ther before him used to grow taro in their gardens in New Zealand, Peter J. Matthews introduces us to its story. An often neglected root crop in literature, it actually represents an important source of food for people living in the tropical regions of the world, and has done so for thousands of years. Physically, taro is a semiaquatic aroid (i.e., it belongs to the Araceae family), with large heart-shape leaves and underground corms that constitute the main edible part. Medical uses are also recorded. Wild taro plants produce flowers and viable seeds throughout the tropics; however, the predominant form of reproduction in the wild and in cultivated fields is through self-propagation of vegetative forms (corms, cormels). This plant is now cultivated in all of the tropical and subtropical regions of the world, with the distribution outside its natural range mainly due to human dispersal.

The retrieval of archaeobotanical taro starch grains in Pleistocene and Holocene sites suggests that this crop may be one of the oldest cultivated plants known to humankind. By following direct and indirect approaches, the author has examined the traces marked in the genetics of taro, and searched for signs left by people who transported taro during their journeys. The work of previous authors was not only inspirational but also essential in learning "that many of them have usually thought 'his' thoughts long before him." This is also the meaning of the *trail*.

The central idea that the author is keen to convey is that only through the combination of botanical, ecological, genetic, and ethnographic disciplines it is possible to understand the history of one of the oldest cultivated crops. The research questions listed in the first chapter set the scene for this premise. The first question is a fundamental one: "By looking at modern (living) plants, how can we learn about the natural and cultural history of a crop?" This question implies an initial distinction between a natural species and a cultivated one, and this in turn leads to the next question "Does the natural geographic range of a natural species correspond to that of the cultivated one?" In the case of taro this spatial characterisation might not be so obvious. In this context, the distribution of wild types of taro offers a starting point for the identification of the natural taro range, and related species narrow down the geographical area of taro as a natural species with its origins in Southeast Asia. The analysis goes on to examine the role that taro might have had in an indigenous development of agriculture in New Guinea, where pollen production, insect association, and agriculture systems are all indicators which are studied for their relevance. In this respect, the author's long experience in researching and observing noncultivated varieties knowledgeably shows how diverse natural wild-types of taro distributed in a wide geographical area might have been domesticated on multiple occasions.

The search for answers is meticulous and nothing is taken for granted with the reader always being treated as a critical observer. Arguments are often presented with hypotheses, questions, and the author's own thoughts formulated through conceptual explanations. "On the Trail of Taro" is not only a book about a tropical plant; it also represents a practical and useful guide for students who want to engage in the scientific and cultural study of the relationships between plants and people. It is, therefore, a convincing example of the significance and relevance of ethnobotanical studies. The laboratory techniques used to conduct taro research and described in this book may sometimes be outdated and hence overtaken by more modern procedures aided by elaborated computer-based calculations, but it nonetheless offers an example of the evolution and progress of ethnobotanical research in the last thirty years. In itself, it is also a picture of the progress of science through the eyes of taro.

The reader is taken on a fascinating journey by this book across the scientific research of the origins and dispersal of a crop where tantalising signs left by our previous researchers seem endless. Some simple illustrations by the author effectively show how it is possible to record field observations. Ethnobotany is indeed a field science, and as such, it must be played out through the eyes and minds of farmers, growers, men, and women who have been following taro life cycles since the appearance of its first green and tender shoots.

The book is divided into four parts. The first introduces the story of the plant, highlighting how writings can be used as a method for research purposes, and lays down the foundation stone for a geographical appraisal of taro in New Zealand. The second part reproduces an edited version of the author's Master's thesis, a study of taro distribution and variation in New Zealand. The author's home country acted as a true living laboratory for the study of taro variants, which in turn led to the study of the origins, dispersal, and domestication of taro treated in the third part, the author's doctoral thesis. Every answer inevitably leads to another question, and in doing so the author, and so the reader, follows the invisible and yet perceivable trail of taro. Part 4 covers some general trends in taro research to complete the picture, thus concluding the voyage of the natural and cultural history of taro.

Representing a lifetime's research, "On the Trail of Taro" is an indispensible resource for an academic audience interested in Asian and Pacific vegeculture. It is a book that not only tells the story of taro origins, dispersal, and domestication, but it also shows how this fascinating story came to be told. Ilaria Grimaldi

Milner, Murray, Jr.: Elites. A General Model. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015. 203 pp. ISBN 978-0-7456-7183-3. Price: € 22.90

It is always nice to read new work on elites, Murray Milner, Jr.'s "Elites. A General Model" in this case. The book starts well, with Milner highlighting a number of issues that I, as an anthropologist studying elites, very much agree with. For one, he argues that the literature on elites has a far too limited focus on the roles of non-elites. He explicitly includes the latter in the process and argues that the power of elites is often overstated while the power of non-elites is understated (8) – an important point in my opinion, which I also discuss in my own work. Milner, moreover, uses a straightforward definition of power. He

limits it to the actual exercising of power, i.e., an agent's intentional use of causal power to affect the conduct of other agents. Milner certainly acknowledges the relevance of taken-for-granted, often unconscious, biases that are built into the culture and social structure, but prefers to exclude these structural forms of power from his definition. I am on his side on this.

The aim to come up with a general model, the essence of Milner's book, is a different and rather audacious game, however. My main questions, then, are: What does the model add? What are the advantages? And what are its limitations?

Milner clearly sets out the reasons for his attempt. From his long experience of teaching social theory he has observed shortcomings, though also merits, in the work of, especially, Marx, Weber, Bourdieu, and elite theory more generally. To come to his model, he convincingly shows some of the limitations of their work; though these limitations are not new and have been pointed out before. Yet, in courses in which these theorists and their general models are discussed, Milner's work is certainly of relevance. His concise lists help to understand the limitations and values of these theorists. Here it also becomes obvious why Milner wants to present a more adequate model. According to him, there is not enough attention given to non-elites; elite scholars mainly focus on political and economic elites and status/cultural/ideological elites are largely left aside; and cooperation and collaboration between, and within, the different types of elites and non-elites should be approached without assuming that these relationships are predetermined.

That Milner predominantly relies on the work of political scientists makes his model less convincing. Yes, he may be right that there is often a too strong focus on political elites, while also non-elites tend to be ignored. But this is a limited interpretation of the existing elite theory. For example, comparative research on elite distinction and status offers a more comprehensive picture of not only the value and limits of a much larger number of (old) theorists who have written, directly or indirectly, about elites but also of comparative cases (e.g., J.-P. Daloz, The Sociology of Elite Distinction. From Theoretical to Comparative Perspectives. New York 2010). Milner limits the comparison to three cases which vary widely: India and the history of the Varna scheme, Athens in the classical period, and contemporary US. I am not necessarily against such a comparison, but I am not sure whether one can build a model on that. More references to other cases could have strengthened his argument for a model.

When it comes to the relationship with non-elites, anthropological studies of elites could have been very informative. The late anthropologist A. Cohen (The Politics of Elite Culture. Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society. Berkeley 1981) already presents a good "model," namely, that an elite needs universalistic and particularistic tendencies; the first being the need to promote its service to the public, while the second encompasses sharing a number of characteristics that fosters cohesion and distinguishes the elite from other social groups. Regarding the relationships with non-elites as well as the different forms of elite power in Milner's model, a closer look at the universalistic tendencies – or something similar, like vertical loyalties – would have been insightful. Cohen shows that elites have to find a balance between their universalistic and particularistic tendencies, and failing to do so may lead to the demise of the elite. For example, if they are too particularistic, elites certainly organise themselves very well but they will most likely fail to obtain much-needed support from non-elites.

Non-elites, and I think this is in essence a good approach, should, as Milner points out, not be seen as too homogeneous. Instead, we should be aware of the differences within this group. Subsequently, however, he only draws differences between respectable non-elites and non-respectable ones, the "[o]utcasts are a reminder to respectable non-elites that their situation could be much worse" (28). These are the "untouchables" in the Varna system, slaves in classical Athens, and non-homeowners in the US, but also migrants and all kind of other groups portrayed as a problem. I certainly agree with Milner that these groups often play an important role in the elites' aim to mobilise support. But if one looks at the US in particular, the case he discusses in most detail, elites actually play a strong role in dividing the respectable non-elites, the middle classes. The middle classes are not a homogenous block and they strongly influence, along ideological lines, which elite dominates. Non-respectable non-elites certainly play a role, but when republican or democratic elites disqualify the other in the hope of gaining support, it is more about divisions within the respectable non-elite. Notwithstanding the fact that Milner highlights the role of ideologies, his model appears too limited here. It guides one in a direction that is not necessarily central to understanding the position of elites and/or their relationships with non-elites.

What Milner rightly points out is the role of status elites, such as celebrities – or celebrity culture in the case of some (US) politicians. It would have been relevant for the understanding of elites, though, to get a more detailed analysis of how this exactly facilitates the obtaining of support – the universalistic tendencies, so to say. What kinds of elites (political?) try to obtain support by associating themselves with celebrities in the hope that some of their status would trickle down to them? And which ones try to shield away from too much media attention in the hope to maintain their power behind the screens? In the relationship with non-elites this would have seen a very exciting avenue to explore.

As Milner concludes, "the model offers guidance about what to look for" (137). He invites others to apply his model to cases he is not really informed about, such as Africa, Latin America, and China. In the case his model would be applied to, for example, White African elites, I already see some limits, however. They, in a sense, partly take up the role Milner attributes in his model to the non-respectable non-elites and often function as attractive scapegoats to mobilise support; not because they have too little power, but because they have too much. It is not clear, how his model helps to explain this. So, although his book is a worthwhile contribution to elite theory, a

very schematic model also feels to obscure essential elements in the aim to theorise elites – and their relationships with non-elites. Tijo Salverda

Nájera, Jennifer R.: The Borderlands of Race. Mexican Segregation in a South Texas Town. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. 183 pp. ISBN 978-0-292-76755-3. Price: $ 30.15

In "The Borderlands of Race," Jennifer R. Nájera tackles an important question in Mexican American studies: If Mexican Americans were guaranteed full citizenship rights by virtue of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 – which legally acknowledged their racial "whiteness" –, what explains the persistence of spatial and social segregation throughout the Southwest long after the formal architecture of racial segregation had been dismantled? For Nájera, part of the answer lays in the uneven and inconsistent application of racial boundaries and segregation practices enacted against ethnic Mexicans beginning at the turn of the 20th century. In this historical ethnography of one South Texas town, Nájera traces the establishment and decline of racial segregation in the 20th century, exploring how deeply entrenched local customs and practices shaped the contours of ethnic Mexican life, and how grassroots activism – both subtle and overt – ultimately challenged the racial status quo.

Nájera focuses on La Feria, Texas, a small agricultural community located in the Rio Grande Valley approximately 25 miles northwest of Brownsville, and argues that segregation took form and evolved through three distinct stages. The first stage, from the establishment of the town in 1915 through the 1930s, laid the foundation for the complete residential and social separation of Anglos and Mexicans. A result of the growth of the agriculture industry – controlled by Anglo landowners and sustained by racialized Mexican labor force – segregation extended to nearly all facets of life in La Feria: its neighborhoods, its schools, its Catholic Church, and even its cemeteries. The 1940s represented the second stage, what Nájera calls an "accommodated form of segregation." National and state policies aimed at maintaining positive political and beneficial economic ties with Mexico, coupled with a greater push for Mexican American civil rights in the post-WWII era, fostered an environment that allowed for greater inclusion. However, this incorporation was still fragmented and limited, and while civil rights organizations like the American G. I. Forum had some successes, very few ethnic Mexicans in La Feria benefitted from the slowly shifting racial climate. Throughout the span of the 20th century, ethnic Mexicans crafted their own sense of identity and community that provided for mutual support in the context of the racially charged landscape in La Feria. This sense of cultural citizenship and local grassroots actions served to usher in the third stage, the demise of segregation in the latter decades of the 20th century resulting in part from the battles waged by the civil rights and Chicana/o movements.

Drawing upon borderlands scholarship and informed by critical race theory, Nájera uses the example of La Feria to make important claims about the ways that local attitudes created and maintained segregation. Although Mexicans in La Feria were largely confined to the north side of the tracks, there were exceptions, even in the early years of segregation. Mexicans with the right "cultural capital" (in the form of wealth, complexion, and the ability to speak English) could cross the rigid divides to enter Anglo social worlds that were otherwise closed off to the broader Mexican population. Yet even for these exceptional cases, there were limits. Using rich oral interviews and archival materials, Nájera uncovers the stories of La Feria's Mexican community to illuminate the messiness, and sometimes the irrationality, of the racial order. For example, despite the practice of racial segregation within the school system, Delia Martínez found a place on the La Feria High School volleyball team in the 1940s, a spot that would suggest a greater degree of social inclusion than many students experienced. However, she vividly recalled her Anglo teammates' attitudes of superiority and the senior trip to a swimming pool in nearby Harlingen, where the Anglo girls went swimming but the Mexican girls were denied entry to the pool because of their race. In the 1950s, Francisco "Frank" Rodríguez was a well-respected real estate broker who worked with both Anglo and Mexican clientele, but was still refused a haircut in the local barbershop because he was Mexican. And while La Feria may have appointed its first Mexican American mayor in 1949 – Joe Gavito, Jr., a Mexican American businessman whose class and complexion afforded him greater access to La Feria social and political circles – little changed for the Mexican community of La Feria indicating the limited nature of inclusion. In fact, there would not be another Mexican American mayor for more than forty years. While borderlands scholars often focus on the fluidity of national and racial boundaries and identities, Nájera contends that the limited forms of incorporation experienced by La Feria's Mexican population, rather than revealing the permeability of racial segregation, is actually evidence of its durability, offering only the *illusion* of access and integration. In the absence of legal statutes mandating racial separation, these exceptions were the mechanisms that allowed segregation practices to persist for as long as they did, allowing for it to continue operating much as it had for generations.

While the first four chapters of the book focus on the creation and evolution towards accommodated segregation, the second half of the study turns attention to racial integration with two chapters that illuminate the overt and subtle ways Mexicans pushed for and affected inclusion in La Feria's schools and church. The hiring of nonpoliticized Mexican American teachers deemed acceptable by the Anglo administration had the unintended consequence of changing the culture of the schools, providing students a supportive learning environment, new student-teacher relationships, and transforming the schools into places of empowerment for ethnic Mexican youth. Similarly, in St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, where segregation remained entrenched well into the 1980s, small faith-based communities called *comunidades de base* allowed Mexican parishioners to use ideas about social jus-