

EDITORIAL

It is always difficult to strike the right balance between inclusiveness and focus when setting a theme for a conference. When we settled on ‘Beyond Ethnography’ as the theme for the 2005 conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand, held at Victoria University of Wellington, we expected it would be interpreted in widely different ways, even subverted. We were certainly not disappointed. On the conference website we explained the theme as follows:

Ethnography – both as a research process and as text – is the life blood of anthropology. It provides new sources of information, a testing ground for established ideas and the basis of new forms of explanation. It is, however, tied to rather low levels of interpretation and explanation, often limited to regional areas where specialists have developed particular patterns of discourse which are difficult to use comparatively. The aim of this conference is to widen the context of anthropological thinking and debate beyond the local and particular emphases of ethnography. It will ask participants and presenters to address larger questions in anthropology involving high level explanations of and generalisations about human society and culture.

Our intention, as organisers, was essentially, therefore, to encourage conference participants to generalise anthropologically. Some of us did so: Cris Shore revisited his ethnographic study of the European Union to reconsider how its development might be understood in terms of theories of the state; I attempted to build on Peter Wilson’s work concerning human domestication. Others, however, addressed the theme in quite unexpected ways. Joan Metge and Kathryn Scott productively interpreted ‘beyond ethnography’ to mean the practical and critical engagements of anthropologists with the wider community. Hal Levine argued that beyond ethnography and cultural meanings there are scientific explanations – answers to ‘why?’ questions. Graeme MacRae took the theme to be an invitation to return to ethnology, although the ethnology he ‘returned’ to was a more general project than that envisaged by most

anthropologists. James Urry saw the theme as an opportunity to historically contextualise the ethnographic enterprise and its current dominance within anthropology. Revised versions of the papers of each of the above participants are included in this issue.

James Urry's paper makes an ideal introduction. Not only did he produce the initial draft of the theme's explanation quoted above, he also drew the cartoon at the front of this issue. Like the responses to the theme, some of the responses to this drawing were also quite unexpected. At least one person thought that it depicted anthropologists as refugees. Joan Metge objected that 'Anthropologyland' is not 'another world' beyond the ethnographic palisades and over the distant horizon. Collectively, the articles in this issue lend support to this view: 'Anthropologyland' appears to be very much here and now; the palisades were only a flimsy fence.

Jeffrey Sissons