

Book Reviews

Balancing the Tides: Marine Practices in American Samoa by JoAnna Poblete. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, HI. 214 pages

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Balancing the Tides: Marine Practices in American Samoa by JoAnna Poblete is a fascinating read, highlighting some of the major and often unnoticed struggles of United States colonials in the unincorporated territory of American Sāmoa. The conditions experienced by American Samoans as Indigenous peoples living under United States Federal jurisdiction has created an interesting dynamic between the continual maintenance of cultural practices and United States federal control, especially with regard to maritime practices.

Poblete completed her graduate studies in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she aimed to investigate the political and social dynamics between unincorporated United States territories and their peoples within larger United States narratives and American perspectives. *Balancing the Tides* is Poblete's second published book, stemming from her dissertation work on other unincorporated United States territories. Other projects from Poblete include the analysis of Filipinos and Puerto Ricans in Hawai'i, and Indigenous communities in the United States Virgin Islands, with this current piece highlighting the importance of maritime practices in the unincorporated territory of American Sāmoa.

Poblete analyzes the interaction between indigenous American Samoan culture and United States federal policy as it relates to the American fishing industry, international seafood production and

consumption, and the implementation of marine protected areas and other United States environmental conservation programs. Poblete frames her analysis in two parts, the first focusing on the history of American Sāmoa and its acquisition as an unincorporated territory of the United States. She further explains how the post-World War II United States fishing programs aimed to center American Sāmoa as one of the largest and most centralized fish processing and canning factories, with direct access to fresh fish solidifying this location as a 'place to be' for quality and cheap seafood production and distribution. The classification of American Sāmoa as an unincorporated United States territory meant that items produced here were exempt from import taxes, making the "Made in the USA" label on all products from American Sāmoa a safeguard for a seafood market once monopolized by foreign companies. While post-World War II infrastructure and policies have generated many jobs in American Sāmoa, their classification as an unincorporated territory has allowed large corporations to operate under low costs because they are not bound by continental United States labor law as that regulate minimum wage and maximum work hours.

The second part of this book further dissects the relationship between local, Indigenous communities and United States ecological conservation policies, especially when it comes to the establishment of U.S. environmental policy at the expense of traditional cultural practices. Poblete writes about community-driven creation for several of the marine protected areas in American Sāmoa, an event which is unique in the fact that it was requested by the people. Many thought that this would aid in the revitalization of fishing grounds, while others felt that allowing federal control over an increasing number of maritime resources was just another way to further limit traditional practices in American Sāmoa. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

and the National Marine Fishing Services (NMFS) play an important role in the support and maintenance of these marine protected areas, often partnering with local communities to create village marine protected areas, all of which are regulated and operated within local communities under the standard that they see fit. While these provide great opportunities for United States colonials to do conservation work they support, western grants and western ideas about science are often large barriers in communicating what is best suited for these Indigenous groups. The inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge in the maintenance of these village marine protected areas shows some of the disconnect between western policy and traditional practices, especially in a maritime-based community like that of American Sāmoa.

Poblete effectively presents the history of United States acquisition of American Sāmoa as a territory, touching on some of the major events that created the dynamic relationships witnessed today. Her inclusion of American Samoan traditional practices and social dynamics (*fa'a Samoa*, *'aiga*, *Fono*) contextualized her work, demonstrating how many legislative decisions interacted with traditional social standards. Understanding these social relations was necessary for successful relationships and support of projects in American Sāmoa, and these needed to be presented in this context for readers to better understand some of these struggles.

More Indigenous perspectives and direct interviews could have been included in this publication. There were many varying opinions within the local community that could have been better presented in this literature, giving more active voices to those directly impacted by these relationships. Poblete presents the subject of maritime practices as a balance between American Samoan colonials and the federal government, so it might be more beneficial to include more background on how the dialogue between these communities and their representatives operate.

Overall, Poblete does an effective job at explaining the 'balancing of tides' that occurs in American Samoan communities. The biggest issue that she attempts to address is the disconnect between many western forms of policy management, like the United States, and the Indigenous people that live in the geographic regions they have control over. Poblete stresses time and time again that allowing federal representatives

to make decisions for communities they have never interacted with, puts those communities in direct risk of being subjected to foreign rules and regulations that completely disregard traditional cultural practices. Individuals under United States colonial rule, like those in American Sāmoa, are directly impacted by policy changes that come without any consultation or understanding of the communities they are enforced upon. While many pieces of literature often frame these contentions as indigenous communities vs. western authority, Poblete does a good job at explaining the basic opinions of community members, making sure to note that not all Indigenous ideals and opinions are unanimous throughout a cultural group. For many American Samoans, there is a delicate balance between maintaining cultural practices and living within the bounds of an unincorporated western society. Poblete interviewed many community members that advocated for wage raises in the tuna canning industry but feared that any further wage increases would drive fish processing industries to other, less expensive areas. Some members advocated for better pay, even at the cost of losing large tuna canning companies, simply because they believed their people needed and deserved more. Similar opinions are seen when it comes to the implementation of conservation policies, with many community members supporting the idea of federally mandated marine protected areas and others requesting a more community-oriented, Indigenous-based set of practices for conservation maintenance. The takeaway message from this is that no culture is static – they are dynamic, ever changing, and vary widely within a community, creating many tensions that are not always easily addressed. When combined with United States federal policy, these situations can be further heightened. Poblete does a good job of presenting how delicate the relationships between United States colonials and their controlling power can be, especially when concerning the preservation and traditional cultural practices.

Poblete delicately analyses the balance between maintaining important aspects of traditional cultural practices while operating under a western rule that often contradicts these practices. Those interested in learning more about the political and social dynamics between western policy and colonized areas that are still heavily reliant upon Indigenous traditional culture should definitely read *Balancing the Tides*.