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In several previous accounts of Pacific historiographic developments I made brief comments about Douglas Oliver's *The Pacific Islands*. His book was notable, for my historiographic purposes, on two counts. First, it had no competition. This seemed to illustrate a weakness within the Pacific history-writing profession for producing monographs and articles rather than, as well, attempting some general, overview history. Second, I was concerned that in the absence of any such new enterprise, Oliver's edition of 1951 (and its very slightly revised version of 1961) was perpetuating a view of Pacific history for general readers that predated the findings and perceptions of a whole new generation of scholarship.

It is sobering to consider that in 1989 Oliver's book was still the only single-volume survey of consequence for the period to 1949. Moreover, it was a "superannuated" (his word) Oliver who had the energy to set to and bring out a third edition. While much of what follows is critical in tone, I wish to make it clear that in general terms I consider *The Pacific Islands* a most significant work in Pacific historical literature.

In this review I will address two questions: In what ways does this third edition differ from the first? Where does the book now fit into a Pacific historiographic context?

Oliver's revisions fall into several categories. A considerable number of sentences have been slightly reworked, presumably for grammatical and stylistic reasons (that often seem less than compelling). Thus, for example, Godeffroy and Son "constituted Germany's spearhead of imperialism in Oceania" (1958:97)¹ becomes "constituted Germany's imperialistic spearhead in the South Pacific" in the third edition (p. 69).

A number of words and expressions that were acceptable in the 1940s and 1950s have had to be changed. Hence “whitemen” and “white masters” become “Westerners.” “Natives” sometimes, but not always, becomes “Islanders.” References to violence and cannibalism are desensationalized (e.g., 1958:80). Hence “clubbed to a standstill” (1958:105) now becomes “fought against” (p. 77); sentences such as “the inland hill tribes still showed more preference for white man’s blood than for his wages” (1958:93) are dropped altogether. Also mirroring changing racial sensitivities is the author’s awareness of sexist language. Hence “man” becomes “person.” Yet such revisions are sometimes careless and incomplete. Thus “man” at the beginning of one sentence becomes “person,” but then “he” occurs unchanged twice more in the same sentence and in the next (p. 62). National sensitivities are also more developed in 1989 than in 1951. Japanese and Germans in particular are spoken of in more neutral terms (p. 82 cf. 1958:108; p. 70 cf. 1958:97). Oliver’s cold war assessment of the likelihood of Communist imperialism in Oceania is deleted in 1989. Some chapter titles and sections are renamed, for example, “Aliens” becomes “Invaders,” “Metamorphosis” becomes “Transformations.” One of the more obvious changes in terminology is the partial substitution of “labor recruiter” for “blackbirder.”

This latter change leads on to a category of potentially more substantive revision—that of incorporating scholarly findings and interpretations that have developed since 1951. Having checked each sentence of the first edition against the third, I have to say that changes falling into this category are in fact quite small. The most radical change has been to the book’s opening ethnographic/anthropological sections. The original six chapters on the ocean, the coming of its inhabitants, and the cultures of Australian Aborigines, Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians have been completely rewritten as one thirty-page chapter, about half the size of the original six chapters. The Australian Aborigines virtually disappear from this section and from the rest of the 1989 edition. This timely and excellent revision is a “brief summary” of Oliver’s *Native Cultures of the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu, 1989). And speaking of radical surgery, the 1951 edition’s final two chapters (“Utopia’s Prospects” and “Epilogue”) have been abandoned. Sources have been added after each chapter. The bibliography has been revised and, to some extent, updated.

But the bulk of the historical narrative, that dealing with the coming of Westerners and their impact on Oceania (pp. 35–278), has been altered very little in substance. Leaving aside the more stylistic and cosmetic changes already mentioned, revisions in this main part of the

book are generally of two kinds. First, there is the addition of “factual” information taken from post-1960s monographs. These additions typically consist of odd sentences or paragraphs that add to the detail of the narrative. In quantity they add minimally to the original text. Oliver’s third edition lists of sources (especially post-1951 sources) for these chapters are not always reflected by additions to the text. Second, there are some more substantive additions, of an analytical or interpretive kind, such as the dozen or so pages of new material in the chapter “Souls” (that examines the Siuai and cargo cults). The biggest addition is fourteen pages to chapters 6 and 7 that demonstrate the extent of depopulation by taking the examples of the Marianas, Aneityum, and Maude’s work on the Chilean slavers.

Overall, I would contest that this book is quite as extensively revised and augmented as Oliver claims in his preface. Apart from its beginning and ending, the third edition is substantially the same as the first edition, and its overall argument for the overwhelming preponderance of Western influences and a consequent “fatal impact” for the Islanders is unmodified, or even strengthened. This might not immediately be apparent since Oliver has acknowledged the existence of counterarguments (e.g., pp. 52–53, 87–90) and he has certainly modified some of his earlier, more extreme descriptions about the actions of certain groups of Europeans, notably the labor recruiters (e.g., a number of statements on 1958:92–93 have been deleted or modified). Yet such changes are semantic rather than substantive. Oliver has chosen virtually to ignore the findings of the now very extensive scholarly literature, beginning with Scarr and Corris on labor recruiting in Melanesia, that highlights the active and voluntary participation of most recruits. Oliver’s narrative continues instead to emphasize the preponderance of violence and kidnaping. His one mollifying sentence from the first edition—“Arguing statistically (of all the masters, there must have been some who were not as bad as some others), many laborers were treated decently, rewarded justly, and returned to their homes on schedule” (1958:94)—is barely altered in the 1989 version: “Arguing statistically, many laborers were doubtless treated decently, recompensed fairly, and returned to their homes on schedule” (p. 67). This seems to me to be but a token gesture to Scarr and Corris and those who have followed them.

It is, of course, a moot point as to how much any revising author should be obliged to take notice of findings that are not easily reconciled with the overall arguments of the original work. And I unreservedly acknowledge how difficult it must be to revise work written almost forty years ago. It is not appropriate here to get embroiled in what is

now an increasingly dated and irrelevant argument about the extent to which there was or was not a “fatal impact.” I simply wish to make the point that Oliver does not appear to have changed his ground, as is his perfect right.

But what is less excusable is his reluctance to revise material that is not subject to points of interpretation. Oliver’s treatment of aspects of New Zealand’s history is particularly poor in this regard. There is some confusion about chronology. In chapter 3 it is correctly stated that the Church Missionary Society (CMS) arrived in New Zealand in 1814, the Wesleyans in 1819, and Catholic missionaries were later on the scene (1838 to be precise) (pp. 55–57). Yet in chapter 8 we learn that the CMS arrived in 1814, “then the Catholics, then the Wesleyans” (p. 108). It is not true that a higher percentage of Maori were literate in English than the “colonials” (p. 110); Maori were literate in their own language. The argument that either or both the French government and the New Zealand Company forced the British government to annex New Zealand (pp. 58, 109) is a hoary old notion discredited many decades ago. Unfortunately, Oliver’s source is I. L. G. Sutherland, ed., *The Maori People Today*, published in 1940 (Christchurch; p. 110). And Oliver mistakenly calls this author “Sullivan” in the notes and bibliography. This dated book also appears to be the source for a series of quite unfounded statements about the Treaty of Waitangi and related questions of “political equity,” Maori voting rights, and legislation for Maori (p. 110; cf. Sutherland 1940:82). Anyone almost fifty years later writing about this now very sensitive period of New Zealand history should at least look at such major works as Alan Ward’s *A Show of Justice* (Auckland, 1973). Oliver does list a 1980 edition of Keith Sinclair’s *A History of New Zealand*, but he has taken little notice of its findings on such issues. Given the quite intense study since the 1960s of early Maori-European culture contact, Oliver could have been expected to be familiar with the works of Harrison Wright, Judith Binney, and John Owens. At the very least he might have consulted W. H. Oliver with Bridget Williams, eds., *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (Wellington, 1981), which summarizes this literature.

Other errors dot the book. For example, Presbyterian missionaries did not “pioneer” missionary work in the New Hebrides (p. 55)—it was the London Missionary Society. Nor did the Wesleyan Mission work in the Loyalty Islands (*ibid.*). And while I am in my correcting mode, I note errors in the notes and bibliography. Titles are sometimes misspelled, and there is inconsistency over whether books are edited or not (for example, Corris is incorrectly listed as editor for his book *Passage*,

Port and Plantation, whereas Shineberg is not acknowledged as editor of *The Trading Voyages of Andrew Cheyne*). The following authors also have their names misspelled: Harrisson, Macdonald (both his first and second names), Sutherland (rendered Sullivan), Ward (wrong initials), Wedgwood. Since this is presumably the final version of this book, it is a pity more effort was not made to get such matters right.

Turning now to the second question, which to some extent has already been answered: If the text and the argument have not been substantively revised, then the 1989 version is unlikely to reflect adequately Pacific historiographic developments since the 1950s. This point can be reinforced by considering less what the book says as what it does not say. The fundamental shift in Pacific history scholarship over the past thirty or more years has been to concentrate more on what the Islanders were doing in the period of culture contact rather than concentrating on depicting Western agents as the sole initiating influences. Pacific historians have long since rejected the imperial overview whereby Westerners were subjects at the center stage and the Islanders were shadowy objects somewhere in the background, having things “done” to them.

Oliver’s history is, essentially, in the imperial vein (in a nonpejorative sense) in that his historical narrative is almost exclusively about Western (and Oriental) activity in the islands. Apart from his persistent argument about the generalized sufferings of Islanders as a consequence, there is little information on just what island communities were actually *doing* during the past two hundred or so years. Oliver’s text was very apposite in 1951, but far less so now. Leaving aside the question of the fate of island societies, Oliver has made no place for a whole generation of Pacific history scholarship that focuses on the social, economic, political, religious, and intellectual initiatives of and developments in indigenous societies since contact with the outside world. Oliver raises this issue briefly and says that indeed the “active” and “two-way” nature of culture contact “cannot be denied” (pp. 87–88). But he then sidesteps the matter with his rather narrow definition of what he understands “active” and “two-way” to mean, namely, that Islanders sometimes killed Westerners, that island religions “put their imprints” upon local Christianity, that Islanders were not easy to employ, and that some island words have “crept into Western vocabularies.”

The validity of the argument that Oliver’s chronicle is mainly Eurocentric or imperial in focus is clearly illustrated by the fact that in his book scores of Westerners have names, from popes to pirates. Yet, if my counting is correct, only five Pacific Islanders are named—one Hawaiian, one Fijian, and three Tongans: Kamehameha I, Cakobau, Ma’afu,

Tāufa‘āhau Tupou, Queen Sālote Tupou. These are all among the most elite. Is it also indicative of a particular worldview that four are referred to by old-fashioned names or outdated orthography or both (“Thakombau,” “Maafu,” “George Tubou,” “Queen Salote Tubou”)?

Oliver’s book remains an extremely useful account of the penetration of Oceania by the outside world. If I had reviewed it just on that ground, my assessment would have been much more favorable. In some respects, it may have been better to have simply reprinted the book rather than to have attempted “extensive revisions and additions” for a third edition. For in this latter exercise I believe that the opportunity to incorporate the essence of post-1960s research on the history of Pacific islands societies since European contact, regardless of how the “losses and gains” may have been assessed, has been lost.

NOTE

1. Since I was unable to get a copy of the 1951 first printing, I have used a 1958 third printing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press). Hence my page references to the 1951 first edition are to the 1958 printing.