

## Book Review

## **Tūrangawaewae: Identity and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand edited by Trudie Cain, Ella Kahu and Richard Shaw**

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Who is a *New Zealander* today? The increasingly multicultural character of Aotearoa New Zealand does not offer a direct answer to this. On the contrary, growing complexity of the social world and the place of individual identity in it provokes multiple discussions and excursus into modern understanding of the shift of national identity, new perspectives of belonging and the notion of *home*.

Kahu (2017, p. 11) notes that “... what it means to be a New Zealander or to be in this place (and these are not necessarily the same things) may be quite different for different people”. *Tūrangawaewae: Identity and Belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Cain, Kahu and Shaw (2017), is an exceptional book that questions and navigates the reader through the changing landscapes of identity, citizenship and culture. The structure of the book embraces a conceptual framework based on *faces, voices, places and stories* and chapters are organised accordingly.

Beginning with a sweeping review of demographic diversities and the changing face of Aotearoa New Zealand, in the opening part, *faces*, Cain (2017) delves into features of the new ethnic diversities, asserting that “a sense of identity and belonging is also mediated by the extent to which a person feels “included and accepted within an institutional fabric of neighbourhood and community” (p. 41), highlighting that multiple aspects like age cohorts, regional differences and collective diversity are to be considered in developing a modern understanding of identity formation.

The following chapter by Warren, Forster and Tawhai strengthens the theoretical framework of the book by attempting to understand the contemporary notion of Māori identity and belonging. The chapter navigates the reader through an uneasy history of colonisation and assimilation, as well as diverse Māori realities of today, emphasising that although these might be diverse, “all realities are derived from particular social, economic, historical and political contexts that are explicitly interconnected with relationships to whakapapa, whenua, and whāinga” (Warren, Forster & Tawhai, as cited in Cain, Kahu & Shaw, 2017 p. 67).

In the following chapters, *voices* of Aotearoa New Zealand are explored in different contexts, with everyone’s voice “acknowledged as a legitimate contribution to the public debate” (Cain & Kahu, 2017, p. 73). Namely, three different ways in which voice is expressed (political representation, political protest, and various forms of art) are explored and their interrelatedness is highlighted. While Kahu (2017) emphasises that “protest, be it face-to-face or digital, is a critical form of participation, and an important right in a thriving democratic society” (p. 110), Cain (2017) asserts that “the arts provide a powerful voice for the nation, for communities and for individuals” (p. 132).

In human geography, place is only given social meaning when it is understood from the human activity and imagination perspective. As Cain and Mansvelt underline, places are a “key source of belonging and identity as sites of inclusion, security, comfort, freedom, and material and social wellbeing” (p. 139). Chapters that contribute to the *places* part of the conceptual framework of this book form the core understanding of *Tūrangawaewae* as “one’s sacred or special place of belonging” (p. 139), and telescope the discussion of the notion of place into perspectives of home, education, citizenship and globalising, digital identity. The critical message of this part of the book is that “our sense of self, and our understanding of what it means to be a citizen in this country, is ultimately connected to different places and the relationships that we have in them” (Cain & Mansvelt as cited in Cain, Kahu & Shaw, 2017, p. 142).

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A range of narratives presented in the final part of the book, *stories*, animates the previously covered diverse content and contributes to the reader's understanding of "developing, or inhibiting, a sense of identity and belonging" (Littlewood, as cited in Cain, Kahu & Shaw, 2017, p. 228).

One of the professed aims of this book is to heighten the reader's awareness to the fact that identity and belonging should be re-considered through a variety of lenses and perceived as a timely response to wider, inevitable changes that happen beyond just one community. This book is a highly valuable addition to the existing discussion on finding our own place in a constantly woven, colourful fabric of cultural meanings and perceptions in Aotearoa New Zealand, "... and, above all - to greet its people, listen to its voices, explore its places and learn its stories (Cain, Kahu & Shaw, 2017, p. 277).

## Reference

Cain, T., Kahu, E., & Shaw, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Tūrangawaewae: Identity and belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University Press.