

CROSSING BORDERS: Changing Contexts of This Book

Culture and History in the Pacific was first published in 1990, thirty years ago, by the Finnish Anthropological Society. Published by a small scholarly society in a remote European country, the original edition of the book was not particularly accessible elsewhere, least of all in the region it discusses, Oceania. Yet over the years some of its papers have continued to arouse interest in researchers. The Finnish Anthropological Society together with Helsinki University Press have now decided to republish it as both print and open access digital version, with the purpose of ensuring the papers stay available, and with the hope that it will reach a wider audience. The authors include prominent anthropologists of the Pacific, some of whom — such as Roger Keesing and Marilyn Strathern, to name but two — are also leading figures in the anthropology of the late 20th and early 21st century in general. On the other hand, as noted by Jukka Siikala in his introduction to the original publication, the authors represent several academic traditions and different areal discussions, which is one of the strengths of the book.

With the benefit of hindsight, one of the most interesting things is that in addition to the American, British and other European scholarly traditions, two of the authors came from the Soviet academia, which in fact relates to the whole context in which the book came into existence. Papers in this book were originally presented in a symposium organized in Helsinki, Finland, in 1987. The symposium took place in connection with an exhibition arranged by the Academy of Finland and the Soviet Academy of Sciences, where a collection of Pacific artefacts from the Leningrad Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography was displayed. Thus, the setting reflected both Finland's geopolitical position as some-

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thing of a mediator between the East and the West during the Cold War era and, and — again said in hindsight — the approaching end of that era. Although people may not have yet anticipated the fall of the Soviet Union a few years later, academic exchange between Soviet and Western scholars had already become easier during the Mikhail Gorbachev period.¹

In addition to the national academic traditions, Siikala referred to areal discussion dominant in the study of Oceania, the tendency of Polynesianists and Melanesianists to discuss among themselves much more than with each other. In *Culture and History in the Pacific*, the area specialists engage(d) in a discussion, in which “juxtapositioning of place-bound projects opened up new perspectives”². It is the articles arising from the Polynesianist and Melanesianist traditions that, according to a contemporary reviewer, illustrated key theoretical trends in the historical anthropology of the Pacific at the time.³

At the time, there was a widespread anthropological interest in historical processes in Oceania; issues such as chieftainship and early contacts, or generally, the understanding of historical events⁴. In *Culture and History in the Pacific*, e.g., Anthony Hooper and Judith Huntsman, Valerio Valeri and Jukka Siikala engage with themes that were related to their other work in historical anthropology of the Pacific.⁵

Probably the most cited of the papers is the one by Marilyn Strathern on “Artefacts of History” which has also been published elsewhere.⁶ In addition to the anthropology of historical events, it has been of interest in, e.g., museology, and the paper has continued to gain mentions during the past fifteen years in various discussions in anthropology.

As theoretical interests have shifted and transformed, what might the value of *Culture and History in the Pacific* be to scholars of Oceania now? What is more, with open access republication making the book more easily available to people from the region itself, what is the value of the book to the indigenous people, be they scholars or the general public and perhaps people whose ancestors are discussed in the book, or both? Namely, compared to present-day scholarly writing about the Pacific, it is notable that as varied as the body of authors of *Culture and History in the Pacific* was, it did not have any scholars from the region itself. Considering the original time frame, it is hardly surprising, but it needs to be addressed, especially now that the republication of the book will make it easily available to anyone also in Oceania.

The aim of this preface is to place this book into perspective — or rather, some perspectives — in the hope that by contextualizing the book, it is possible for the reader to separate that which has withstood time or is

of value to him or her. This process of contextualizing is necessarily selective, including reference to some of the conditions of that time, as well as developments after the publication. I will be doing so particularly with reference to the borders and divisions referred to in the original preface, but also going beyond them.

Firstly, I will briefly describe one context in which the original papers were presented: the era approaching the end of the Cold War, and its effect on academia in general and anthropology in particular. While there lies a danger of Eurocentrism in bringing this up for a book on the Pacific, the particular historical juncture in which the original texts were produced requires some attention. For younger scholars who did not grow up in the Cold War era, who hopefully would also find this reprint useful, the impact of the era and its end on scholarship might be less well-known. While the majority of the contributors to the book belong to the Western scholarly tradition(s), two authors represent the Soviet academia, whose distinctive character is also reflected in their texts.

Secondly, I will comment on a scholarly context within Pacific anthropology which is explicitly present in the book. This is the context of areal discussions, and the division of the Pacific into the culture areas of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. I will consider the power of areal discussions in the anthropology of Oceania, and some of the ways in which the areal perspectives have been debated and complemented.

Thirdly, I will look at a further framework in which the papers were written, but which is only partly visible in the book. It is worth considering, however, because it is connected to important developments in the study of culture and history in the Pacific after the original publication and which will no doubt affect the reception of the new publication. The papers of the book represent traditional anthropology in the sense that there is a clear division between an outsider researcher and his or her topic. In the decades following the original publication, the border between outsider and insider has been challenged and transformed, particularly in the emerging field of Pacific studies,⁷ but also in anthropology.⁸

Soviet anthropology, the end of Cold War and the Pacific

Approaching the end of the 20th century, the exchange of ideas between American and British traditions of anthropology might have been slow to develop, but by comparison, the Soviet academia had been isolated in earnest for decades. Anthropology, or as it more frequently was called,

ethnography,⁹ there had developed a distinctive character.¹⁰ While Russian anthropology, ethnography or ethnology before the revolution and up until the early 1930s maintained links with the developing discipline of anthropology elsewhere in the world, Soviet anthropology gradually became isolated.¹¹ In other words, there were borders to be crossed on several levels. Meyer Fortes noted in 1980 that while many Soviet scholars were well-versed in Western anthropological research, Soviet anthropology was generally not well-known among Western scholars.¹²

Ernest Gellner wrote in 1980 that Soviet *etnografia* was significant not only for its content, but also “for the light it throws on Soviet thought and the manner in which social and philosophical problems are conceptualized in the Soviet Union.”¹³ Gellner pointed out four examples of such problems: the relationship between economy and polity, the historical evaluation of human societies and the resulting typologies, the nature and role of ethnicity society, both historically and in the contemporary industrial society, and the study and interpretation of Soviet culture.¹⁴ The concerns with historical evaluation and typologization of societies can be seen reflected in V. A. Shnirelman’s paper, which discusses class and social differentiation comparatively in a variety of Melanesian societies.

Areas of interest and research questions in Soviet anthropology were often directed by state ideology: There was, on the one hand, interest in the culture or *ethnos* of the various nationalities that lived in the Soviet Union, but preferably discussed historically, as things of the past. Research on contemporary practices should evince “the emergence of new pan-Soviet social forms and practices.”¹⁵

Thus, Soviet researchers working on the Pacific were likely to be very few, and possibilities for extended fieldwork limited. Research on the Pacific was mostly theoretical and/or historical, with material culture playing an important role.¹⁶ It is no accident that both the papers by Soviet authors in *Culture and History in the Pacific* are historical in nature: the one by N. A. Butinov discussing the ancient Rapanui script in the *rongorongo* tablets; and the one by V. A. Shnirelman comparing Melanesian and Polynesian societies in terms of social differentiation in an evolutionary perspective. In the former, material objects, two rongorongo tablets acquired by the 19th-century Russian explorer N. N. Mikoucho-Maclay kept in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Leningrad — and on display in Helsinki in 1987 — were a crucial incentive for research. The latter, on the other hand, illustrates well the theoretical orientation. In other words, neither paper was based on the type of extended fieldwork in one location, the practice of most Western anthropologists, but

on extensive literature review and the material objects themselves. When the Soviet Union fell apart and, more generally, the Eastern bloc ceased to exist, in the year following the first publication of *Culture and History in the Pacific*, research also changed drastically. Discussing Soviet and Post-Soviet anthropology, Albert Baiburin, Catriona Kelly and Nikolai Vakhtin¹⁷ describe how, on the one hand, new possibilities opened up, but on the other, research infrastructure, including state funding, partly collapsed.¹⁸ Former Soviet researchers turned their attention to topics previously unstudied because of state ideological restrictions, such as forms of Christianity and urban life. On the other hand, it became important to understand the processes going on in post-socialist societies, which demanded a significant amount of research attention.¹⁹

In present-day Russia, too, there are only a few scholars engaged in Pacific anthropology. Most research on Oceania is being undertaken at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography — formerly known as the Leningrad Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography — the same institution that loaned items from its Pacific collection to Helsinki in 1987.²⁰ There is a continued interest in history and material culture, but also some new field research is carried out. Most of the research is published in Russian.²¹

Regional discussions in Pacific scholarship

The majority of the papers were, however, written broadly speaking within the same Western academic tradition. Another division, or border to be crossed, explicitly discussed by Siikala in the original Preface and reading as commentary on a topical issue of that time was that between Melanesianists and Polynesianists. The background of these scholarly traditions is the tripartite division of Oceania on the basis of cultural and racial characteristics into Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, commonly credited to Dumont d'Urville, a 19th-century French navigator, although it has a much longer intellectual history.²²

While I do not want to equate the original outsider division with the intricate and specialized anthropological areal discussions, the division continues to persist. The Melanesia/Polynesia/Micronesia division had long been criticized for its racialized basis, and for its failure to take into account the cultural variation within an area, but it was particularly called into question from the mid-1970s and early 1990s²³ — at the time of the symposium and the first publication of this book.

The usage of the terms has nevertheless largely persisted, mainly, according to Paul D'Arcy,²⁴ because there have been no viable alternatives. Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia “continue to be useful general categories for the broad cultural similarities noted across the regions they encompass.”²⁵ It could be argued, by looking at conference panels and some — but certainly not all — publications on Oceania, that there is still a tendency for areal specialists to discuss more with one another than with specialists from other areas.

However, as someone who did graduate studies focusing on Micronesia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the division felt less powerful. On the one hand, it was due to the fact that it was rather Micronesia which seemed to be left on the sidelines, compared to the strong Polynesianist and Melanesianist traditions.²⁶ On the other hand, perhaps due precisely to the position of a relative outsider of a Micronesianist, I felt I was able to draw on both these rich intellectual traditions and discussions for comparison. Indeed, it might even be suggested that their richness might partly be due to the specialized nature of the discussions, the certain shared premises allowing the discussion to go into more detail.

Rena Lederman has remarked that culture area discourses, such as that on Melanesia about which she was writing, “remain one of the valuable social contexts in which anthropological research is accomplished.”²⁷ Its strength, to be acknowledged and amplified, lays in the “layering of perspectives and cross-purposes engendered by different anthropological observers”, which allows for depth and subtlety that an individual work cannot achieve.²⁸

One can then see value in the accumulation of knowledge in restricted regional discussions even if a particular division of regions can be questioned. During the past thirty years, other comparative frameworks of reference have emerged, even though none of them has taken on the overarching quality of the tripartite division. One important frame of reference has been the Austronesian context, referring to the linguistic grouping of peoples speaking Austronesian languages. The Austronesian perspective crosscuts Oceania in the sense that it includes many Indonesian societies, which are not counted as Oceanian, but includes Polynesians, Micronesians and part — the Austronesian-speaking peoples — of Melanesian societies.

In fact, the Austronesian frame of reference is present in *Culture and History in the Pacific*, in Eija-Maija Kotilainen's article about bark cloth-making among Kaili-Pamona speakers, who are an Austronesian people in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Bark cloth, known in many Poly-

nesian societies as *tapa*, is a shared feature of early Austronesian culture,²⁹ and in the Pacific continues to be important particularly in Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. Kotilainen argues that because of the shared features of bark cloth tradition in eastern Indonesia and Western Polynesia,³⁰ the study of bark cloth-making in Sulawesi can also throw light on the cultural history of the Pacific.

Generally speaking, the Austronesian research framework is best exemplified by the Comparative Austronesian project at the Australian National University, which has resulted in several publications.³¹ As the concept of Austronesia leaves out ca. 800 Papuan language groups, very much part of Oceania, the Austronesian perspective cannot be seen as a replacement for the regions of Oceania. Rather, it has created a complementary discursive space, thus facilitating and diversifying discussion(s).

Other discursive spaces for regional comparisons within the Oceania division have been created based on the interaction between cultural patterns and environmental constraints.³² Paul D'Arcy³³ discusses, e.g., the bio-geographical division between Near and Remote Oceania, stemming from archaeology and used in the study of history of human habitation (Green), the grouping of islands on the basis of their relative isolation and access to resources (Alkire, cf. early Sahlins) and the study of regional networks of interaction. According to D'Arcy, some of the most fruitful comparative discussions have been on regional history, studying "historically specific processes of interaction",³⁴ such as regional exchange networks like the Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. On the other hand, he points out work by Glenn Petersen,³⁵ in which the basis of comparison was not culture, but socio-political organization, and which cut across the conventional regions (Micronesia/Polynesia).

D'Arcy concludes that "different questions require different spatial and temporal perspectives",³⁶ affirming the value of multiple discursive spaces for discussing the Pacific. Nonetheless, detailed regional discussions invoke questions within that framework and provide answers that tend to remain within that framework. Inasmuch as there is value in discussing the wider region that is Oceania, and in asking many kinds of questions, the regional perspectives need to be complemented by other ways of framing research questions.

These can be analytical, such as in the case of Petersen's analysis, or pertaining to the whole region. For example, in the 21st century, environmental perspectives have become decidedly global, with the climate change affecting the whole Pacific region in both similar and varying ways. Other issues to examine that have affected the whole area are colo-

nialism, capitalism and Christianity. A further perspective, incipient at the time of the original publication of *Culture and History in the Pacific*, concerns the representations of culture and the power relations entailed in research, perhaps particularly within the discipline of anthropology.

Problematizing culture and history in the Pacific

One of the contexts in which the book was originally written was the emerging discussion on the conceptualizations of culture and history variously called, e.g., tradition, custom, *kastom* or “way”, and the corresponding indigenous appellations — in the Pacific and the politics of cultural identity.³⁷ Yet the local traditions, *kastoms*, ways of being Fijian, Tongan and so on consist of both representation and living practice, and carry meanings to people themselves beyond their possible (but not inevitable) use in identity politics.³⁸

On the other hand, there was an increasing participation of Pacific islanders themselves in the scholarly discussion concerning their own heritage, as well as a critique of anthropological practice and its colonial features/heritage.³⁹ These discussions, expanding in the 1990s, are too broad to be reviewed here,⁴⁰ but they involved a juxtaposition of anthropologists working in the Pacific with indigenous scholars and activists. In the late 1980s, this discussion was only gaining momentum, and in a double-edged way it is both present in and absent from the book.

Roger Keesing starts out questioning anthropology’s Orientalist project and the place of Pacific ethnography in it (“representation of ethnographic areas in terms of prototypical institutions”), using the *kula* exchange as a case. Keesing acknowledges that his own work partakes in power asymmetries, but ends by critiquing the indigenous critique.⁴¹ Roger Keesing was involved in some of the heated debates between Western anthropologists and indigenous scholars and activists, and parts of his contribution to the volume can be read as a commentary to those discussions.⁴²

Anthony Hooper and Judith Huntsman, on the other hand, approach the issue of indigenous representation of culture and history from a different perspective, by examining the indigenous history writing in Polynesia. Considering the more “academic” type of history concerning the contact period (rather than traditional oral history and myth of older periods), they point out that “representations of the past by Polynesians have a long history”,⁴³ dating to the 19th century. Hooper and Huntsman examine the

relationships between Polynesian and European representations of Polynesian history. Thus, they demonstrate that indigenous representations of culture and history are not new, although they have sometimes been appropriated by Western scholars, shadowing the original Polynesian authors. Some more even collaborations⁴⁴ have also taken place.

A few of the other papers also cite indigenous researchers, yet most do not reflect these issues. What is more, and notable compared to present-day scholarship, none of the authors in the book is indigenous to the Pacific. While Pacific islands were long at the core of the development of anthropological theories (and practices, for that matter), there was at the time a notable scarcity of anthropologists among academically trained Pacific islanders.⁴⁵ Instead, as Geoffrey White and Ty Kawita Tengan have written, many Pacific scholars of culture and history of Oceania chose to write within other fields, such as Pacific studies/Indigenous studies or arts/literature, and were critical of anthropology (and history), pointing out its (their) entanglement with colonial forces.⁴⁶ White and Tengan argue that this new scholarship called into question the boundaries that had been at the heart of anthropological practice: outsider-anthropologist-author and insider-native-informant, as well as field/home.⁴⁷

Critical discourses had also started within anthropology. The reflexive turn, and attention to the ways of “writing culture”,⁴⁸ and the power relations they entail were ways in which anthropologists began to examine some of the premises of their work. There was also an explicit call for a decolonization of anthropology,⁴⁹ although its ethnographic and institutional focus was not in the Pacific.

In the Pacific context, indigenous methodologies and epistemologies are increasingly taken seriously by many anthropologists.⁵⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s influential *Indigenous Methodologies* has also inspired some anthropologists working in the region.⁵¹

On the other hand, the new millennium has seen the growing importance of the repatriation of research materials to the communities where they were originally gathered; both in the sense of returning old material (both museum artefacts and fieldwork materials) and of ensuring that current research benefits the community. These are slow processes and far from complete. Yet I would suggest there is an increasing sensitivity to the fact that the oral histories and genealogies of anthropological and historical data are not mere abstractions, but feature somebody’s ancestors. During the past thirty years, the criticism and self-criticism of anthropology have brought to the fore the discussion about who has the right to represent whom. While there is no simple answer to that question, the

discussion makes it clear that people are concerned with how they and their traditions and culture are represented, and anthropologists need to take this into account.

To sum up, the relationship between anthropology — which the writers of this volume by and large represent — and indigenous scholarship of the Pacific has not always been an easy one, but during the 2000s and 2010s this relationship has grown closer. While a symposium in Northern Europe in 1987 was hardly expected to invite speakers from Oceania, the new millennium has seen an increasing intellectual exchange between scholars from the Pacific region and Europe. For example, the European Society for Oceanists conferences have in the past decade or more invited several Pacific scholars as keynote speakers, and at least in my personal experience the ESfO meetings have become stimulating meeting places for researchers of non-Pacific and Pacific background.

Of course, being a white person within European academia, it is easier — or more comforting — to see the advances in inclusiveness, whereas indigenous Pacific scholars still feel marginalized within the discipline.⁵² The structures of academia change slowly, and work remains to be done. However, preconditions for a more inclusive dialogue exist, and they are also aided by communication technologies, which allow for scholars to interact with one another in their everyday practice, rather than just intermittently during visits or fieldwork. Technologies also enable the free flow of information, including making available older research — such as this book — whether used for their ethnographic content or theoretical insights, or subjected to critical scrutiny.

Finally

Siikala ended his 1990 introduction by predicting that “if there is to be a future for ethnographic analysis, it is to be found in the crossing of the borders of scholarly traditions and areal discussions”.⁵³ I feel this holds true, while past decades have shown that even further borders have had to be crossed than perhaps imagined at the time, including those between disciplines, and implicit assumptions about outsider researchers and insider locals. There continue to exist methodological and theoretical differences between different approaches to culture and history of the Pacific, but this does not have to prevent the exchange of ideas across borders. The old areal and regional perspectives can continue to inspire and provide answers to certain questions, but they should be combined with

other perspectives, traditions, frameworks and contexts, also beyond anthropology, as the past thirty years have shown. Not necessarily in one and the same study, but in the collaborative and cumulative process of scholarship and science. In the study of the Pacific, this process ideally brings together scholars from many parts of the world, including Oceania, linked by “the belief that our enquiries matter”, to quote Teresia Teaiwa.⁵⁴

Making these papers freely available through republication is to my mind an important contribution to this collaborative effort. The potential value of the book may not be the same for all readers, but hopefully the selective contextualizations above have given the reader some tools to assess it.

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Notes

1. Baiburin, Kelly and Vakhtin 2012: 4.
2. J. Siikala 1990, 8, this volume
3. Kaplan 1992: 685.
4. See e.g. Sahlins 1985; 1991; Biersack 1991
5. See e.g. Valeri 1985; Siikala 1994; Hooper and Huntsman 1996.
6. Strathern 2013.
7. White and Tengan 2001.
8. See e.g. Hviding 2003.
9. In the Soviet academia, socio-cultural anthropology was usually called *etnografiya*, with “anthropology” commonly associated with physical anthropology.
10. Gellner 1980; J. Siikala 1990: 56, this volume; Sokolovskiy 2012: 29.

11. Sokolovskiy 2012: 29.
12. Fortes 1980: xix.
13. Gellner 1980: xiii.
14. Gellner 1980: xiv–xvi.
15. Baiburin, Kelly and Vakhtin 2012: 2.
16. Arina Lebedeva, personal communication by email November–December 2019.
17. 2012.
18. *Ibid.*: 6–7.
19. *Ibid.*: 15.
20. Arina Lebedeva, personal communication by email November–December 2019.
21. *Kunstkamera* n.d.
22. See Tcherkézoff 2003.
23. See e.g. Thomas 1989; D’Arcy 2003: 217–218.
24. D’Arcy 2003.
25. D’Arcy 2003: 218.
26. See Rainbird 2003.
27. Lederman 1998: 442.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Bellwood 1979: 151–152, cited in Kotilainen 1990: 211, this volume.
30. See Kooijman 1972: 431–432, cited in Kotilainen 1990: 202–203, this volume.
31. See e.g. Bellwood, Fox and Tryon 2006 [1995]; Fox and Sather 2006 [1996].
32. D’Arcy 2003.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*: 231.
35. Petersen 2000.
36. D’Arcy 2003: 234.
37. See e.g. Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Jolly and Thomas 1992; Feinberg and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995a, 1995b.
38. See e.g. Otto 1992; A-L. Siikala 1997; Autio 1999.
39. See e.g. Hau’ofa 1975; Trask 1991; Hereniko and Teaiwa 1993; Mahina 1999.
40. For some contemporary assessments, see e.g. Friedman 1993; Inoue 2000; White and Tengan 2001.
41. Keesing 1990: 159, this volume.
42. See e.g. Linnekin 1983; Keesing 1989, 1991; Trask 1991.
43. Hooper and Huntsman 1990: 15, this volume.
44. See Hooper and Huntsman 1990: 17–18, this volume, on the collaboration between the anthropologist Elizabeth Bott and the Queen SĀlote of Tonga, also referred to by Biersack 1990, this volume.
45. Hau’ofa 1975; White and Tengan 2001: 382.
46. White and Tengan 2001: 384.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Clifford and Marcus 1986.
49. Harrison 2010 [1991].
50. See e.g. Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001; Hviding 2003; see also Sillitoe 2015.
51. Tuhiwai Smith 1999.
52. Uperesa 2016.
53. Siikala 1990: 8, this volume.
54. Teaiwa 2006: 72.

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