CHAPTER 1

MICRONESIAN/MACROFUSION

The story of Micronesia is one of fluidity and fusion. It is fluid in the basic sense of the sea as salt water, a body of fluid that allows for the passage of seacraft across what in the terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri (1988) we might understand as smooth space. The ocean is a space not striated by walls or fences as boundaries, but one where all the known world is the place of home; where nomads exist is large space from which they do not travel. We should be aware of the metaphorical use of some of these terms, the sea is not always smooth, but it is a space for movement, and the inhabitants of Micronesia are not regarded as nomads in the conventional sense, but their world has often been a large one allowing movement by judicious use of winds and currents that would often mean extended stays on islands that were not their homes: but, they were at home with the sea.

As salt and water fuse in the fluid of the ocean, so it is that I understand the story of Micronesia as one of fusion. As a concept in the study of human societies past and present, fusion allows us to think beyond boundaries, both of the body and of space. In regard to the body, if we accept fusion we can accept there is no expectation of finding pure types of people, no expectation that contacts between people from different places and with different histories produce hybrid forms, because each party in the process is already a fusion derived from meetings that occurred long before the several millennia that are the concern of this book. Fusion has the ability to allow us to think through intra- and inter-regional connections and is a concept that might stand as the motif for Micronesia and Micronesian studies. Whereas individual island worlds have often been invoked as microcosms of the Earth, perhaps best observed in the title of Paul Bahn and John Flenley's (1992) popular book *Easter Island, Earth Island* (see also Kirch 1997a; cf. Rainbird 2002a), in being sealed and localized eco-systems in which the humans are included, which is an extension of island biogeography and the now discredited concept of 'islands as laboratories' (cf. Rainbird 1999c). The connecting sea that ebbs and flows between the islands of Micronesia is also a connecting sea that pays little heed to supposed boundaries. Any boundaries that exist are social ones, and are of no less importance as a consequence, but have to be historically situated rather than assumed. Consequentially, with the seascapes of the Pacific Ocean in mind, it might be

useful to look beyond the conventional boundary of the region under discussion here.

The following passage comes from the work of American ethnographer Fay-Cooper Cole in *The Wild Tribes of Davao District, Mindanao* and is derived from work conducted early last century:

> Another possible source of outside blood is suggested by well verified stories of castaways on the east coast of Mindanao and adjacent islands. While working with the Mandaya in the region of Mayo Bay the writer was frequently told that three times, in the memory of the present inhabitants, strange boats filled with strange people had been driven to their coasts by storms. The informants insisted that these newcomers were not put to death but that such of them as survived were taken into the tribe. These stories are given strong substantiation by the fact that only a few months prior to my visit a boat load of people from the Carolines was driven to the shores of Mayo Bay and that their boat, as well as one survivor, was then at the village of Mati. I am indebted to Mr. Henry Hubbel for the following explicit account of these castaways: 'One native banca [single outrigger boat] of castaways arrived at Lucatan, N.E. corner of Mayo Bay, Mindinao, on January 2nd, 1909. The banca left the island of Ulithi for the island of Yap, two days' journey, on December 10th, 1908. They were blown out of their course and never sighted land until January 2nd, twenty-two days after setting sail. There were nine persons aboard, six men, two boys, and one woman, all natives of Yap except one man who was a Visayan from Capiz, Panay, P. I., who settled on the island of Yap in 1889. These people were nineteen days without food and water except what water could be caught during rainstorms. The Visayan, Victor Valenamo, died soon after his arrival, as a result of starvation. The natives recovered at once and all traces of their starvation disappeared within two weeks. The men were powerfully built, nearly six feet high. Their bodies were all covered with tattoo work. The woman was decorated even more than the men. (Cole 1913: 170–1).

Mindanao is one of the larger and most southerly of the Philippine Islands archipelago, a group of large Southeast Asian islands that has at no time been considered part of Micronesia. But to quote the report above is to highlight the fluidity of the boundaries and thus the difficulties inherent in such a project of labelling and identifying the region of Micronesia. Certainly in current geographical toponyms, the ocean expanse that forms the western seascape of the Mariana and Caroline Islands is the Philippine Sea. Part of this sea, with a greater area provided by a section of the Pacific Ocean, constitutes the 7 million square kilometres of area conventionally labelled Micronesia. Within this seascape there is 2700 square kilometres of land. Micronesia epitomizes what Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) has termed, in his highly influential essay, 'a sea of islands'. One sea connecting a multitude of islands both within and, as we have already seen, beyond conventional boundaries. The Philippines to the west of the study area (Fig. 1.1) have been the location for such stories of contact since the earliest reports by European visitors. As historian of Micronesia Fran Hezel (1983: 36–7) writes from the primary sources:

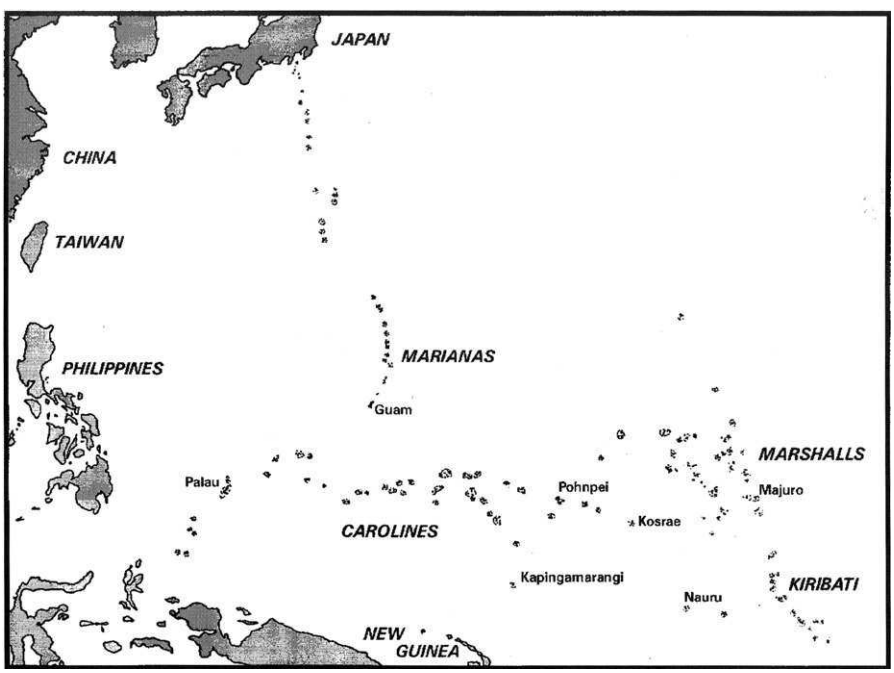

Fig. 1.1 Map of Micronesia. The current popular understanding is that Micronesia incorporates the island groups of the Marianas, Carolines and Marshalls, and the Gilberts in the Republic of Kiribati. A small number of other islands that fall outside of these main groups are also included.

One day in late December 1696, two strange-looking canoes appeared off the eastern coast of Samar, an island in the eastern Philippines . . . The villagers of Samar responded promptly and generously to the plight of the castaways. They brought coconuts, palm wine, and taro, all of which were greedily devoured by the strangers who . . . had been adrift for over two months. The villagers hurriedly summoned two women, who had themselves drifted to Samar some time before, in the hope that they would be able to communicate with the strangers. At the sight of one of these women, several of the castaways, who recognized her as a relative, burst into tears. By the time the parish priest arrived at the spot, communication between the Filipinos and the band of Carolinians was well under way, with the two women serving as interpreters.

Hezel continues that the 'castaways' were able, by placing pebbles on the beach, to tell of eighty-seven islands that they had visited, and provided the names and sailing times between them. They also had with them when they landed a piece of iron and were very keen to collect some more.

This second account, more than 200 years prior to the first is, at least in its secondary reporting, apparently consistent in interpreting these 'strange' people on 'strange' boats arriving by accident through drifting from their prescribed

course; the group arriving at Samar was supposed to have been sailing between Lamotrek and Fais in the Caroline Islands. But each of the groups had elements that were exotic to the Carolines (one had in their party a Filipino man, the other had a piece of iron), both crossing and re-crossing parameters of regional definition.

A third and final example from the Philippines is quite different from those reported above and is derived from the report of Fedor Jagor; whilst travelling through the Philippines in 1859, he states (Jagor 1875, quoted in Lessa 1962: 334):

> In Guiuan [Guinan] I was visited by some Mikronesians [*sic*], who for the last fourteen days had been engaged at Sulangan on the small neck of land south-east from Guiuan, in diving for pearl mussels (mother-of-pearl), having undertaken the dangerous journey for the express purpose.

William Lessa (1962) in collecting this information has no problem with its reliability and accepts that the shell collectors were from Woleai in the Caroline Islands. And, indeed, why should we have a problem with accepting that Caroline Islanders were able to make many round trips of over 1000 kilometres each way in locally built outrigger vessels for the express purpose of collecting a resource not available nearby? Other resources to exploit might have included iron, but the Caroline Islanders, like the communities of the other Micronesian island groups, were users of shell over all other raw materials for portable tools until the general availability of iron, for most places not beginning until the twentieth century. Specific shell types would be intimately known, and the variety of colour, pattern and physical properties would be recognized by the majority of the community. Certainly, beyond apparently functional items, such as adzes and fishing lures, shell beads and whole half-bivalves were often valued as a type of money, strung together; and as I will discuss in detail in chapter 6, they often formed part of the cargo in inter-island exchange. But as we will see in chapter 7, in regard to the widespread distribution of particular adze types, fishing lures manufactured for trolling behind sailing craft can also have need of special raw materials that require contacts over large swathes of seascape. Robert Gillett (1987), in his study of tuna fishing on Satawal in the central Caroline Islands, found that pearl shell for fashioning lures was imported both from Chuuk Lagoon, which produced shell particularly prized for its rainbow-like colouring, and from much further asea in New Guinea, once again, like the Philippines, well beyond the supposed bounds of Micronesia.

The historical accounts, which I will review further in detail below, when read in relation to the later accounts of scientists and ethnographers, provide an understanding of the islands of Micronesia as situated within a seascape; although we should be wary of relative terms such as 'strangeness' or 'dangerous' that are used, as in some of the passages reviewed above, in outsider accounts of voyaging and encounter. Seascapes are knowable places, in the same way that landscapes have to be understood also as visionscapes, soundscapes,

touchscapes, smellscapes (Tilley 1999) and even tastescapes. A person approaching the sea from the land in a strong onshore breeze can attest to the taste of bitter salt that is driven by the wind into the mouth and drying the throat. Seascapes are further nuanced and utterly knowable places for those that exist in them on a quotidian basis. Modern ethnography allied to historical reports provides an abundance of information that, through senses, lore, observation, technology, skill, mythology and myriad other ways, the ocean of the Micronesians was, and in some cases still is, an utterly knowable place in its form and texture and its link with the guiding heavens connecting the strange place that is always beyond the knowable world, the horizon, where spirits of below meet the spirits of above (Goodenough 1986). This is a seascape traversed by known seaways; a place of paths that linked communities.

Like landscapes, seascapes are not without their dangers and the large amount of recorded ritual relating to seafaring in the Micronesian sea of islands is as much to do with safe return as with successful, in an economic sense, trading or fishing expeditions. Journeys were taken when it was perceived safe to do so. They were not merely a necessity for the collection and exchange of mundane goods, but were instead part and parcel of communities who did not always perceive their boundaries as being at the edge of the reef, although at times, as we shall see in relation to the people of Pohnpei (chapter 7), they may have found it unnecessary to travel as people came to them. At other times, for example when the Spanish settled Guam in the late seventeenth century, islanders broke off the connections that had existed along well-traversed seaways.

Although occurring 250 years after the first European encounters with the people in the region now known as Micronesia, the voyages of Captain James Cook are often assumed to be the major turning point in Pacific history, the one that led to the colonial era which lasted up until the post-Second World War period (Rainbird 2001b). Scholarship concerning the Cook voyages has given apparent precedence to the map that was created from the information provided by the Raiatean navigator-priest Tupaia during the Second Voyage's visit to Tahiti as reported by Johann Forster (1996). Tupaia named eighty-four islands of which Tahiti was at the centre. The actual identity of these islands has been argued over ever since (see discussion in Lewis 1994), but for Forster it was simple to conclude that:

> The foregoing account of the many islands mentioned by Tupaya [Tupaia] is sufficient to prove that the inhabitants of the islands in the South Seas have made very considerable navigations in their slight and weak canoes; navigations which many Europeans would think impossible to be performed, upon a careful view of the vessels themselves, their riggings, sails, &c. &c. also the provisions of the climate.

Unlike the potentially doubting Europeans, Forster had first-hand experience of the similarities of language and physical type of the people encountered on the second of Cook's first two voyages, which incorporated the two southerly

angles of what later would become known as the Polynesian Triangle. The expeditions visited Aotearoa/New Zealand and Rapa Nui/Easter Island and the islands of the Equatorial zone of Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Marquesas in the east and the 'Friendly Islands' of Tonga in the west. The importance for Pacific scholarship that has been placed on this account and the chart that was prepared for Forster is quite different from the little-commented-upon chart constructed by Father Paul Klein of the eighty-seven islands identified by the Carolinian 'castaways' on Samar in 1696. Why are these received differently? The Spanish certainly appear to have become excited in regard to the prospect of many more souls to be saved on these previously unknown islands and an official inquiry found evidence of earlier 'castaway' groups that show, 'if the reports are to believed, the traffic between the Palaos [as the Carolines were then known] and the Philippines was heavy. In the year 1664 alone, as many as thirty canoes reportedly drifted to the Philippines' (Hezel 1983: 40).

Klein's chart was reproduced many times, but as a measure of indigenous interaction prior to prolonged European contact with the region it has held little sway compared with the chart derived from the Cook voyage. Perhaps this reflects the fact that the area was generally a Spanish colonial concern until the nineteenth century. Even as late as the 1920s the anthropologist James Frazer (1924: 27) was able to say of Micronesia that 'on the whole this great archipelago has been more neglected [in scholarship] and is less known than any other in the Pacific'.

Another concern may have been the difficulty in grouping together these peoples who clearly were aware of each other's presence, and travelled beyond the putative region of Micronesia, but who also had distinctive differences in material expression and linguistics. Such problems are perhaps suggested in the musings of the French 'scientists' Grégoire Louis Domeny de Rienzi and Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville. Although Dumont d'Urville is regarded as the founder of the boundaries of the division of the Pacific into three areas, or four if one includes the islands of South-East Asia and the appellation Malaysia, he had great arguments with his contemporary Domeny de Rienzi (see 1837). It was Domeny de Rienzi who coined the term Micronesia, a year ahead of Dumont d'Urville's tripartite division that used the term Melanesia for the first time, and was published in 1832.

Nicholas Thomas (1989; 1997) has highlighted the racist distinctions made in these divisions of the Pacific, at least in relation to Melanesia and Polynesia. Micronesia fits less comfortably into such arguments and this is probably due, at least in part, to what Serge Tcherkézoff (2001) has identified as a continuation of a fifteenth-century dualism separating dark skin/fair skin people. This has been identified as continuing today in Pacific scholarship (Terrell, Kelly and Rainbird 2001), but can be seen in other works such as Forster's significant work already mentioned above. In this, Forster links those people he had encountered in Polynesia as related to the Caroline Islanders and thus concludes

that the Polynesians (although I use this term anachronistically in this case) were descendants of the Carolinians and quite distinct from the 'black' people that he had encountered in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and New Caledonia. Both the latter groups are today conventionally understood as part of Melanesia, that is, the 'Black islands'. Forster (1996 [1778]: 341) states in relation to the forming of the two distinct types of Pacific people that:

> both would afterwards in the new climate preserve in some measure the hue and complexion they brought from the country which they left last: upon these premises we ventured to suppose that the two races of men in the South Sea arrived there by different routs [*sic*], and were descended from two different sets of men. [T]he five nations of [Tahiti/Society Islands, New Zealand/Aotearoa, Easter Island/Rapa Nui, Tonga, and the Marquesas] seem to come from Northward and by the Caroline-islands, Ladrones [Marianas], the Manilla [Philippines] and the island of Borneo, to have descended from the Malays: whereas on the contrary, the black race of men seems to have sprung from the people that originally inhabited the Moluccas, and on the approach of the Malay tribes withdrew into the interior parts of their isles and countries.

Forster was writing only a few decades prior to the advent of racial science that from the beginning of the nineteenth century attempted to systematize the attributes relating to the concept of divisions of people by race, and which eventually became linked to theories of social evolution through biology and social Darwinism (see, e.g., Stepan 1982). The intellectual milieu of Western discourse at this time was one in which the fusion of people from different places, evident in the population of Micronesia, provided a stumbling block in attempts to provide a definition of an actual Micronesian 'type' or 'race' as was desired. Consider these attempts for example:

> We sometimes speak of the numerous colonies which have proceeded from Great Britain as being one people, inasmuch as they have issued from a single source; and in this sense we may apply the term to the tribes of Polynesia. We also speak of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire – at least after two or three centuries of conquest – as forming one people, inasmuch as the various nations and tribes to which they belonged had been cemented and fused together, by the general ascendancy and intermixture of one dominant race, – and in this sense alone the term is applicable to the natives of the Micronesian islands. Hence it will be seen that no general description can be given of the latter, which shall be every where equally correct, and which will not require many allowances and exceptions.
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> The Micronesians, as a people, do not differ greatly in complexion from their neighbours of Polynesia. Their colour varies from a light yellow, in some of the groups, particularly the western, to a reddish brown, which we find more common in the east and south-east. The features are usually high and bold, – the nose straight or aquiline, the cheek-bones projecting, the chin rounded and prominent. The nose is commonly widened at the lower part, as in the Polynesian race, but this is not a universal trait. The hair, which is black, is in some straight, in others curly. The beard is usually scanty, though among

the darker tribes it is more abundant, and these have often whiskers and mustachios. In stature, the natives most often fall below than exceed the middle height, and they are naturally slender. (Hale 1968 [1846]: 71)

[For the Gilbertese] [p]roofs are abundant that the inhabitants of these islands belong to the same race as those of the Hawaiian, Marquesan, Tahitian and Samoan Islands. In appearance, they most strikingly resemble Hawaiians. There is evidently a mixture of people coming from different parts of Polynesia. Some strikingly resemble the Samoans, or Navigator Islanders. Not only does their appearance, cast of countenance, form of body, color of hair, eyes, teeth, and other characteristics indicate their origin to be the same, but also their language and many of their customs and practices. (Damon 1861: 6–7)

[The Carolines population is] an odd medley of the black, brown, and yellow races. It is a curious fact that, although Yap lies some 1500 miles nearer India and the Malay archipelago than Ponape [Pohnpei], the westernmost islands are much the darker and their language the more strange and barbarous. The great stream of Polynesian migration has passed further southward. Yet the dialect of Ulithi to the north of Yap, like that of the central Carolines, has a considerable Polynesian infiltration. These jagged or indented areas of speech are a peculiar puzzle to the philologist, showing a very irregular distribution of race-mixture. (Christian 1899a: 105)

It will be understood from their geographical position that mixture of races is inevitable in these islands. For instance, two different types may be distinguished in the natives of Truk [Chuuk]. On Yap and Palau, we notice that some of the natives have frizzy hair. We may possibly regard these facts as testifying to the mixture of races. (Matsumura 1918: 12–13)

All of these authors were writing on the basis of some direct experience of travelling and observing Micronesians first hand, but they all also relied on the writings of others for comparisons with places they had not visited, and the biases exhibited are not only their own but represent a long-established tradition of grouping and labelling people on the basis of similarity and difference. Of these authors only Horatio Hale and Akira Matsumura may be considered ethnographers proper of their quite different times, but the missionary Reverend Samuel Damon and the traveller F.W. Christian both adopt the common language for biological ascription prevalent at the time. In all cases, however, the complexity of the situations that they encountered did not allow for simple labelling.

The comment of Damon regarding the Gilbert Islanders (the I-Kiribati of the present Republic of Kiribati) having close affinities with Hawaiians is perhaps illustrative of a phenomenon exhibited by many travellers in their attempts to describe people and perhaps ought to be taken as a warning to the unwary. Damon was the pastor of the Bethel Church in Hawaii and had never previously visited Micronesia. The account of his trip on the missionary ship the *Morning Star* from which the quotation is taken makes it clear that the people of the Gilbert Islands were the first he made acquaintance with in Micronesia.

Thus, given his knowledge of Hawaii and Hawaiians, he is best able to make comparisons between these two groups. This is important, as the itinerary of voyaging requires consideration when assessing the various claims of people in describing the inhabitants of individual islands because it is likely that the comparison, although not always made explicit, will be with the people of the island previously visited. It has been argued in relation to this that the black/fair race divide of the South Sea made by Forster was particularly strong as the Melanesian New Hebrides (Vanuatu) was encountered by him for the first time directly after a stay in Tahiti (Jolly 1992; Douglas 1999).

Christian's reliance on linguistic variation as an indicator of complexity within the region is a continuation of a link between philology and race beginning in the eighteenth century with the discovery of the Indo-European family of languages (Ashcroft 2001). In our current understanding this would mean at least seven non-mutually intelligible language or dialect groupings in the region at the time of Magellan. Even within these there could be some difficulty in communication between different island communities, and within individual island communities there were also rank-accessed special ritual languages such as the *itang* of Chuuk. At another level however there are two main subgroupings (see Fig. 1.2) of the language family of Austronesian which covers the whole region. Thus, language could be used to separate or encompass at a variety of levels and with as much success in reality as physical characteristics. Of course, other languages such as Spanish, Tagalog, Japanese, German, English and American English all have had, or still do have, a presence in the islands, starting from at least the sixteenth century onwards according to historical reports. In the same way that today English has been incorporated as a second language, one of colonial government, while the local language has been maintained in many cases for the home and 'traditional' politics, neighbouring languages of the communities that were in regular contact with each other could also be learnt. 'Scientists' attempting to record the essential elements of a society rarely commented upon such occurrences, and this neglect in recording may also in part be a further consequence of treating individual islands as laboratories.

Fusion and fluidity do not in essence or as a consequence indicate sameness. In considering the contemporary consequences of globalization through multinational corporations and the forging of greater alliances between nation-states, many commentators have found that rather than the feared consequences realized in homogenization and the consequent single 'global village', such broader groupings have allowed different community identities to emerge as they imagine themselves differently when released from the confining dictates and boundaries of the nation-state (Bauman 1998; cf. Anderson 1991). It is possible, I believe, to envisage the history of Micronesia in a similar way, where social boundaries are maintained within a milieu of communication and contact across seaways and across putative language groupings.

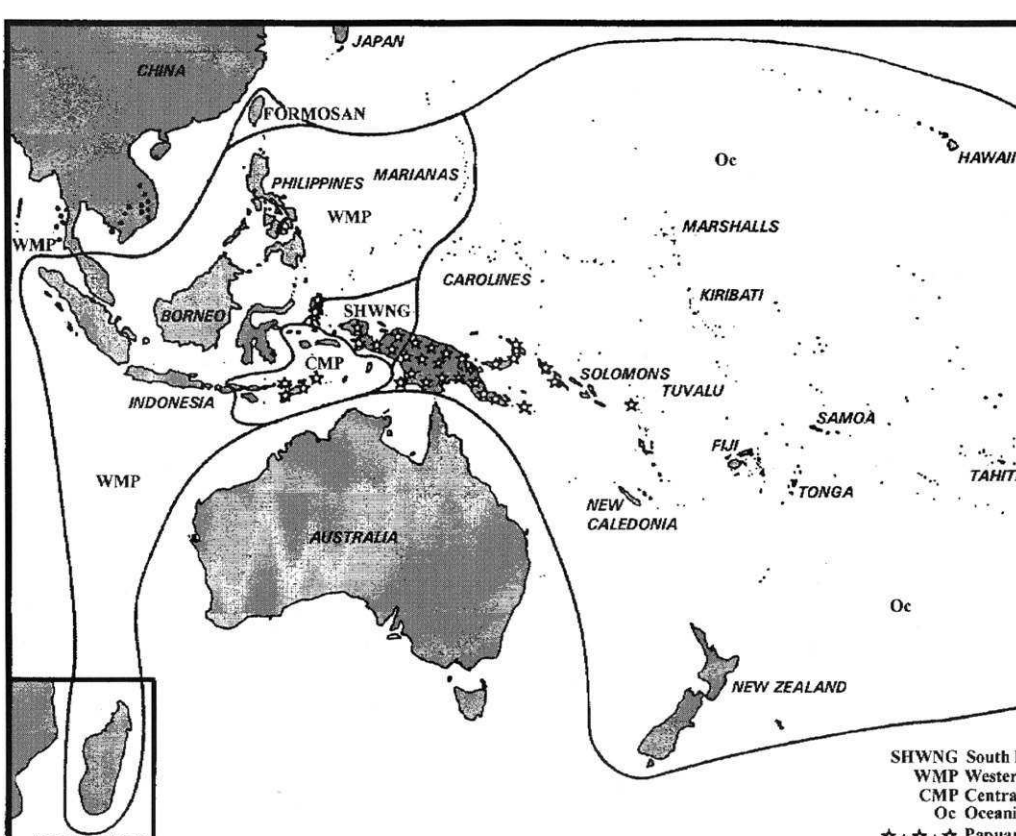

Fig. 1.2 The geographic range and high-order sub-groups of the Austronesian language g
The solid lines indicating certain distributions should not be confused with the
nation-states or supposed 'culture groups'.