

## BELONGING IN THE PACIFIC, CULTURE AND HISTORY THIRTY YEARS ON

It is timely in many senses to reflect on culture and history in the Pacific. I join colleagues in celebrating the anniversary of the 1990 publication of the landmark volume *Culture and History in the Pacific*, edited by Jukka Siikala. The book was the fruitful result of a 1987 international symposium sponsored by the Academy of Finland that brought together a group of western scholars of the Pacific with Soviet counterparts (Keesing 1987). Times have changed. But it is again a good time for anthropologists and historians to reflect on the importance of insights from and about the Pacific for our understanding of cultural structures and histories across the globe—particularly as we consider the culture and history of our interconnections (including nation-state belonging) and the culture and history of our encounter with the Anthropocene.

Looking back at my review of the volume, I remember feeling nervous and honored. I was a young anthropologist in 1992 invited to write a review of this high powered volume. As a scholar of ritual politics and colonial history, and in particular of the past and present of a political religious movement in Fiji (Kaplan 1995; 2008), I had studied with Marshall Sahlins, whose vision of ‘structure and history’ reframed the understanding of indigenous cultural history-making and more generally proposed exploding the notion of any single world history with a multiplicity of structures (Sahlins 1985; Kaplan 2022). I also studied with Bernard Cohn, who taught us to take colonial culture seriously in historical anthropology. Looking back at my review, I agree with my assessment that the

core of the volume engaged three important approaches in historical anthropology of the Pacific of the 1980s: “structure and history” approaches examining indigenous cultural transformations; Marxist perspectives including both world system insistence on political-economic interconnections and the Gramscian problematic of hegemony; and issues of representation, invention, and the use of constructions of history, tradition, and culture (Kaplan 1992), I wished for more on colonialism, Christianity, capitalism, and nationalism. And I observed that the authors tended to consider history as a matter of the past, rather than investigating the making of history in the present.

The connection of culture to history so seriously explored in this volume has since become basic in Pacific studies, and all three of the approaches exemplified here thrive. Since the publication of *Culture and History in the Pacific*, looking back over three decades, as I expected, Pacific history and historical anthropology have engaged colonialism and nationalism/nation-states in fruitful ways, especially explicating how colonial legacies have created real paradoxes for citizens, non-citizens, and nation states generally. Pacific nation-states in particular have drawn our attention as scholars (see e.g. Kelly and Kaplan 2001). But there are two areas that have emerged as key to current questions of Pacific history-making.

First, belonging. The emerging historical anthropology of mobility, movement, and diaspora, in intersection with the anthropology of colonial and national states of the 1980s,

had only one developed location in Pacific studies—Asian labor diasporas. Looking to Fiji, which I know best, we see that the volume is contemporary with the work of historian Brij V. Lal and of anthropologist John D. Kelly on the century-long history of Fiji citizens of Indian descent making their histories with modernist dreams (Lal 1992) and with a particular version of the Gandhian vision for justice (Kelly 1991). For Hawaiian studies see the works of Gary Okihiro. However, this fundamental boundary-crossing history does not engage the authors in the 1990 volume. Generally the scholarship of that moment bounded Asian diaspora culture and history apart from Pacific islands history. Nor were Pacific islander labour diasporas (Leckie et al. 1990) engaged. At the time, world system anthropology studied labour diasporas, but without culture. Approaches that have emerged to augment this range from Appadurai's (1996) 'ideoscapes' to Roy and Ong's (2011) 'worlding'. When migration and diaspora met the mid-twentieth century nation-state form, the historical complexities and connections on both sides of the supersession of empires could too easily be theorized as inherent oppositions, or migrant threats to a rural pristine, whereas they might best be understood as particular kinds of post-colonial dilemmas. Looking back over thirty years of Fijian history, it seems to me that scholarship is better when we write histories that expect multiplicity and connections, and see in the boundaries of islands, states, and regions sites that are best addressed through theorizing dilemmas and possibilities of 'belonging' (Kelly 2018; Hermann 2018: 8).

Second, a grand and perilous environmental history emerges for all of us to engage. For much of the 2000's I have been drawn to study the export of Fijian water, from the

cultural enchantments of American bottled water-drinkers to the complex colonially-derived ethnic separations of Fiji that structure both who the water belongs to and who belongs in Fiji. But from historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) comes the suggestion that the global climate crisis requires us to reframe our previous historical commitments. Is Pacific history, and indeed everyone's history nowadays, about people, their gifts and commodities, their corporations and nation-states and their history-making? Or have urgent global climate forces redetermined, in some grand practical reason, the agents and scope of world-making? It is no surprise that inescapable climate change was not a topic in the 1990 volume. Though Cold War science found it out for us (anthropologist Joseph Masco [2010] shows that missile trajectory calculators and spy satellites were the first to notice the 'bad weather' patterns), it is really in recent years that the Pacific, like the world, has come to recognize and address the crises of the Anthropocene era.

Congratulations to the authors and editor on this landmark volume of its time! I wish I had, as a young reviewer, drawn more attention to the western-Soviet rapprochement that gave it special promise. Certainly, I did celebrate the rapprochement of history and anthropology, past and meaning, that the volume intended. If dilemmas of belonging and the challenges of the Anthropocene have come to frame the anthropological and historical scholarship of the Pacific, I hope that here, too, scholars will think of history, not as the past but as the dynamic process of making history. As to culture, even in the face of rising seas—and in collectivity with global science—Pacific peoples value their presents and futures in distinctive ways. Yet again, this is a gift to our understanding of human possibilities.

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