to anyone.

A man yells from a moving vehicle,
'Get a fucking real job!'
He extends one of his fingers towards me.
That. Is. Talent.

A woman says the job I do is ridiculous.
Despite paying for the wrong space,
she continues to question my presence.
'Like why do you even?'
Is that even a question?
'I'm actually quite odd,' I reply —
awkward and triumphant silence.

I am called a fat shit.
The driver isn't in the best shape himself.
'Why don't you go for a run, ya fat shit!'
He snatches the fresh white print.
I try to catch laughter in the middle of my throat.
I walk almost 30 kilometres a day,
and I'm Polynesian.

At a pedestrian crossing,
I overhear a woman tell her child,
'You see, son. If you work hard at school, you won't have to do a job like that.'
She points to me.
I turn to the child, 'And I have a walkie-talkie!'

The child smiles.
To his mother's evil eye,
I pull a thumbs up.

Two elderly ladies ask for directions.
One lady says, 'Darling, you don't speak the way you look . . .'
The other: 'You're a very polite young man . . . Good for you . . .'
I pity them.

I see taxis on broken yellow lines
double-parked on a one-way street.
A driver spots me and alerts his companions.
'Go, go! The brown one is here!
The brown one is there!'
I see panic spilling out of their ears and exhaust pipes.

'Does anyone give you shit, bro?'
asks a man gripping a can of beer.
'Why would they? Look at you . . .'
I attach a printed headache to a vehicle.
'You're a big dark-skinned brother. No one will give you shit, my kill!'
I have a sudden vision of myself, as fresh kill, on the roof of a parked vehicle.
A mechanic spots me checking resident and coupon zones.
He screams,
'Warden! Warden!'

Just another white jaw rattling to remind me of what I am.

## Name

*Inspired by lyrics from Meg Mac*

Give me my name back,
capitalized,
as a period,
between my half ethnicities.
Give me my name back,
as a beat to my mother's hula,
chiselled into father's taiaha,
just before their vows misplaced.
Give me my name back,
stuck on the end of rolled cigarettes,
filling lungs of coloured young,
flicking ash upon grounds of their dead.
Give me my name back.
The one covered in age:
Family album —
I've forgotten the value of this face.
Give me my name back,
for my supposed ancestry:
Hunters, sailors, navigators,
their movements are denied in me.
Give me my name back,
in my childhood room,
covering the plastered holes,
where these calluses grew.
Give me my name back,
decapitated,
on the rear of father's utility.
It has hosted rust since 1993.
Give me my name back,
I can't go home without it.

Tusiata Avia

## Ova-sta-ya

The Tongan rugby player found them hiding in a fridge
he went round to a house in Balmoral yesterday after a tip-off.
One of a team of Tongan rugby players found them in a fridge
after seeing cabbages strewn across the kitchen floor.

Immigration and police were hiding in a fridge
there was a trail of cabbages strewn across the kitchen floor.
*We went there and had a look around*,
immigration official Kathryn O'Sullivan said

*We put a mattress underneath the house*
*we were trying to avoid detection*.
The Tongan rugby player found them hiding in a fridge
there were cabbages strewn across the kitchen floor.

The Tongan rugby team is considering whether to prosecute
the people who harboured them.
The Tongan rugby player urged the remaining immigration officials
and police officers to hand themselves in or face a similar fate.

*Three others had previously been found*, he said
*We're four down and ten to go.*

## We are the diasporas

No nations, just a mash-up
of all the countries starting with B
Bermuda, Barbados, Belize, Bahamas

everyone is from there
and all the countries starting with T
Trinidad and Tobago, Turkestan, Tonga.

What collection of molecules are you?
Nobody lives there.
You get a prize if you live in the country you are from

from I'm from From
that's my country
I was born in all the countries starting with F

my parents are each a UN genealogy
they met in all the countries starting with E
Ethiopia, Egypt, Eden, the garden of.

I was brought up in all the countries starting with
B, S, V
and now I live in Toronto.

I speak in Arabic and French and Italian
but if you are from Arabia or France or Italy
you may not understand me

my Creole is thicker than yam-jam
*peppersoupgumbomambojambo*
Italian spoken with an Eritrean accent

underneath it the seething soup of Tigrinya.
You get a prize if you are loving in the country you were born
or the country you grew up in

or the country your parents are from
or the country you would represent at the Olympics
if you were going to the Olympics.

It's true that poetry was once an Olympic event
a bit like Miss Universe where the poets read in ethnic costumes
or bathing suits.

There is a prize for being the most beautiful poet in the world
and that goes to the man from Trinidad and Tobago.
I can't even speak to him

his skin is too shiny, his teeth too white
his eyelashes too curled, his hands too intelligent.
You get a prize if you can speak.

## Poly kidz r coming

*Boom Shakalaka* Shirley Boys are dressed in pink
sharp teeth round their necks

*Shirley-is-a-girl's-name!*
*Where's your boyfriend?*

Their taupou is a boy with muscles
chanting:

*Shirley Boys is coming!*
*Where's your boyfriend?*

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Marlborough Boys are flying Tongans
bicking all da crapes
Marlborough Girls are britty kirls
bicking all da crapes
All da islands to da vineyards
bicking all da crapes
Tonga, Sāmoa, Tokelau
bicking all da crapes
Tuvalu, Niue, PNG
bicking all the crapes

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Suga, you wanna fofō? You gonna lie on my table an write da boem? Apout me? I gotta send money to my fricken family in Sāmoa. Don worry, no Carona here, I put da cover for your mouf.