

PACIFIC PEOPLE PRACTISING
THE PACIFIC WAY

By Misa Telefoni

There has been a lot written lately about Samoans. Where they live. What they do. In what circumstances should they be entitled to be made "matai".

I once heard an eminent psychologist say "if you are suffering from an identity crisis, look in the mirror and see who you are". The point is that identity crises are subjective, unique to a particular individual. There is an inherent weakness in any attempts to generalize this subject.

We may not all agree the solution is as simple, as buying a mirror, and taking a long hard look at what we see, but I am getting a little tired of what all the fuss is about.

Pacific Magazine is an enigma as complex as the Pacific itself. It is published in Honolulu. Its Fijian born editor-in-chief is based in Sydney. The age of technology makes such an arrangement possible.

I would base some of my comments on Samantha Magick's October 2004 editorial "Embracing the Expat". The key issue is how much do we contribute to our various islands' economies, not where we are geographically located. A Samoan living in New Zealand, remitting back an average of NZ\$50 per week to Samoa (most of them), is making a substantial contribution to Samoa's economy, and that contribution is both appreciated and fully recognized.

International Samoan movie star and wrestler, Seiuli "Rock" Johnson, is a major contributor to Samoa's economy. His acute sense of national identity with

Samoa, and his cultural awareness and appreciation of his Samoan roots, make him potentially a multi-million dollar marketing tool for everything Samoan.

In recent holidays, I was impressed to note the bottled water of choice at the Maui Hyatt Regency, was Fiji Water. With annual exports exceeding FJ\$35 million, Fiji Water now has remarkably surpassed Evian as the biggest selling water in the United States.

In Samoa, we have many such examples of successful marketing.

Fasavalu and Tia Tinielu are at the forefront of a “nonu” revolution in the international herbal medicine market. Richard Cook is at the forefront of the organic farming thrust. Zita Martel is pioneering the internet marketing of Samoan tourism.

This is Pacific Power! Pacific Power is Fiji Vijay Singh surpassing Tiger Woods as the No 1 Golfer in World! Samoa's Tana Umaga becoming Captain of New Zealand's All Blacks. The Pacific Rugby Team surviving with distinction three grueling tests in a row against Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

It is absolutely of no significance where these various people may live or reside, they are first and foremost Pacific Islanders, and, will always be recognized as such.

There has been extensive academic literature recently concerning the so-called New Zealand born “Samoans”. Who are these “poor” cross-cultural misfits – caught in an identity crisis, not of their own making?

I strongly object to such a category of "Samoan". Indeed, these people themselves also object to this categorisation. I have written extensively that we know a Samoan by how he "behaves", not by where he "lives".

If a person does not give up his seat in a bus for older people, he is not a Samoan! If he (or she) talks back to parents, are they Samoan? Even if they live in Samoa, a Samoan does not "talk back" to parents, stands up for old folk in buses, speaks with respect to elders. New Zealand born Samoans who do not do these things, should not be described as Samoans. Neither should Samoan born Samoans, who do not practice these common courtesies, so basic to the Samoan culture.

Descartes said "Cogito, ergo sum". – "I think, therefore I am". This logic applies to one's identity. This also applies to one's profession. In an address to the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) in 2003, I told them they are Pacific Islanders first, and journalists second. There is a "Pacific Way" as the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara put it, not just in politics, but in all aspects of life in the Pacific. I have already made the point in a Paper prepared for the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Pacific Way is not an excuse for idleness or corruption in any way, shape or form.

The Pacific Way is rather a way of life, a celebration of Pacific cultures. In this regard, since every Pacific Island is unique, the Pacific Way combines what is an amalgamation of our traditions and cultures.

The term has been rendered trite by its reference to the trend in Pacific fora to seek consensus at all costs. It is much more than this, rather a celebration of all that is best in our Pacific cultures.

So when Seiuli "Rock" Johnson said to me (at the Airport when I officially farewelled him) how much he appreciated the Samoan culture and identifying his roots, I was able to thank him for his major contribution to Samoa, through being the humble, great but gentle giant of movies and wrestling, that he had become. The Rock is no less a Samoan because he is now a multi-millionaire movie star with residences in Beverly Hills and Miami.

When my friends Papaliitele Tihati and Cha Thompson, helped ESPN Television to bring back Jesse Sapolu (ex 49ers), Pisa Tinoisamoa (St Louis Rams) and Isaac Sopoaga (49ers) to find their roots in Samoa earlier this year, it was a moving and emotional event. All these football "heroes" were moved to tears by the emotional impact of their homecoming.

As did Seiuli "Rock" Johnson, they all knelt before King Malietoa, their chief, and thanked God for their heritage. It was just as emotional a spectacle for we Samoans who live in Samoa who witnessed these events. I could not help wondering what the movie fans of Rock would say when they saw "Scorpion King" kneel before Malietoa, to receive his blessing.

I am in full agreement with Samantha Magick, we are who we feel we are, it matters not one iota where we live. Should Mufi Hannemann become mayor of Honolulu on November 2, we shall celebrate our first Samoan/Hawaiian mayor of Honolulu. We shall, all Samoans everywhere, be so proud of Mufi's achievement! He is no less Samoan because he lives in, and has become, mayor of Honolulu. *(Mufi Hannemann did subsequently win the election and is proving a very successful mayor of Honolulu)*

Let us in the Pacific all celebrate our cultural and racial identities, regardless of where fame and fortune may lead us to live. Let all Pacific

Islanders residing overseas, raise their windows, look back at their home-Islands,
and always proudly call their island nations home.

Home, after all, is where the heart is!

Soifua and God Bless

Misa Telefoni