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For Schachter, relationships form the ligaments, to use her word, of the *mo’olelo* (tale or history) of John Simeona and his sister Eleanor Ahuna. They are members of a generation referred to in the book title that were born in the late 1920s and 1930s and who, Schachter argues, experienced a particular process of Americanisation. Schachter claims their story is not a history of American colonialism, of which she is clearly critical, but neither is it a story of Native Hawaiian culture under United States rule. By presenting the story of Simeona and Ahuna, Schachter explores what it means to be Native Hawaiian and a citizen of the United States and investigates the relationships and entanglements between a generation who strongly identified with Native Hawaiian culture and an imperial United States that made strenuous efforts to deny their indigeneity.

Schachter has constructed an unconventional biography, but the template she draws on is Simeona’s own life-writing, a *mo’olelo* which he gifted her as a 64-page book: *Life Story of a Native Hawaiian*. To write her book, Schachter also uses interviews, kitchen table chat, and hundreds of letters that Simeona wrote to Schachter over the two decades of their association. Schachter acknowledges Jonathan Osorio’s contention that *mo’olelo* constitutes a form of assertive scholarship so that the *mo’olelo* is not dominated by “scholarly paraphernalia” (p. 13), but Schachter does provide notes on many referenced texts, archival and secondary sources. Referring to Dening (2004), she employs the concept of beach crossings throughout the volume. This porous, shifting metaphor and the digressive, anecdotal and sometimes contradictory *mo’olelo* underpin her depiction of the ways in which power relations influence the lives of individuals who “strenuously and steadfastly redesign that impact every day of their lives” (p. 11).

The construction of Simeona’s and Ahuna’s stories attends to the particulars of the individuals in time and place. Arranged in chronological order, the chapters follow them from their earliest years to their later lives as hānau mua (oldest living member of a family, source of wisdom). Central to each of their *mo’olelo* is their abiding connection to Hawaiian homesteads, in particular Keaukaha, near Hilo on the island of Hawai‘i but there are also connections with Pana’ewa on Moloka‘i and Waimānalo on Oahu. Schachter argues that the homesteads, epitomised by Keaukaha, represent a powerful critique of American policy in Hawai‘i and have been sites for the unanticipated revitalisation of *ahupua’a* (a land division) customs where residents maintained “a collective way of life at the margins of the colonialist-capitalist economy” (p. 30).

Prince Kūhiō’s proposal for the 1921 Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA) is one of many historical threads that run through the life narratives of Simeona and Ahuna. Following their lives as school-age children with curricula devoid of Hawaiian
history, Schachter personalises the impacts of the labour demands of the most powerful business interests and the plantation elite on young Native Hawaiian lives and the ramifications for generations to come. Schachter’s deployment of this strategy brings events like the Great Depression, the Massie case and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour into sharp focus. Colonial pedagogy and impositions such as Standard English and scripted roles for Native Hawaiian students are also depicted through the experiences of Simeona in particular. Sixty years later in 1998 his granddaughter Ana’s eighth-grade history book reveals the persistence of white-washed stories of Hawai’i’s “discovery.” A family funeral, inheritance and instances of hänai (to foster or adopt) are each revealing of the, at times, fragility of *aloha* and the conflicting values of different generations, but also the resilience and aptitude of Native Hawaiians in the face of sustained and unequal power relations.

However, there are moments when Schachter creates a curiously non-committal impression. The subtitle for example: “From Territorial Subject to American Citizen” suggests a progression of status that is a highly contestable notion, regardless of Schachter’s conviction that resistance strategies are unlikely to provide a singular pathway to cultural autonomy for *kanaka maoli* (Native Hawaiians). The fluidity with which Simeona and Ahuna negotiated their identities was cultivated through necessity. Her description of Simeona learning to “practice the right culture at the right time” (p. 3) was borne out of a hegemonic disparity. Yes they have multiple subject positions, but Ahuna’s determined silence about her school years is profound, and her younger sister Priscilla’s statement that: “the library wasn’t meant for us” (p. 62) speaks of a great betrayal of the young lives of Simeona’s and Ahuna’s generation. The notion that they are American citizens with all of the accompanying rights and privileges as Schachter suggests is undermined by a host of other examples: blood quantum definition of Native Hawaiian, Native Hawaiian incarceration statistics and public versus private schooling. Schachter integrates many of these issues in her text but neglects to decode or problematise American citizenship and its connection to a statehood that is not universally recognised. Schachter’s positive assessment of one judge’s comment that he “let them exploit the system” (p. 145), unlike his fellow justices (in relation to hänai), constructs Family Court rulings as subject to personal disposition. The injustices within this example are manifold but unexplored.

Schachter consistently foregrounds the lives of Simeona and Ahuna and emphasises the negotiations each of them makes, in Ahuna’s case as a commissioner within the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) and also as an activist in her role as president of the homestead association; Hui Ho’omanu. Schachter provides detailed and contextualised examples of the ways in which Simeona and Ahuna, among others, employ constitutional processes, federal programs and legal procedures to maintain kinship practices and relationship with the land. Her depiction of these negotiations is one in which Americanisation has not overpowered indigenous Hawaiian culture.

The potential readership for Schachter’s book is wide. Her portrayal of homestead life beginning with the legacy of Prince Kūhio and the subsequent entanglements through which she describes Simeona’s and Ahuna’s unfolding lives actualise many aspects of Hawaiian history and epistemology and firmly locate the personal in the political. Within an academic context it is an exceptional resource in terms of life writing, a perspective on the world through the story of a life. Schachter declares early
on that she is not an insider, although she does spend time calibrating her “Auntie” status, she does not refer to any of the people she talks story with as her informants or participants, and rises to Aunty Eleanor’s challenge that she assert her point of view without making herself the central subject of the story. A lesson Schachter derives from Simeona’s writing is that mo’olelo is pedagogical; it is not only the account of a single individual, but transmits knowledge and learning to future generations. Schachter’s text is a meaningful addition to the canon of Hawaiian studies particularly because of her analysis of the evolution of the HHCA, but especially because of the Native Hawaiian subject-centred portrayal at the heart of the text. Whether the book fulfils Simeona’s expectations of a biography or Ahuna’s maxim that a person writes in order to create change, Schachter has reciprocated with something of value for the ‘ohana with whom she has spent so many years talking story.

**Reference**


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At the heart of Vanessa Smith’s fascinating book is a Tahitian word, *taio*, signifying an “Oceanic friendship pact formalized with some degree of ceremony” (p. 69), with persons from outside someone’s own kin group, and involving an ongoing sequence of exchanges, including personal names as well as goods and services. It quickly came to be used by European explorers to describe their cross-cultural relationships with the men and women they perceived to have authority over the local people in Tahiti and other islands. *Taio* is arguably the first Tahitian word that Europeans pick up in their writings. Nonetheless, it is also a tantalisingly unknowable word which disappears from use during the 19th century. Contemporary Maohi, ‘Indigenous Tahitians’, who Smith spoke to, have no recollection of it. It only exists in the archival records of the Europeans visitors who experienced it. However, Smith’s book is not an ethnographic reconstruction of ancient Tahitian forms and practices of friendship, although these are alluded to. Instead, Smith utilises the concept of *taio* in order to explore how Europeans responded to particular demonstrations of Oceanic cross-cultural friendships, and what light these experiences throw on European ideas of friendship. The Pacific Islanders who became *taio* to Europeans are viewed through the writings of these friends and other European observers.

In the first half of this book, Smith creates a sequence of chapters that mark moments in the early European exploration of Oceania, in particular of Tahiti and other eastern islands. The first chapter looks at the welcoming crowds, highlighting their significance in the “fraught problematic of cross-cultural encounter” in Oceania (p. 35).