

*Review:* HEATHER YOUNG LESLIE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

*Voyages* is the most enduring and readable ethnographic account of contemporary Tongans' lives available to date. It is a must read for anyone studying Tonga and will be of interest to anyone working in the contemporary Pacific or on the subject of transnationalism. In *Voyages*, Cathy Small focuses on what is probably the most significant catalyst for change in contemporary Tonga over the past thirty years, the issue of migration. Small examines the experience of migrants through a comparative lens, capturing the experiences of Tongans who left with those who stayed. She focuses on a single village and, mostly, a particular kin group, thereby retaining the fine-grained detail expected of good ethnography.

The interesting thing about *Voyages* is that the long, recursive view means the analysis includes migrants to the United States and then follows a younger generation on their visits back to the “home” village. She is thus well placed to document the transnational aspect of contemporary Tongans’ experience and to compare the ways in which migration has affected everyday life. The book is structured into four sections; within this framework she is able to describe the various rationales for migration and the effects of migration on social mobility, kinship relations, gender roles, traditional practices, and notions of identity both in Tonga and for Tongans in America.

Small documents how migration began, motivated at the village level by desires to “help” the family as part of a broader movement towards monetization of the economy. Such help came in the form of better education and wage opportunities, and returns of remittances and other goods gained from overseas labor. She makes the good point that migration was (and is) a way to fulfill Tongan ideals for self-elevation—to become “big” or “high”—and has contributed to even more monetization and efflorescence of prestige markers (ceremonial and material) both overseas and in Tonga. Small also shows that like many other migrants in America, however, there is a tendency for Tongans to experience relative downward social status, discrimination, baffling bureaucracy, and limited labor opportunities. Migrants must return to Tonga to become elevated in social status. Of Tongans in America, she notes, most send remittances to family back home, but a high percentage live close to the poverty line, at least in the initial wave of migrants. These factors change the longer families live in the United States, as do family relationships and the sense of responsibility to relatives in Tonga, traditional practices, and notions of identity. Small is clearly not convinced that migration has necessarily been good for Tonga, despite new forms of material prosperity, higher education, and international experience. Tongans have changed a lot in the last thirty years but even still, she concludes, Tongans are still Tongans. The key factor that initiated the flow of migrants—love for the family—remains central to Tongan culture.

I like this book very much, for three reasons: First, the representation of contemporary Tongans’ lives matches what I have been seeing since first coming to Tonga in 1991. Indeed, as I write this review, sitting in a house in the Nuku’alofa suburb of Ma’ufanga, I am surrounded by potential characters in Small’s book: my neighbor worked in New Zealand and American Samoa to finance his house and his children’s education. His wife’s mother lives in a house built by two daughters currently living in Australia. My house is available because the couple’s son and his family are away, studying in Fiji. When I take a taxi or bus, the driver has invariably worked or studied for some time overseas. These are indeed voyaging people, as Small has so neatly categorized them.

I also like the book because the voices of Tongans are strong. Small is careful to let them speak for themselves, providing, for example, their own migration narratives and comparisons of life in Tonga with life in America. It's a technique that works well. I'm also impressed by Small's own reflexivity. Her voice is included in the text—justifiably so, since she is part of the relationships about which she is writing. She writes clearly and simply, and is just as clear about her reader's active involvement with the text as she is her own positioning. Thus the tangle of counterdependencies that characterize what I think of as good anthropology—long-term engagement with the people and place, reflexivity, reciprocity, cautious and accurate representation and clarity of voice, recognition of the tangible nature of whatever we say as anthropologists, and recognition that we need to make contributions to our own societies—are all evident in this book.

For these reasons I find *Voyages* very useful for teaching. It allows students to really see what anthropology is about, what constitutes good, ethical ethnographic representation, what it is anthropologists do, how we get our data, and how we frame the questions that eventually evolve into anthropological literature.

As with any book, there are some problems. *Voyages* has some rather embarrassing typos—as examples, the first Tu'i Tonga was Aho'eitu, not "Ahotaihu" (p. 13); and the root sent by the village water board was undoubtedly kava, not "kafa" (p. 71). I also found the text to be underreferenced, particularly with regard to general anthropological theory, a drawback in its applications for teaching.

Another drawback to *Voyages*' classroom applicability relates to Small's choice of audience. She justifies her focus and case study on migrants on the basis of the "global phenomenon" of migration, which is pervading the "industrial world" (p. 8). Her case study focuses on Tonga and the United States. Although I have no problem with her use of the United States as a field site, I would have preferred she apply her skillful use of voice and reflexivity to avoid erasing the wider variety of locales to which Tongans migrate and the larger audience to whom the subject would appeal. The book is written entirely for an American audience, although Small does not actually say so until the second-to-last page of the final chapter. This kind of myopia should not exist in anthropology, especially in ethnography of such a clearly transnational society as Tonga. The "American with a college education" (p. 215) that Small addresses as the book's reader could just as easily be Canadian, Australian, Norwegian, or Japanese, just as interested in the global phenomenon of migration, perhaps especially, of Tongans.

These are minor irritations. Of a more serious nature is the fact that some of Small's information is already outdated. For example, she states that Poly-

nesians settled the Tonga islands around 1500 B.C. This is not substantiated by recent archaeological work, which dates the oldest Lapita site in Tonga to 900 B.C.E. or approximately 785 B.C., give or take 50 years (Burley and Dickenson 2001). Also, she uses quite outdated data when referring to island residents who tend migrated relatives' property (p. 65). In support of this point she references data from 1984 that indicated that 10 percent of Tongan landholders live overseas (p. 225). This is a gross underestimation that was clearly out of date when the book was published in 1997. Since the hurricane of 1982, for instance, the level of out-migration from Ha'apai has made it increasingly difficult for remaining villagers to *fua kavenga* or "carry the burden" of social life. The situation varies according to island and proximity to the capital of Nuku'alofa, but I know of villages with closer to 60 percent of town sites lying abandoned. A decade ago, relatives were able to keep the weeds at bay on such sites. Today, alternative arrangements are being made, either because there are not enough relatives left or they may be too old to care for the property. The situation is severe enough in some areas that women are taking up men's work—hoeing—under the auspices of women's development or church groups with the (domestic) goal of making the town look "clean." Some town officers are dealing with the problem by seeking aid money for mowers because there simply are not enough people to keep all the town land clear of bush and weeds.

In the same section, Small notes that relatives also care for children sent home from America. I doubt she could have predicted the current problem developing—at least in and around Nuku'alofa—with "unclaimed" children: juveniles with one or both parents working overseas are making their own places with neighbors or distant relatives, sometimes on fairly contingent bases. A recent scandal being discussed in newspapers and in public areas as I write may relate to a similar scenario. A hotel in the center of town has been exposed as a brothel, out of which girls as young as twelve are working. That their families are unwilling or perhaps unavailable to care for daughters, who in traditional practice are meant to be highly protected, is shocking to people living in Tonga. Locals see it as no surprise that the hotel is run by a Tongan entrepreneur recently returned from America. There are also "problem" children who have been sent back to learn "Tongan ways," including older teens who have been deported, under the assumption that aging grandparents and village relatives can handle them. Many households today are overstressed for resources and clearly not coping well with the situation, however.

I do not want these criticisms to hide the fact that *Voyages* makes an important contribution to literature about contemporary Pacific life, as well as to perspectives on migration within the United States. The book has such strengths and is so topical that I would like to see a revised edition, one that incorporates a more transnational focus and updates the data from within

Tonga. There are fascinating things happening in Tonga, and Small is well placed to contribute even further. I look forward to her next publication.

### REFERENCES

Burley, David V., and William R. Dickinson

- 2001 Origin and Significance of a Founding Settlement in Polynesia. *PNAS* 98 (20): 11829–11831.