

Book review



Teine Sāmoa

Author: Dahlia Malaeulu and Niusila Faamanatu-Eteuati.

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In my experience living in New Zealand and having children born here, this book is relevant to our young people. It talks about issues that they face each day of being a young person born in New Zealand navigating two worlds; the world of their traditional culture with their island born parents and the world where they must walk in as a minority.

The book was easy to read and very interesting because the characters are real, and their experiences personal. The book was interesting reading one character to another and seeing how they all strived for the one goal which was to embrace their culture. They recognised their challenges in their life journeys however, they continued to persevere.

The different characters really brought insight into their lived worlds, and you were able to see the similarities and differences of the Samoan culture. Including different lived experiences across ages and life experiences. I really appreciate the diversity of characters sharing their story about growing up as a Teine Samoa.

As a Pacific islander, I am aware of our similar values and more aware of the differences. I was able to identify with similar feelings felt by the characters, for example, frustration of not being able to have a voice but having to be obedient to your parents and what they wanted for your life.

I could relate the book to my New Zealand born children and how they would have had a similar experience. The number of responsibilities placed on the characters as they were growing up is very similar to that of my own children. As parents, we fail to stop and think of the impact on our children as we are too focused on trying to get our children to succeed here in New Zealand.

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This book highlights the cultural capital that Pacific ethnicities possess. From the characters' stories, there is a sense of wanting to belong or identity. By understanding your culture and where you fit provides you the confidence of lifting your head high as a Samoan. The importance of embracing your culture and what that looks like for you is different as shown in the book. You can be a Samoan and not speak the language and that is okay. The strength of the book is that it encourages everyone who may be struggling with their identity. This is shown by the stories in the book where characters are different, family backgrounds are different however, the commonality is the desire to be a Teine Samoa.

The one thing that I will take away from this book is how everyone is so different regardless of whether you are from the same island. The book showed me that being a Samoan teine comes in different forms due to the diversity of experiences.

I felt in some places, I was not able to follow as there wasn't any translation for the Samoan phrases, it would have been great to have any Samoan words translated. This was difficult because I didn't want to miss out on anything they were saying.

Ultimately, that is the key take away...respect for diversity. One cannot judge a person and their cultural identity and try to place everyone neatly in a box. The book has shown how teine Samoa is different from one girl to another. Until one can embrace where they are at culturally, no one has the right to tell them that they don't qualify to be a Samoan teine.

Review by Terisa Tagicakibau, Pacific Regional Advisor Te Waipounamu

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