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HISTORY IN POLYNESIA: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES AND CURRENT ISSUES

In Polynesia, as elsewhere, historical approaches in anthropology have come into vogue again after a hiatus during which functional, structural and cognitive studies predominated.¹ The new historiographies have brought with them new problems and dilemmas, which I will try to identify. In particular, I would like to draw attention to issues of discourse, that is, the language - including underlying assumptions - in which historical approaches have been embedded.

Early historical genres

Anthropological history began in Polynesia with attempts to reconstruct the great migrations that resulted in the settlement of the island archipelagoes. From the very beginning, European explorers like Bougainville and Cook speculated on the origins of the Polynesians and the routes that took them to the islands they inhabited. Missionaries like Samuel Marsden (1832) and William Ellis (1830) were no less fascinated by the puzzle, and offered scenarios they thought would account for the peopling of Oceania. The missionaries were followed by an array of early ethnologists, writing in the latter part of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries, including Hale (1846), Lang (1877), Fornander (1878-85), Fraser (1895), Brown (1907), Smith (1910), Friederici (1914) and Dixon (1920).² During the 1920s and 1930s, the Bishop Museum

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¹ This essay is adapted from a keynote speech presented at the First European Colloquium on Pacific Studies, Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 17-19 December 1992.

² For a review of early migration theories, see Howard 1967.

sponsored a series of studies aimed at collecting systematic data that would bear on the issues of origin and migration. Anthropologists were recruited to spend from a few weeks to several months on the various islands, documenting language, artefacts, customs, myths, and religious beliefs, as well as social and political organization. Among those who published in the museum's ethnographic series were Beaglehole and Beaglehole (1938), Te Rangi Hiroa [Peter Buck] 1932a, 1932b, 1938), Burrows (1936, 1937), Gifford (1929), Handy (1923), MacGregor (1937) and Métraux (1940). The basic premise of the museum's project was that by systematically comparing 'traits', the historical relationships between Oceanic societies could be unravelled. It was assumed that traits had diffused along with migrating populations; hence, cultures that shared traits were historically related as donors or recipients. The theoretical task was to determine directions of diffusion.

Diffusionism thus focused on language forms, artefacts, customs, and the like - presumed residues of an inferred history. In this context, 'history' was synonymous with sailing expeditions from one island base to another. Humans were largely omitted, except as conveyors of traits.

The main competitor to diffusionism as a grand strategy to account for traits associated with traditional, pre- or early-contact Polynesian societies has been evolutionism, which had effloresced in the late nineteenth century, then waned as diffusionism took hold, only to be revived in the 1950s. Generally, humans have also been omitted from evolutionary accounts, which have focused on varying levels of political and economic development evident in Polynesian cultures at the time of European intrusion.

For classical nineteenth-century evolutionists, history was essentially absent, replaced by the classification of non-western cultures into stages that inferentially represented earlier historical eras in the march toward civilization. For later evolutionists, 'history' was equivalent to 'processes of development' that were stimulated or constrained by ecological conditions (Sahlins 1958). The forces behind development were essentially impersonal, although human actors were sometimes given a role in promoting movement from stage to stage. For example, in Goldman's account (Goldman 1970), specific Polynesian chiefs are credited with conquests and political activity that brought about changes of scale. But they are portrayed by Goldman as players in a cultural game motivated by status rivalry rather than as flesh-and-blood human beings absorbed in historical events. To be fair to Goldman - fairer than Thomas (1989) in his critical essay *Out of Time* - he was not claiming to 'do history', and contributed much to our current understanding of political development

in Polynesian societies.³ Evolutionism is, of course, alive and well in Polynesia, informing much of the archaeological work currently being done. Kirch (1984) summarizes the accomplishments of this approach in his book, *The Evolution of Polynesian Chiefdoms*.

Despite their limitations, diffusionism and evolutionism have given anthropology a strong foundation for a more sophisticated historiography. Diffusionists, although they divided cultures into a catalogue of traits, did manage to collect vital materials, and they incorporated a good deal more history into their accounts than their project called for. Their ethnographies often provide the only comprehensive accounts of societies in the early part of this century, thus making them historical documents in their own right. The evolutionists, for their part, drew our attention to key relationships within Polynesian societies: between ecological constraints and kinship systems; between population size and levels of hierarchy; and between chiefly power, economic patterns and religious practices, to cite a few. This has given us a more focused lens to apply to historical issues. But, as Thomas (1989) has correctly pointed out, diffusionists and evolutionists gave short shrift to the writings of missionaries, traders and other 'untrained' visitors to the islands, thus missing an opportunity to gain historical understandings. The historical sense in their writings was therefore undeveloped at best, and at times entirely unapparent.

In the second quarter of this century, anthropologists such as Keesing (1928, 1934, 1941) and E. Beaglehole (1957) initiated studies of 'culture change' in Polynesia. These were premised on a reconstructed base-line culture that had been altered by European intrusion. History was seen to begin with the European explorers, who, along with missionaries, traders, beachcombers and colonists, set off a chain of causation that led to the transformation, and sometimes 'breakdown', of so-called 'traditional' cultures. A key concept in culture change accounts was 'acculturation', which was originally defined as a two-way process of exchange between interacting cultures, but in practice almost always referred to ways in which dominant western cultures changed subordinated non-western cultures. The documentation that supported such studies was generally compiled from European-centred accounts - from the records of missionaries, colonial administrators and the like. Although they used a wider range of materials to construct their accounts, as history, culture change studies had much in common with diffusionism and evolutionism. They, too, were more focused on general processes than on historically situated actors engaged in coping with complex, multifaceted conditions.

³ For a review of Sahlins' and Goldman's contributions to Polynesian ethnology, see Howard 1972.

But they did demonstrate the potential value that lay in the wealth of archival materials previously ignored by anthropologists.

Modernist ethnographies

While culture change studies continued into the post-World War II era, they took a back seat to accounts inspired by functional, cognitive and symbolic anthropology, approaches aimed at understanding contemporary, functioning societies. Firth's (1959) functional studies of Tikopia were an inspiration to Polynesianists, and set an exceptionally high standard for fieldwork. Kinship, political systems, land tenure and economic organization became focal points for investigation. In these accounts, history was sometimes ignored and sometimes included as background to a particular institution. But it was marginalized at best, and when included, history was assigned a role similar to the one it played in culture change studies. That is, it performed the task of providing a logical transition from reconstructed 'traditional' forms to the forms being described by contemporary ethnographers.

An implicit goal of many functional-cognitive-symbolic accounts was to dispel some of the stereotypic misconceptions in the earlier literature and in Euro-American public culture. Polynesians had been romanticized excessively on the one hand, and disparaged on the other. Images of natural humanity and noble savagery were mixed with notions of irresponsibility and laziness to compose a cartoon of Polynesian personhood. Ethnographic accounts by anthropologists, from the 1960s on, have done much to refute these stereotypes, but I sometimes wonder if we have not generated new stereotypes for the ones we have dispelled. I have the feeling that we have created a new standardized image of Polynesian personhood, more sophisticated and superficially more benign, but every bit as stereotyped. Have we, for example, exaggerated the degree to which Polynesians are context-bound at the expense of ignoring personal integration? And have we not overemphasized their responsiveness to kin and community and underemphasized the degree of autonomy they exercise in their daily lives?

These new caricatures will only begin to unravel, I believe, when we approach Polynesian societies as historically dynamic systems, with real actors doing important things in real time. Only then will appreciation of the complexity of persons-in-situations replace the facile generalizations embedded in these new stereotypes.

In 1959, Firth introduced a new approach to history in Polynesia. Visiting Tikopia after an absence of 23 years, he documented the changes that had occurred, interviewed previous informants and reconstructed

events that had transformed Tikopia in the interim. This was a new kind of history in several respects: it was relatively short term; change was calculated from a well-documented account of the earlier culture; the people who participated in historical events were clearly identifiable and large as life; and significantly, most of the data were provided by the Tikopia themselves. European accounts were used but were clearly secondary (Firth 1959).

The revival of history

At the time, Firth's restudy of Tikopia was seen by anthropologists more as a unique opportunity than as a revival of anthropological interest in history. Not until the early 1980s, when Denning (1980) and Sahlins (1981) published their studies on the Marquesas and Hawaii, respectively, did history come into vogue in Polynesian anthropology. Informed by structural and symbolic frameworks, Sahlins and Denning focused on early encounters between Europeans and Polynesians. Unlike most previous accounts - those in the culture change genre, for example - they paid almost as much attention to the culture of the European intruders as to the culture of the Polynesians who were affected. In this respect, Sahlins' and Denning's work marked a major step forward, but their studies were limited in scope. In some ways, by confining themselves to the period of 'conjunction' (in Sahlins' phrasing), their projects had more in common with reconstructions of pre-European Polynesian societies than with post-contact historical accounts familiar to historians.

By drawing attention to the cultural background of European intruders, Sahlins and Denning have raised a number of issues of focal concern for historical scholars in Polynesia. The language used in historical documents, for example, now becomes a matter of problematic concern. As Borofsky and I (1989) have noted, European explorers' characterization of Polynesian attempts to appropriate shipboard goods as 'theft' is heavily loaded with cultural assumptions. Documents therefore need to be read with a wary eye for both European and Polynesian cultural agendas.

Parallel to a growing interest in early contact history has been a revitalization of reconstructionist projects. Oliver's (1974) work on ancient Tahitian society and Valeri's (1985) work on Hawaii are two outstanding, though very different, examples. Perhaps even more important is the work being done by a new breed of archaeologists who are integrating historical accounts with studies of environmental transformation, historical legends, and changes in material culture and language (for an overview, see Kirch 1989). Their work promises to

provide a sense of Polynesian real-time history prior to European intrusion, replacing notions of relatively fixed 'traditional' cultures or sequential evolutionary stages. The early post-contact period provides some unique opportunities for archaeologists and cultural anthropologists to work together, as the collaboration of Kirch and Sahlins (1992) on the Anahulu Valley project in Hawaii clearly demonstrates.

The period following early contact, and particularly the colonial era in the Pacific, has also caught the attention of contemporary anthropologists. Many of us are now competing directly with historians of the Pacific in a quest to understand the political economies that resulted from colonization. Documentation of this period is extremely rich, thanks to the compulsiveness of colonial administrators and many missionaries in keeping written records. But the documentation is strongly biased in favour of the values and concerns of European administrators. It inevitably reveals far more about the culture of colonialism than it does about subjected peoples. If we are to write credible histories of Polynesian societies during the colonial period we have to do more than take European biases into account, however. We have to do something to compensate for the silencing of Polynesian voices. In my opinion, one of the best ways to do this is through biography, and by assisting and encouraging Polynesian elders to record their own autobiographies.

I have recently completed a biography of a remarkable Rotuman man by the name of Wilson Inia (Howard in press). He was trained as a school teacher and became a leader who served as a bridge into the modern era. He started the Rotuma High School and was responsible for training a whole generation of individuals who went on to become teachers, ministers, doctors and government officials. Without compensation, he nurtured the Rotuman Co-operative Association into the most successful co-operative venture in Fiji. In his later years he was elected Rotuma's first senator to the Fiji Legislature and served with distinction from 1970 until his death in 1983.

What I found when researching Inia's biography was that although his record of accomplishments was known to most Rotumans, he was not seen as a figure of historical significance. Nor was he an historical figure to the British colonialists. He had often proved an irritation to them by defying their authority, and they were content to bury him in their voluminous files.

What I came to realize through this research was that in some very important respects, Rotumans, along with many other peoples who were colonial subjects, have been deprived of their history. The colonial powers, Great Britain among them, had little interest in glorifying indigenous individuals, especially any who defied their authority. 'History' in colonial schools was mainly European history, and only a few

indigenous individuals - usually rulers or warriors - were ever identified, mostly for the roles they played in abetting or thwarting the dominant society's agenda. Rarely are they represented as flesh-and-blood human beings; their biographies, if known at all, are more often than not superficial and shallow. Virtually without representation are those individuals, like Wilson Inia, who - unobtrusively from the viewpoint of their colonial masters - led their people into new social, economic and political territory.

It is no wonder, then, that the only histories available to ex-colonial peoples are so often short on biography. But history without biography is cold and impersonal; it fails to provide the substance for empathetic identification. It lacks the immediacy needed to make a people's history their own, to make history personally meaningful. Heroes - historical models who exemplify the virtues of particular cultural traditions - are a vital part of every group's sense of themselves. I have written Wilson Inia's biography in order to identify such a hero for the Rotuman people, in the hope that it will help to awaken their concern for their history.

As Sahlins (1993) points out in a recent essay, post-colonial studies of political economy may be acting to continue this deprivation of indigenous history. By accentuating the planetary conquest of capitalism, to the near exclusion of local cultural responses, such studies deny indigenous peoples historical agency. What needs to be studied, Sahlins argues, is the indigenization of modernity as an historical process (see also Thomas 1990).

In search of Polynesians' history

All of the approaches to history I have discussed so far have been from a western perspective, embedded in forms of discourse that emphasize chronological sequencing, cause and effect, developmental stages, and the like. Events and processes with pronounced political or economic effects are routinely privileged.⁴ But what of the ways Polynesians 'do history'?

⁴ Recognizing the biases in previous approaches to Pacific history, Davidson (1966: 6) introduced 'island-oriented' history in the 1960s. In contrast to imperialistic history, which emphasizes the western 'acquisition of sovereignty or of political control; the establishment of law and administration; emigration from the mother country to the colonies; commerce within the empire; and, behind all these and giving unity to the whole, the notion of a "civilizing mission"', island-oriented history emphasizes the less formal agents of European expansion: beachcombers, traders, and whaling crews'. As Maude (1971: 20) has put it, island-oriented history emphasizes the perspectives of the governed more than that of the

What forms do their discourses take? Were their traditional approaches to the past 'historical' in our sense? Are their current perspectives different from ours?

Some forms of traditional Polynesian knowledge were widely presumed by European scholars to be historical discourse as we know it, especially legends. Many early commentators treated legends as oral accounts of 'real events', embellished to a lesser or greater degree with metaphors and colourful exaggerations. Their assumption was that Polynesian storytellers were repositories of time-chronicled events important to each group - that they were 'doing history' in our sense. Some current scholars take a similar view, and attempt to accurately date legendary events (for a particularly successful example see Kirch and Yen 1982). But, as I have stated elsewhere when discussing Rotuman legends (Howard 1985), Polynesian storytelling is often couched in strong semiotic codes, in which sequencing plays an important part. The structuring of legends thus seems to be less oriented to chronicling history than to documenting recurrent cultural truisms. In other words, Polynesian myths and legends seem to be forms of discourse designed to explicate cultural logic, rather than chronicled history. I have no doubt that 'real' events are often incorporated into legendary accounts, but I do not believe the assumptions underlying Polynesian legendary discourse are of the same order as those underlying western histories, written or oral.

Genealogies probably come closer to historical discourse as we know it. They are ordered chronologically, and often significant events are attached to various personages. They may be mythalized to a greater or lesser degree as they recede in time, and they are politically manipulated to the extent that they provide legitimacy to authority, but these are processes familiar to western historiography as well.

In an effort to learn more about historical discourse in Polynesia, I recently embarked on a project to discover how contemporary Rotumans 'did history'. I purposely chose a sample of educated individuals to begin with, thinking they would be sensitive to contrasts between western and Rotuman approaches. I was surprised to discover that although they were all familiar with history as a subject taught in school (which included British history, the history of Australia and New Zealand, and in some instances, the history of Fiji), none had thought about Rotuma's past within an historical framework. When I asked which events in the past they regarded as especially important, they drew blanks. If I suggested

governors. Nevertheless, as Ralston (1985: 151) and Borofsky and Howard (1989: 244) have pointed out, history in this genre remains mostly Eurocentric in character. Polynesian voices have been left in the background, while Polynesian notions of history have rarely been considered at all.

events I knew to be important, they would usually agree, but it was apparent they had not thought about them in historical terms. When I asked about people whom they admired, or had done the most for Rotuma, they invariably named a close relative or near ancestor, never an unrelated individual who, from an outsider's point of view, had been an historical figure.

These interviews gave me the clue that I needed. For Rotumans, history is embedded in family lines, not in the polity as a whole. My informants' responses reflected the fact that personal identity is still much more strongly attached to kin groups and locality than to Rotuma as a whole, or to the expanded Rotuman community. This helps to explain why genealogies remain the closest approximation to western historical discourse in many Polynesian communities. Genealogies are, in essence, family histories, which coincidentally at times are also political histories.⁵

Once this realization took hold, it was much easier to identify forms of discourse that encoded information about past events. Most of the forms require some previous knowledge of persons and events; familiarity is assumed, so much of the potential narrative is not made explicit. The cryptic nature of these verbal accounts is one reason it is so easy for an outsider to miss their historical essence. Some examples are:

1. Family jokes (*te samuga*): jokes about families that usually refer to a humorous event involving an ancestor. These are often condensed to a single word (e.g., biscuit, button) or a short phrase, and are known by nearly everyone. For example, the descendants of one man are known as *shake hands with the mirror*, in reference to his reaction when he was first shown a mirror by European visitors.
2. Sayings: some sayings encode prototypical events that serve as commentary on current affairs. For example, *fak se Michael* refers to a story about a district officer who, in a fit of rage, threw hot water on a man who had been a faithful servant. The saying is used as a commentary about someone who turns on loyal supporters.
3. Place names: place names carry with them stories and associations that are well known to people in a specific locality. Who owns a particular piece of land, who claims rights to it, disputes associated with it, and social dramas played out on it are all embedded in the name of the land.

⁵ I would not claim that this is true for all Polynesian societies. In Tonga, for example, the establishment of Christian missions, the civil war, the state formation process, and the public family events of the royal house are seen as part of the history of all individual Tongans (Paul van der Grijp, personal communication). On Rotuma, in contrast, the 150th celebration of John Williams' arrival was very much a local, village event.

4. Chiefly titles: as with place names, titles are cultural shorthand for encoding ancestral persona, wars and conflicts, triumphs and tragedies. Titles are located within particular districts and families, and as such are circumscribed rather than general to the Rotuman community at large.

So, in contrast to western historical formats, which are oriented towards providing readers or listeners with information they are presumed not to know, these Rotuman tropes assume a listener's prior knowledge. They aim at recall - at directing a listener's attention to the relevance of their knowledge to a contemporary context. An uninformed listener must ask a knowledgeable kinsman or friend in private about the associations involved. Only rarely will the historical knowledge embedded in these codes be made explicit in public arenas.⁶

Still another trope for encoding history is songs, which are composed to honour specific events such as weddings, funerals, the Methodist Conference, and visits by important guests. These songs are often sung in conjunction with *tau maka* (group dances), but they are also created by individual singers in modern formats. They are composed as commentary on current events rather than as records for future reference. Most songs are therefore ephemeral, relating to the current context, and soon forgotten, although some survive in people's memories and thus gain historical significance.

I am well aware that in other contexts educated Polynesians have joined academic discourse concerning their history. Some have taken radical stands disparaging all western scholarship. They argue that only persons with 'Polynesian blood' are entitled to produce representations of Polynesian culture or to narrate Polynesian history. Usually, this is stated in more parochial terms: for example, only people with Hawaiian blood or Maori blood are entitled to write about Hawaiian or Maori culture and history. They argue that anthropologists and historians have demeaned them with inaccurate characterizations and have undermined their political power in the face of Euro-American domination and oppression (see, for example, Trask 1991).

While such arguments deserve a hearing, and are based on serious grievances, I find them unacceptable. For one thing, I have a strong aversion to the racial premises underlying such pronouncements. Any attempt to legitimize or de-legitimize scholarship on the basis of race or

⁶ This has the effect of establishing the authority of the narrator as a social insider and of marginalizing uninformed listeners. Knowledge of local and family histories are therefore vital for a sense of intimate belonging, and can be used to draw implicit boundaries around in-groups.

ethnicity should be resisted. All accounts are partial (Thomas 1990); what we need is a vigorous debate in which multiple views are represented. It is through hearing as many voices as possible that we are most likely to do justice to the full richness of any single group's humanity. Only through multiple views can we gain a satisfactory appreciation for the human experience in general.

A step forward for anthropology would be to broaden the scope of our discourse so that it is more accessible to and appropriate for the people we study. I am, therefore, extremely sympathetic to the efforts of Polynesian scholars like Albert Wendt from Samoa, Epeli Hau'ofa from Tonga, and Vilsoni Hereniko from Rotuma. They have incorporated Polynesian tropes into their writings - humour, mythical imagery, redundancy - lending to their work an insider's subjectivity that enriches everyone's understanding of the Polynesian experience. To treat such writings as somehow less scholarly because they may not conform to current academic standards of discourse would be a grave injustice. In other words, I am arguing for inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, and for a universalism that is culturally sensitive. For too long, academic anthropologists have overvalued esoteric discourse designed to prove their intellectual superiority. We have correspondingly undervalued communication that is clear, straightforward, and accessible to a public that includes the subjects we study.

History in the making

Finally, I wish to address a form of history that is being thrust upon us by changes in the way we do fieldwork. In the past, anthropologists would usually go into the field, spend a year or so there, then return to their home society, and that was it. Return trips were rare, and 'the ethnographic present' was represented in writing as an experience frozen in time. Today, however, many anthropologists stay on location for much longer periods, or return to their field sites over and over again, year after year. They come to see history in the making, and gain a very different perspective from their predecessors whose ethnographies were based on single visits. The more time we spend in the communities we study, the more blurred the distinction between 'us' and 'them' becomes. The notion of 'the other' as the subject of anthropological investigation and discourse comes to make less and less sense. Ultimately, we come to realize there is no other, only 'us'.

I did my first fieldwork with Rotumans from 1959 to 1961, and did not return for 26 years. During the interim my field notes constituted for me an ethnographic present devoid of history. But, in the period between

1987 and 1991, I returned every year to Rotuma for field sessions lasting from a few weeks to six months. So, I not only have a thirty-year perspective on recent Rotuman history, I have been seeing history unfold before my eyes. Each time I go back I gain deeper insights into ongoing disputes, shifting alliances, and political and economic manoeuvring by individuals I have seen in many guises.

Modern technology has also contributed to making a constant flow of information accessible to the anthropologist. In addition to letters, I now get periodic faxes from my Rotuman friends in Fiji. I talk regularly, in person and on the telephone, with Rotumans - including some who live abroad, who relate the latest news from home. Other important sources of ethnographic data are the Fiji newspapers. One can find articles about Rotuma ranging from results of cricket matches to political upheavals. So, there is no longer an ethnographic present, only perpetual change and ongoing process; only history in the making. And the anthropologist often becomes an integral part of that history.

Being witness to and a participant in history creates new ethical problems for anthropologists. When analysing the colonial period or earlier forms of European intrusion such as missionization, we have felt perfectly justified in mercilessly criticizing Europeans who had abused power in pursuit of their own self-interests. In the struggles between Europeans and Pacific Islanders, most of our sympathies have been unabashedly with the latter. Europeans had the power; Pacific Islanders were powerless. We were the oppressors; they were the victims.

The post-colonial situation is much more complex, however. Whatever rationale may have existed for treating islanders as having unitary interests in the past (and even that is questionable) is now gone. As Thomas points out, 'contemporary history and political commentary can no longer situate itself straightforwardly and comfortably on the side of "the" local people' (1990: 143). Independence has brought to the fore ethnic, political, and economic differences within Pacific Island societies. Encompassing these variations is a serious challenge to contemporary scholars, wherever they may come from.

The point I want to make here is that in the post-colonial period, power abuses continue. We are now confronted with occasions in which Pacific Islanders in positions of authority abuse power in pursuit of political or economic gain. It would be easy to turn a blind eye, to ignore such instances in our ethnographic accounts, rationalizing the decision by reference to the time-honoured relativistic ethic that we must not be judgmental - that tyrannical behaviour is acceptable in some cultures. Alternatively, we could report power abuses with the same ruthless candour we have used to expose excesses by European colonials. The choices we make will greatly affect the kind of history we do.

I wish to make my own bias clear. In my opinion we have more to lose, both as anthropologists and as human beings, by accepting extreme forms of moral relativism than by adopting a universalistic approach, albeit a culturally sensitive one, to power and power abuse. Power relations should be at the heart of an historical anthropology. I think the time has come for anthropologists to muster the courage to confront tyranny in no uncertain terms, at every level and regardless of the ethnicity of its perpetrators. Such an approach will no doubt involve risks. It may mean being denied access to field sites. It may mean getting politically involved despite attempts to avoid it. But it will result in more credible accounts, and probably in more social justice, than ignoring power abuses.

To conclude, I believe that anthropologists can no longer avoid paying attention to historical processes, whether they are analysing earlier cultures in the Pacific or recent ones. But we must choose the form of history to be done. We can do history that highlights abstract processes (as in diffusionism and evolutionism) and thus avoid the necessity for portraying flesh-and-blood actors in real time. This would keep us at a safe distance from having to make harsh judgments - or any judgments at all. We can approach history timidly, falling back on comfortable stereotypes and glossing over rough edges. Or we can confront the worst as well as the best head on, in the manner of good investigative reporting. I suggest that in the long run we will provide a greater service to anthropology, to the people of Polynesia, and to humanity if we have the courage to opt for the latter.

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