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Oliver's *The Pacific Islands* (hereafter *TPI*) appeared at a time when anthropologists were renewing their interest in or receptivity to historical approaches. Cultural evolutionism (reborn), acculturation, and development were all claiming programs of study and practitioners. However, apart from the author's interest in the prospects of development in Pacific Island territories, *TPI* seems to have been conceived independently of these new interests. As history it was conventional, an "objective" sort of history, and certainly not eccentric by reason of its emphasis on socioeconomic rather than political dimensions. It was happily conventional—again, for historians—in being well written, from a definite point of view, and frequently entertaining in the bargain.

The publication of *TPI* also coincided with the commencement of Pacific history "as an organized specialization within the general discipline of history" at the Australian National University in Canberra (Maude 1968:xv). A quarter of a century later, in the same year (1975) that the second edition of *TPI* was reissued by the University Press of Hawaii, some of the Canberra historians gathered to discuss their collective accomplishments (Daws 1979). These did not include a general history of the Pacific, even though there was a perceived need for one. Deryck Scarr thought that several people were planning to do "short general histories of the whole area" (ibid.: 125), but none appeared. Another of the discussants, Oskar Spate, may have put his finger on a reason for this. The material and political insignificance of the Pacific as part of the world past means that a general history, however well done, would likely be counted as a small contribution among historians generally. (Scarr himself has just published *The History of the Pacific Islands, Kingdoms of the Reefs* [Melbourne: Macmillan Australia, 1990].)

Whatever the place of the Pacific Islands in world history, Pacific Island cultures, by reason of their number, diversity, and comparative isolation prior to the late eighteenth century, hold a very significant position in the history of anthropology. For that reason a general historical account that is especially attuned to anthropological interests, as *TPI* is, has held its place for anthropologists engaged in teaching cultures, as it were, rather than teaching history. It is from this vantage that the third edition of *TPI* is cause for celebration, and from which many of the comments of the three reviewers who consider the revisions of the third edition—Howe, Newbury, and Ralston—appear oddly disparaging. Most surprising is the opinion of Howe and Newbury that it was a mistake to revise the book at all.

But what, more specifically, is this vantage point from which one is led to applaud rather than denigrate the revised edition? It is that of an anthropologist teaching an ethnographic area or survey course on the Pacific. Such courses seem to be characteristic of North American university curricula. They are styled "service" courses in that they are intended to cater to the interests of students with diverse academic goals and professional aspirations. Typically they are the only courses (subjects) in their respective universities that focus on the Pacific Islands. In 1961, when the slightly revised second edition of *TPI* appeared, only about two hundred students enrolled in Pacific ethnography courses in tertiary institutions in California. Within a few years particular courses

enrolled that many, and since then many thousands of students have elected Pacific area courses in US and Canadian universities.

Thus, a considerable fraction of the nonspecialist audience at which Oliver aimed his book has been made up of undergraduates who, one may add, are neither aspiring anthropologists nor historians. Oliver knows this kind of audience well from his teaching days at Harvard and Hawaii, and I suspect that it was more a sense of obligation to students than to his teaching colleagues that underpinned his decision to produce the revised edition. But I am no less grateful for the book's many changes that are definite aids to learning in anthropology courses, and that are not mentioned, exemplified, or evaluated by the reviewers (see below).

In the postwar study of Pacific history, the interests of historians and anthropologists have overlapped, but our priorities are not the same. The usual goals of the ethnographic area course are to gain some understanding of how the indigenous sociocultural systems were constituted and functioned prior to disturbance by Westerners and how they have changed as the result of that intrusion. It would be quite enough to do one or the other, to present a comparative survey of traditional cultures in light of selected questions or problems that have engaged anthropologists in the study of nonliterate small-scale societies generally, or to do a survey of studies of sociocultural change. If there is only room for the one course, as is usually the case, there is a very strong temptation, if not also a responsibility, to try to tell the whole story, or as much of it as possible. Whatever path is chosen, *TPI* is indispensable, not merely as historical background but in providing, first, a historical—which is to say, explanatory—framework for understanding sociocultural change, and second, the historical contexts of the ethnographies themselves.

Given these objectives, the most salutory feature of the third edition is that in "scope, structure, and interpretation" (Ralston) it has remained the same. The essential continuity in these major aspects justify the reviewers' judgment that overall the revision is minor and also the approach of Baré's critical appreciation in which he found little need to comment on changes in the text. But Howe, Newbury, and Ralston appear to approve of the revisions more than they do the continuities. Before addressing the latter, however, one feels compelled to say a few words about the value of the revisions in the context of an ethnographic area course.

With the practiced eye of an ethnographer and teacher, Oliver has sharpened the discussions of indigenous cultures in systematic fashion.

So, for example, the somewhat inaccurate statement that Solomonese returned laborers "had less respect for status based on old age alone" (1961:231) becomes in the third edition: "less respect for social status based entirely on seniority and native-money wealth" (p. 159); of the achievements of missionaries in German New Guinea by 1939, the rather vague statement that "it is most unlikely that they succeeded in changing many basic institutions or attitudes toward the supernatural" (1961:242) is replaced by: "they had doubtless enlarged the native pantheons of spirits and supernatural powers; but it is unlikely that they had succeeded in transforming many native attitudes or practices vis-à-vis the supernatural, least of all in the sphere of magic, both helpful and harmful" (pp. 165–166). Cumulatively, changes of this specific order for the benefit of students who are now more sophisticated readers of ethnography—or readers of more sophisticated ethnography—add up to a greatly improved text.

Revisions of this kind in the historical narratives and discussions of European activities are less extensive, evidently far less extensive than the historians would have liked. Newbury, for example, has a number of specific complaints, but at least one of these, the allegation that administrators have vanished from the work, is far from the truth. They may not appear in the index, but they appear in the title of chapter 5 ("Miners and Administrators . . .") and in many other places as well. Some examples: the character and effects of Spanish colonial rule in the Marianas (pp. 93, 95); colonial government and land (pp. 103–104); pacification and effects on indigenous leadership in Siuai (pp. 123–124); administration and cargo cults (pp. 128–129); administrative regulation of native labor (p. 135); colonial government functions in the Solomons (pp. 156–157); functions and goal of the prewar Australian administration in New Guinea (p. 166); the peculiarities of the Anglo-French Condominium administration in the New Hebrides (pp. 172–173); the New Caledonian administration (p. 227). In these and other discussions, Oliver has answered Newbury's question of whether administrations were "not among the principal agents of change?" They were influential agents of change, but in giving more attention to missionaries and European economic agents than to colonial administrators, Oliver has judged, correctly I believe, their respective impacts on the indigenous societies in the period up to World War II. If student readers are led to contest this assessment, on the basis, say, of perusing Newbury's *Tahiti Nui* (1980), all the better. *TPI*'s generalizations, arguments, and judgments invite challenge, and the author's caveats and provocative phrasing show that they were so intended.

Let us turn now to *TPI*'s essential continuities, beginning with its somewhat modified scope.

Scope

The geographic scope of the third edition has contracted by the exclusion of Aboriginal Australia whereas the temporal span, which brings us up to the immediate pre- and post–World War II years, remains the same. Oliver's failure to extend his coverage to the last four decades, although he seriously contemplated taking on the vast project that this would entail, in no way diminishes the value of what he has done, including the provision of bibliographic leads. Certainly he would not have been satisfied to devote only a couple of chapters to the recent decades, as Scarr (1990) has done.

Usefully retained are the twin historical perspectives that Spate (e.g., 1978) dubbed the Oceanic and Insular—the history of the Pacific Ocean and the history of Pacific peoples. This is one sense in which the book is both Eurocentric and islander-centered, and it is important that students understand, as Baré's opening comments underscore, how the Pacific began to emerge as a new entity by the end of the eighteenth century.

Structure

At the core of *TPI*, and comprising over half the book, is the section now titled "Transformations." Following a brief introduction on the dimensions of change, illustrative stories of what took place to change islander ways of life unfold in the series of chapters entitled "Lives" (new), "Land," "Souls" (both extensively revised), "Coconuts," "Sugar," "Sea Harvest," "Mines," and "Bases." Displayed here are the new conditions, constraints, and opportunities faced by islanders in the postcontact era, in short, the causes of sociocultural change. If there is extensive treatment of Western (and Oriental) activities, this is because for the nonspecialist reader such activities—e.g., the roles of missionary, trader, planter, colonial officer—are as exotic, or nearly so, as those of islanders in the traditional scheme of things. To say, as Howe does, that *TPI* is mainly or essentially Eurocentric/imperial in focus is belied by the way in which legions of students have read the book. It is islander-centered, first, because the focus is on those conditions that help to explain how and why islanders' ways of life changed, and second, because as colonial history we clearly have a view from the village and

not from the metropole (not to mention that it is abundantly clear who claims the author's sympathies).

The method of presentation of "Transformations," which is the key feature of what Baré refers to as Oliver's choice in the face of a difficult challenge and Newbury acknowledges as a "good idea," has some disadvantages. Some of these are discussed by Ralston (e.g., diversity is underplayed) and especially by Baré. But the advantages of Oliver's comparative-illustrative presentation are patent; and beyond those qualities which, to Baré, account for the book's "enduring success" is that it conveys the sense that understanding the history of Pacific societies is a serious and rewarding intellectual endeavor.

Interpretation

The principal issues of contention raised by the reviews are, crudely put, Fatal Impact and islander agency. These are separate, or at least separable, issues since Fatal Impact refers to effects whereas islander agency refers to causes. Of course, Fatal Impact may imply that islanders were exploited victims rather than effective agents in change, for if they were effective they must have conspired in the demise of their own cultures (this they did, as in Oliver's references to indigenous "opportunists"). Howe linked the two issues by proposing that islander passivity is an assumption shared by "all" Fatal Impact thinkers (from Cook to Moorehead and including Oliver), and goes on to state, "Just as modern Pacific historians have rejected the view that Islanders were inferior, passive, and helpless in a contact situation, so have they also rejected the view that the end result was a fatal impact" (1984:350; see also Howe 1977). The first view is obviously not that of anthropologists who see in islanders the same sort of adaptability as is exhibited by humans generally. Adaptability and adaptation, however, are not the same thing. In Melanesian cargo cults, for example, we see islanders who are active, creative, and exasperatingly resilient—islander agency raised to a high power—and invariable adaptive failure owing to the complete mismatch of means and ends. Nor is adaptation explained, adequately or in full, by identifying the people who are doing the adapting.

With respect to Fatal Impacts, every island culture is on the casualty list, initially and early on, not only as an end result. There are a range of problems and questions that are of great interest to anthropologists, and which can only be pursued by means of knowledge of the pristine sociocultural systems (in the Pacific and elsewhere). In varying degree,

ethnographies are reconstructions of systems modified by Western contact, and it matters a great deal whether those reconstructions are correct and whether, in the particular case, they are even possible. In the sense that every system ceased to function in the way it had in its pre-European context, the Western impact was invariably "fatal"—i.e., destructive, decisively and irreversibly so, and so probable as to be reckoned inevitable. The many instances and aspects of change described in *TPI* help to provide students with a historically critical approach to the ethnographic record. And contrary to Howe's suggestion, the Fatal Impact issue is neither dated nor irrelevant. Indeed, in a world in which fatal impacts go by the terms genocide and ethnocide, and in which so many of the world's ethnic populations are at risk, such a suggestion seems curiously out of touch.

But arguments about islander agency or Fatal Impact that are cast in general terms will probably not get us far. One needs to get down to cases, and the case chosen by Howe, wherein both issues can be joined, is the Melanesian labor trade. Oliver's portrait, he contends, is one-sided for its emphasis on violence and coercion. So once again islanders are exploited victims rather than the active volunteers that more recent scholarship has shown them to be.

The systems of labor migration comprising the Melanesian labor trade can be analyzed in terms of a complex of "push" and "pull" factors. Significant among these were various forms of coercion, some of them infrequent (which does not mean insignificant!) so far as the total number of recruits over time was concerned, such as kidnaping, while others were more frequent, such as the forceful means used by indigenous leaders. Still others, such as head taxes and the forced return of contract breakers, were systematically applied under colonial rule. Nor did violent means of recruiting cease following the Queensland phase of the trade. The extent and bases of voluntarism varied, but there is no inconsistency between voluntarism and violence. There is no more avid volunteer than the illegal Mexican migrant bound for the fields of California, yet the labor agent or "coyote" is viewed with the same apprehension and hatred as the labor recruiters were, say, on the Sepik River. As with voluntarism/coercion, so with exploitation/benefits. Ralph Shlomowitz has recently argued (1989), convincingly, that Meillassoux's notion of "super-exploitation" in African labor systems does not apply in the Pacific. If islanders were not super-exploited, were they, then, merely exploited? Time may have eased the pain and the moral outrage, but to listen to islanders' accounts of their experiences as laborers in the prewar era is to instantly recapture the violence and brutality, the

deception and extralegal tactics, not to mention the pitiful rewards and the problems created for village life and livelihood. *TPI* captured this succinctly, and though Shlomowitz's analyses of the economics of the Melanesian labor trade are admirable, they do not carry us as far as Howe's characterization of the trade as a "cooperative venture" (1984:330)!

What are at issue, really, both for Oliver and his student readers, are the consequences of migrant labor for the islanders' social and cultural lives. In the eastern Pacific (Oliver summarizes Maude's *Slavers in Paradise* [1981] in the new chapter, "Lives," on demographic history) the consequences were sudden and drastic cultural loss. Much of the so-called mystery of Easter Island depends on this. In the west there was a bundle of sociocultural changes, for example, as summarized for Solomon Island villagers (pp. 158–159), which many islanders viewed as adverse consequences. A focus on the character and history of the labor systems is directed to the question of what happened to change island cultures; but again, it is the new features of these and the explanation of these features that claim our (anthropological) attention. Yet Howe objects that Oliver's book dwells on "generalized sufferings," tells us little about what island communities were actually doing, and ignores the findings of Pacific historians concerning the "initiatives of and developments in indigenous societies since contact with the outside world." What islanders were doing, their initiatives and the developments in indigenous societies as the result of plantation wage labor, are presented in specific terms for all to read. All one can suggest is that Howe is not interested in such doings, restricted as they are to the village arena. Understandably, historians are more interested in those new and larger arenas for islander action, to our knowledge of which anthropologists have contributed so much less than they might have by virtue of customary reluctance to tarry in the "contact culture" while enroute to the village. While opportunities were missed, it was just as well that we yielded to the siren call of the traditional Pacific worlds. Those worlds still beckon, their call reinforced by the splendid achievements of our archaeological colleagues and the self-conscious efforts of islanders in cultural revival and preservation.

Symptomatic of a classic work, George Steiner suggests, is that it does not become "the equivalent or even the lesser occasion" of the interpretations and commentaries it gives rise to (1978:158). In the present airing and exchange of views, the third edition of *The Pacific Islands* passes Steiner's test with ease.

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