

EDITORIAL

This edition of *SITES* welcomes two new board members – Chris Prentice of the University of Otago and Monte Aranga from Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi to the editorial board. We hope that this widening of the expertise of the editorial board into the areas of post colonial, cultural and indigenous studies signals to our readers the journals’ continued interest in exploring interdisciplinary perspectives on culture and society within the Pacific. The current year has also seen us joining the virtual world via our webpage at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/anthropology/sitz/sites-3.html>. In the coming year we will be mounting abstracts of all the new series papers on this location and connecting the journal website back to the *ASAANZ* website.

To change topics now to the contents of this current edition – while it is a general edition, it seems that in certain ways, the eclectic collection of writing assembled here does touch on a continuous theme - the politics of indigenous and non-indigenous identities in several locations within Pacific societies.

Our lead article by Keith Barber continues the debate which Tremewan (2005) initiated in our previous general edition. Barber rejects the view that social anthropologists from Aotearoa/New Zealand have remained silent in the face of culturalist arguments to support indigenous identity. In addition, he suggests the civil backlash on current government policy towards Maori results from a conflation by voters of ethnically targeted spending with the separate issue of treaty claims for some Maori. This confusion of constitutional procedures with welfare provision has occurred in a climate marked by increasing pressure on the material conditions of existence for the poorest of New Zealand’s (ethnically diverse) families. Perhaps more researchers will follow this thread along further – is it neoliberalism that is at the core of such disharmony or are there other recollections and conjectures from researchers working and living here during the 80s and 90s to explain the contemporary politics of resentment? Once again we invite submissions to the next general edition which continue this discussion and we hope to secure as many points of view as possible.

This edition also marks our first inclusion for the New Series of a paper situated within the broad terrain of cultural studies by the material culture theorist Deborah Cain. Her article ‘Whitefella Cleaning?’ explores Daniel Malone’s artwork *A Long Drop to Nationhood* via the piece’s own complex references to aesthetic precursors and well known Antipodean cultural forms. Cain provides a reading which nimbly charts complex political and cultural terrain around identity and belonging – topics so relevant to Barber’s preceding discussion.

Fitzgerald and Robertson take up the idea of identity but at the institutional level of its expression as they explore a variety of styles of residential homes for the aged. In shifting from homey to hotel-like, each institutional identity apparently satisfies residents’ desire for a place to live. The concept of institutional identities then shifts closer to professional identity in the article ‘Focus’ by Mike Lloyd in which Mike draws our attention back to us all as researchers. Both playfully and provocatively he invites us to reconsider our identities as theoretically informed empirical researchers. What is it that sociologists (his own point of focus) are currently doing? Perhaps some more of you will engage him in conversation in the next general edition?

This issue also features a special section edited by Tricia Laing entitled ‘Cultural Positions in New Zealand’s Deaf World’. The articles in this section attempt to make sense of the processes by which people enter and maintain the Deaf community, develop Deaf and deaf-related identities, and create and express Deaf culture. Like the making of *The Lord of the Rings*, the story behind this collection of writings is a uniquely New Zealand production however its implications are international. The variety of perspectives presented marks a turning point in New Zealand Deaf/deaf-related research.

The beginning of the special section can be traced to the Second Deaf View Conference held in Auckland in July 2004. The conference theme was ‘Together we prosper – the way forward’. Rachel Noble, whose paper in this collection talks about her experiences with her hearing daughter, was a key organiser of the conference. At the conference Kirsten Smiler, Sue Nicolson and Ava Buzzard, and Tricia Laing presented earlier versions of their papers. Shannon Knox was one of the interpreters for Kirsten’s paper because of her Maori language knowledge – Kirsten’s paper explores the complex identities of Maori Deaf people. This was Kirsten’s first conference presentation on her MA thesis. Rachel McKee, whose paper in this collection is about the experiences of mainstreamed deaf and hearing-impaired children, was the supervisor for Kirsten’s thesis.

Another thread to the collection began at the annual anthropology conference in December 2004 which was promoted via a photograph of an interpreter signing. The conference theme was 'Translations, Treaties and Testimonies: The Cultural Politics of Interpretation'. This provoked Tricia to organise a session in which papers previously presented at the Deaf View Conference, were re-presented. Shannon interpreted the papers and more. Sue and Ava attended the session before the one featuring their own work and Shannon interpreted this session without preparation. The discussion between Shannon and Tricia afterwards was the first step towards her writing about academic interpretation for this collection.

Among the feedback on these papers was the comment from anthropologists that listening to and watching the session was like doing ethnography – translation and interpretation is central to the cultural identities of the Deaf and deaf-related. Editing this collection of papers was also like doing ethnography. The authors of this collection feature in each other's lives and stories beyond presenting papers at conferences.

Rachel McKee's work on mainstreamed education for deaf and hearing-impaired children has long been familiar to Tricia's family - Rachel had trialed her interview schedules on them. When Erica (Tricia's daughter) was much younger and Shannon was working as an interpreter in Wellington, Shannon interpreted for Erica at a school trip. The relationship Erica had with her teachers and classmates changed significantly for the better as a consequence. The Deaf Association paid for the interpreting service because they saw it as an opportunity to promote the benefits of the service. Sue and Ava's story was a signed, power point presentation that Rachel Noble, Shannon and Tricia helped translate into a written script for this collection of writings.

At the 125th Anniversary of the van Asch Deaf Education Centre in 2005, Tricia met Peter Fogarty. He had written and published a history commemorating the Centre. He accepted Tricia's invitation to write an autobiographical piece about his shifting identity growing up to be Deaf. James Townshend and his brothers played significant roles at the celebrations. His Deaf brother was an invited guest who told his success story. James and his hearing brother were interpreters. James' view added to the multiplicity of perspectives of the Deaf community. At the annual meeting of the New Zealand Federation for Deaf children this year (2006) James presented a moving description of his experiences and identity challenges as a sibling of a Deaf person and a child of Deaf parents. His story resonates with Wenda Walton's and together they provide insight into the contribution of the deaf-related as interpreters and teachers

of the Deaf. The papers in this collection are stories that are told, retold and reflected upon in the process of creating, maintaining and expressing Deaf culture and community.

If the writing and editing of the special section was ethnography in action, the question remains, 'Why would a group of Deaf and deaf-related people prepare a collection of autobiographical and reflective anthropologically oriented papers?' One answer is that the process has provided an excuse to explore identities and cultural process together, an opportunity that doesn't often present itself. It was also a long-term project motivated by a need associated with New Zealand Sign Language becoming an official language. New Zealand Sign Language became an official language of New Zealand in April 2006. Public awareness was raised significantly. Deaf and deaf-related people found themselves justifying the idea of Deaf culture and revisiting some of the old arguments about the linguistic status of Sign Language.

Tricia's motivation also came from an awareness of how few resources are dedicated to the transmission of Deaf culture and New Zealand Sign Language from one generation to another. More often than not New Zealand Sign Language is transmitted from one family to another rather than within families – hearing parent, Deaf child/Deaf parent, hearing child. Two separate organisations respond to the needs of deaf adults and children – the Deaf Association of New Zealand and the New Zealand Federation for Deaf Children respectively. Both organisations have interests in Deaf culture and New Zealand Sign Language but neither can ensure that New Zealand Sign Language and Deaf culture will provide for future generations of deaf people unless they work together. When Tricia Laing began to talk to people who were not deaf-related, and who might provide the resources, it became clear how difficult it was for them to understand what Deaf culture entailed. This awareness motivated Tricia to enlist the help of other Deaf and deaf-related friends and colleagues to write the papers in this section which is intended as a celebration of language and culture.

We invite you then to continue reading, and in doing so to engage with some of these diverse accounts of identity politics within the Pacific.

Ruth Fitzgerald (*General Editor*) and Tricia Laing (*Special Section Editor*).

REFERENCES:

- Tremewan, C. 2005 'Ideological Conformity: A fundamental challenge to the social sciences in New Zealand', *Sites New Series*, 2 (1):1–27.