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A Remarkable Journey (review)

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(Review)

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jumping-off point for scholars intrigued by Hawai'i's radical mix of politics and art.

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*A Remarkable Journey*, by Lady Carol Kidu. Sydney: Pearson Education Australia, 2002. ISBN 0-7339-3227-4, 161 pages, photographs. A\$21.95, PGK42.90.

The journey is a prevalent postcolonial metaphor for a search: a search for identity, a search for a sense of place, and a longing for situatedness—homeland. Indeed, it is a hunger for the center, which is always elsewhere. Lady Carol Kidu's book, *A Remarkable Journey*, is an autobiography that engages the motif of journey as the main thread that yokes together the narrative. Autobiography is a common genre in which an author's life is recorded, often in terms of symbolic journeys from a certain location to other destinations. Lady Kidu uses this genre to narrate her own history by reassembling the scattered elements of her life, her private self, and regrouping them. This book deals with issues of self, uprootedness, and relocation. It is about a shift from the center to the periphery. At the same time, it is about Lady Kidu's cross-cultural love relationship with her husband, the late Sir Buri Kidu, former Chief Justice of Papua New Guinea.

On a different plane, it is about the redefinition of her identity within a different cultural matrix. Indeed, it can be ascertained from the book that the question of her identity within a

new context must be renegotiated in order for her to be visible. The writer is able to achieve this through mediation and negotiation between the two cultures through the assistance of her family.

The journey metaphor commences in Brisbane, Australia, when a sixteen-year-old Australian girl meets and falls in love with a Papua New Guinean student in the mid-1960s, a time when cross-cultural and interracial relationships were socially proscribed and shunned. The relationship between the hitherto obscure Australian girl and the Papua New Guinean boy is indeed a journey itself: from sexual innocence to sexual maturity, from mono-racial relationships to interracial relationships, from a private (egocentric) vision to a broader social and cultural understanding, among others. This journey is played within the interface of this white/black falling in love. But the white Australia policy, which proscribed interracial relationships, reduces this journey metaphor to a sense of superficiality and ambivalence. Despite the oppositional voices, however, the journey is undertaken, consummated in marriage and relocation to Papua New Guinea. The metaphor of the journey as dialogue/bridge enables the author to bridge the lacuna of cultural silence that exists for her as an outsider trying to invent for herself a new hybrid identity.

In this book the author provides us a rare and intriguing insight into a mid-1960s Australian girl's growing love for a Papuan school boy, the deepening of the relationship, the marriage, the return to Papua New Guinea, the difficult period of adapta-

tion to an alien culture, the elevation of her husband to the position of chief justice, his death, her decision to contest the national elections in 1997 (Moresby South), and her subsequent win to become one of only two women parliamentarians. Simultaneously, the narrative is about her mental and physical struggles, pains, and perseverance to adjust and adapt into a culturally different society.

What makes this story powerful and poignant is that the love relationship was conceived when the social and cultural interplay between the two races was still unsanctioned. In other words, white Australia was not yet ready to accept interracial relationships. "As we walked the streets (in Brisbane) I was aware that many people were staring. I was so proud to walk with Buri and was surprised when an elderly (white) man walked straight toward me, then spat at me with such hatred, 'You filthy woman'" (29). Given this matrix, Lady Kidu was able to overcome many of the cultural and social obstacles because she had an understanding family, understanding husband, and understanding in-laws. It is this atmosphere that overtly foregrounds the strong determination of the author and makes this book truly remarkable and interesting.

Indeed the narrative crisscrosses between the numerous personal journeys the writer undertakes and the journeys of her family—her husband and children and immediate relatives. The writer's parents make numerous journeys to Papua New Guinea, the husband makes many journeys, and the births of the children are themselves journeys. These journeys are not

only physical but also psychological and spiritual. For the writer, these are often journeys of self-examination. This journey of sorts informs the very production of the narrative.

The book reminds me of Ian Downs' *The Stolen Land* (1970), in which the main character, Papua New Guinean Joseph Makati, wins a scholarship and studies in Australia. Like this fictional character, Lady Kidu's husband excels academically and in sports, and is musically talented. However, unlike the story of Makati, who has a string of brief relationships with Australian girls (the last one ends in a disaster when the girl publicly humiliates him), *A Remarkable Journey* succeeds because the writer is willing to give and take. While these two stories are similar, Lady Kidu's is much deeper and more lasting, because the story is told from a balanced perspective.

The author also provides readers (especially outsiders) glimpses into her adopted Motu society. This is done through her descriptions of some of the customs and values, for example, the emphasis on consensus, the significance of consultation with family and clan members on important matters, the belief in sorcery, the concept of reciprocity, and the different roles performed by Motuan men and women. Lady Kidu's conscious efforts to accept a different cosmology, and her willingness to adapt and adjust, flamed by her profound love for and commitment to her husband and her firm decision to intimately understand her adopted society provide the social leverage, balance, and finally, the cultural and social mooring.

In addition, the motivation to

adapt and succeed in an alien culture was perhaps fueled by her husband's statement, "Carol, if we get married, remember one thing. Never ask me to choose. . . . Never ask me to choose between you, my people because I tell you now that I will choose my people. I will not choose you" (37). This statement also demonstrates her husband's deep commitment to his country.

*A Remarkable Journey* departs from the earlier, often voyeuristic writings of Australians in which the representation of Papua New Guinea and its people is not based on observing reality but on externalizing a private vision. This book tenderly captures the local nuances and intimacies because of the author's in-depth understanding of and attachment to her adopted society, and her "living it out." This allows her to mediate and traverse between the two worlds. While she demonstrates a sense of independence, she is quick to admit that her pillar of strength was (is) supported by her husband, their children, and the relatives, in both Papua New Guinea and Australia. Indeed, this book is about transformation and the crossing of many cultural and social barriers.

In the final analysis, we realize that the author accomplishes some of the journeys while deferring many more. Her relocation (social and cultural situatedness) often provides an ambivalent definition of self. This is because this relocation sits on the dialectical intersection of familiar and foreign, real and imaginary. In other words, there is always a nexus between original homeland and new homeland.

In this book Lady Kidu provides

a sharp interpretation and shows a great inclination to portray a balanced perspective. The sincerity and courage she brings to her writing is admirable. At the same time, she brings to her book great sensitivity and passion with a ring of honesty and truth. As shown in the book, Papua New Guinea is no longer too strange for (Australian) imaginations to grasp.

The book is well written, well researched, and easy for readers to follow. It has twenty-one short chapters with a number of photographs. In essence this is a family story, how an interracial family attempted to endure in a colonial PNG society on the verge of independence, and how through sheer determination the author overcame many cultural differences and obstacles. It is about how, after the death of her husband, she gained the strength to carry on amid deep pains and uncertainty. Indeed this is a journey from the provinciality of white Australia to self-discovery and cross-culturality, from innocence to maturity, from housewife to member of parliament.

The book is a remarkable journey of a remarkable woman who unashamedly reveals her innermost emotions and thoughts through her love relationship with her husband. It is poignantly written, very moving, and, in essence, a love story, told in readable English and from an intimate, deeply personal oasis.

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