

FORUM: CULTURE AND HISTORY IN THE PACIFIC

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2021 saw the open-access republication of *Culture and History in the Pacific* (ed. Jukka Siikala), an edited volume originally published in 1990 by the Finnish Anthropological Society. *Suomen antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* marks the occasion with this special book forum.

For a number of years, *Culture and History in the Pacific* was known as a book that was particularly hard to find. Back in 1990, the Finnish Anthropological Society had quite limited overseas distribution channels at its disposal, so the book circulated largely from hand to hand over the following decades, acquiring something of an uncalled-for ‘cult’ status in the process. Now, 30 years after the original publication, the book is freely accessible with a new contextualizing introduction by Petra Autio (University of Helsinki).

But what, if anything, is achieved by republishing this book now? For the two persons in charge of the digitization and republication process—Heikki Wilenius and Tuomas Tammisto—the point was twofold. First, to make the rare volume available to a wider audience and second, to explore the technical possibilities and difficulties of digitizing books. In 2016 Heikki Wilenius was reading Marilyn Strathern’s article in the volume and noted it was still a much-cited text. It was also the only

one of the volume’s chapters that had been published elsewhere. Meanwhile, in talking with other Oceanists Tuomas had noticed that there was continuing interest in the volume, though it remained hard to find. Heikki thus suggested trying to make the volume openly available online, to allow for a wider readership.

Initially Heikki and Tuomas wanted to scan the volume using optical character recognition (OCR) and upload the searchable document on the website of the Finnish Anthropological Association or of *Suomen antropologi*. They took apart one volume, scanned it and ran it through OCR software, which recognized the text reasonably well, but manual correction of the text was still needed. A major motivation for Heikki and Tuomas was to see how labour-intensive the process was and whether other publications of the Finnish Anthropological Society could be digitized in the same way. Both noted that with careful scanning and current OCR programs, often embedded in the scanners, digitizing the text was not an unreasonable workload.

Later, while discussing another publication with the newly-established Helsinki University Press (HUP), Heikki and Tuomas offered the republication to the press. As HUP is an institutionally supported open access press, Heikki and Tuomas were extremely happy that

HUP was interested in the republication, as the primary motivation was to make the volume openly available. Heikki and Tuomas received permission to proceed from the authors (or their estates) and asked Petra Autio to write a new, contextualizing introduction. HUP took the project seriously and on Heikki's and Tuomas' request typeset the republication matching the original page numbers, so that readers can easily follow up citations to the original. The text itself was not edited, only obvious typographical errors were corrected and references updated to their current publication status. With the help of HUP, Heikki and Tuomas modernized the spelling of Polynesian names by substituting apostrophes with 'okina, faka'ua and 'amata, and by adding missing diacritical markings.

In other words, the republication of *Culture and History in the Pacific* was a result of the twin motives of an appreciation for open access and an apparent demand for the book. However, now that the book resurfaces three decades after its original publication, it is easy to see that the republication also serves to foreground the change that anthropology—in the Pacific and in general—has undergone in the meantime. This is something that Petra Autio (2021) discusses in more detail in her introduction to the new edition. She approaches the issue from the viewpoints of recent world history, changed foci in Pacific research, as well as anthropology's 'historic turn' and the way it was articulated in Pacific research. Particularly the focus on history—on the driving reasons behind other, 'non-European', histories and interests, to be particular—calls attention to the significant absence of Oceanic voices in much of the late-20th-century literature.

In 2020, with the republication of the volume well on its way, we asked three scholars of Oceania, Martha Kaplan (Vassar College), Alex Golub (University of Hawai'i),

and Nayahamui Michelle Rooney (Australian National University) to share their thoughts on republishing the volume some 30 years after its original publication. All three authors approach the task from different viewpoints, but their analyses also overlap in interesting and important ways. For example, all three authors note the marked absence of environmental issues in the publication. Climate change and environmental crises are not merely history-defining questions, but epoch-defining existential questions, especially in Oceania, whose inhabitants are among the first to experience the adverse effects of climate change and who are making history by mobilizing for climate action (see Teaiwa 2018). The absence of environmental themes thus underlines just how much has changed during the past three decades. What we cannot find in the volume, the authors suggest, reveals in some ways even more than what we do.

Martha Kaplan, who reviewed the original volume in 1992, reassesses her original observations from this viewpoint. She notes that the three main themes she identified in the volume were the 'structure and history' approach, a Marxist-inspired perspective focusing both on a political economy analysis of an interconnected world system and on a Gramscian analysis of hegemony, and, thirdly, issues of representation and the invention and construction of history, tradition, and culture. All these approaches, Kaplan notes, have since then become established and continue to be of importance. In her original review, Kaplan called for more analysis of colonialism, Christianity, capitalism, and nationalism. Since the publication of the original volume these, too, have become central topics in the anthropology of Oceania. In her original review, Kaplan also wrote that *Culture and History in the Pacific* treats 'history' as a thing of the past and hoped

for investigations of history in the making. But amidst these now-glorious omissions, she points out that it is also by engaging with the past that we can advance present understandings of human possibilities.

The two other contributions engage with the history of *Culture and History in the Pacific* in very different ways. Both address what Petra Autio (2021), in her new introduction identifies as a classic, much critiqued, ‘outsider perspective’ characteristic of older anthropology. Hence both Nayahamui Rooney and Alex Golub also point to the relative absence of indigenous Oceanic voices in the original volume. Whilst some of the authors, like Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman and Aletta Biersack cite Oceanic scholars and engage with Oceanic historians, the volume itself does not have contributions from scholars of Oceanic origin. Rooney and Golub engage with this absence in different, but complementary ways.

In the new introduction, Petra Autio (2021) notes that *Culture and History in the Pacific* represented a classic, subsequently much critiqued, ‘outsider perspective’ characteristic of older anthropology. Golub sets out to contextualize this perspective by detailing the rise, peak, and cresting of the scholarly wave of the ‘culture and history’ approach in Oceanic anthropology. He recounts this history through Marshall Sahlins (1930–2021), who was a key figure, if not *the* key figure in the ‘culture and history’ approach, as well as Golub’s teacher and mentor. As Golub notes, the historical anthropology approach to the study of Oceania emerged in three conferences, one of which resulted in the volume discussed here. It was also the one not attended by Sahlins. Not long after the publication of *Culture and History in the Pacific*, the ‘wave crested’ (p. 60, this issue) and new foci and approaches were emphasized in the study of Oceania following trends in

anthropology more broadly. Golub mentions the questions of representation brought up by Lila-Abu Lughod and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, as well as the seminal ASAO key note ‘Our Sea of Islands’ by Epele Hau‘ofa (1994), among others.

While the ‘culture and history’ approach crested, turned old-fashioned, and had its shortcomings picked out by successive approaches, it obviously did not end. After all, history, as Golub reminds us, is a process of transformations.

Nayahamui Rooney shows us a highly personal account of engaging with—or being engaged in—the historical transformations surrounding *Culture and History in the Pacific*. Like Golub and Kaplan, she, too, notes the relative absence of Oceanic voices and how the shifted emphases of the anthropology of Oceania differ from the focus of *Culture and History in the Pacific*. Like Golub, Rooney also explores the question of ‘outsider observers’ and indigenous perspectives. But she does so through the life history of her mother, Nahau Kambuou Rooney (1945–2020), who had just passed away when we invited Rooney to contribute an essay to this forum. Rooney finds inspiration in the volume’s discussions on gender and hegemony, and especially Marilyn Strathern’s contribution on ‘the artifacts of history’. Using Strathern’s words as a lens, Michelle Rooney explores her mother’s life and death as ‘historical artefacts’, and through them reflects on gender, power, and the history of Oceanic anthropology. Nahau Rooney was an influential person: a woman of renown on her home Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, a local leader, and one of the first three women to be elected to the parliament of Papua New Guinea in the first post-independence elections of 1977. Nahau Rooney as also a critic of western anthropology and Margaret Mead, who had conducted research

on Manus. Can a work of western anthropology be deployed to foreground matters of continued importance arising at the passing of one of its critics?

Like Golub discussing Sahlins' role, Rooney takes us on a historical journey following her mother, the different and sometimes conflicting interpretations by anthropologists and locals of renown and leadership or women's role on Manus. Both Golub and Rooney discuss the history of the anthropology of Oceania, not as a thing of the past, but precisely as a set of transformations. And for both Golub and Rooney, this exploration is also a very personal discussion and homage to the people inextricably linked with the issues under discussion. As editors of the forum, we take this opportunity to raise another name, namely that of Jukka Siikala—the editor of the volume.

There are various other themes in *Culture and History in the Pacific* that this short forum does not address. This is largely a result of the way in which we, as editors, invited the authors to reflect upon the reappearance of this volume thirty years after its first publication. We thus called attention to all that has changed in anthropology, in the Pacific, and in the world at large. Yet we want to end this short introduction by pointing out that *Culture and History in the Pacific* is not significant just for its role in disciplinary history. It also contains first-grade scholarship that does not lose its value with age: this work is simply harder to distill into large general themes (though Martha Kaplan does an excellent job in her 1992 review). But for anyone who learned their anthropology in Helsinki, Finland, roughly between the 1980s and 2000s, two familiar themes stand out: the cosmological underpinnings of political systems, and the quest to show how cosmological ideas may be found in material forms. The first, in particular,

remains synonymous with 'Jukka Siikala's anthropology' in Helsinki, the second has been a methodological approach he deployed in much of his teaching. Whilst anthropology's recent cosmological and material 'turns' have been kept quite far apart from contemporary affairs, Siikala has always taught his students to find such phenomena also in the permutations of contemporary politics. Maybe the republication of this issue will find new resonances and combine with 2020s concerns in fruitful ways. We certainly hope so.

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