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P A R T
O N E

THE PACIFIC TO 1941

CHAPTER

1

CONTENDING APPROACHES

Like eunuchs, they grace the shoreline of Waikiki. Coconut palms without coconuts. Symbols of lost identities. Exotic images as a backdrop for semi-naked tourists lounging on the beach.

Coconut palms have grown at Waikiki since the first Hawaiians arrived in their magnificent canoes some two thousand years ago . . . Coconut palms were much valued then—for the many different uses of their roots, trunks, and leaves, but mainly for their nuts, which provided a reliable source of sustenance. Coconut flesh was scraped and its cream used for cooking; coconut juice was refreshing and nourishing—ideal for a tropical climate. But all that has changed forever, at least at Waikiki, where tourists now reign. There, coconut palms are merely decorative, essential to complete the picture of Paradise—a tropical world of pleasure and personal happiness. To maintain this illusion, coconuts are removed so that dreams of Eden may remain intact.

Vilsoni Hereniko¹

What we think about the past of Samoa (and its future) is determined by what we are.

Albert Wendt²

POINTS OF VIEW

In every community there are diverse points of view on past events and experiences. Clearly there can be no single, seamless history of the many peoples who inhabit the Pacific Islands. *The Cambridge History* acknowledges the diversity of Pacific voices and the particularity of their experiences, while narrating common patterns and intersections with global events. This is 'a' history, not the only possible construction of events affecting Islanders. A composite history told through indigenous genres would consist of oral accounts, related in many languages and taking widely varying forms. Some would explain the origins of gods, humans, plants and animals; others would recount great voyages or the rivalries and conquests of great chiefs. Chanted, spoken, or sung, the narratives might not relate events in chronological order. Some

¹ 'Representations of Cultural Identities', in Howe, Kiste and Lal, *Tides of History*.

² 'Guardians and Wards', 113.

would take the form of genealogies, and crucial details might vary with the teller—and with each audience. Europeans and Americans would figure in accounts of recent times, but the Islanders' versions of events would likely hold a severely critical mirror to those Western histories which celebrate 'discovery' and the benefits of colonisation.

This volume does not attempt to compile indigenous histories in their native formats. The authors have been trained in Western universities, in history and anthropology, and the text follows many conventions of the Western narrative form which we call 'history'. Excepting direct quotations, the volume is written in a single language. Without attempting to be all-inclusive, the chapters by and large centre on events, though not always the events which Western observers considered significant. The accounts are roughly in chronological order, but this volume differs from conventional published histories in several respects. Most obviously, we focus on the experiences of peoples who did not produce written accounts before the coming of Europeans. This is but one reason why narrating Islanders' 'history' is controversial today. Some indigenous Pacific leaders and intellectuals argue that foreign scholars have neither the right nor the competence to write objectively about cultural 'others'. Anti-colonial political critiques and post-modernist moves to 'deconstruct' and 'decentre' received discourse have also undermined the implicit authority of scholarly writing. The reflexive challenge has been so effective that in some social sciences the impersonal, un-selfconscious narrator is becoming extinct.

Vilsoni Hereniko's epigram powerfully conveys the host of cultural, ethical and epistemological issues raised by 'history'. Lawyers and film makers as well as academics have documented the 'Rashomon effect' in accounts of lived experience: that witnesses to the same event produce radically different testimonies, and it may be impossible to validate one version while rejecting others. The post-colonial Pacific is marginal to the economic and strategic concerns of the major industrial nations. In this context of unequal power, whose version of history should be the authoritative text, and how will Islanders be portrayed—as effective actors or as history's victims? Is it possible to avoid constructing a Western 'master narrative' in which Islanders' stories are but a sub-plot? Moreover, is it not presumptuous to speak of 'Islanders' as if Pacific peoples spoke in a single voice? Even within the smallest Pacific societies there are wide disparities of status and authority. How can we include the stories of those who are not dominant in their own societies, such as women, lower-status men, and 'subaltern' minority groups?

In the second epigram, the Samoan historian and novelist Albert Wendt points out that history is always written from a point of view. This statement in his 1965 thesis foreshadowed the now-fashionable dictum that all knowledge is constructed rather than simply uncovered. This insight implies that Pacific history is not a set of unambiguous facts, awaiting scholarly discovery like a buried cache of adzes. Rather, our understandings are influenced by the biases of our sources and are bound up with our own context: class, ethnicity, gender, education, political persuasion and biography all influence an author's perspec-

tive. The recognition of context and point of view applies to ourselves as writers as well as to the observers on whom we depend for information. The implications for analysis are profound. How can we take into account context and still use ethnohistorical information, partial and flawed as it is? Much has been written about the effects of Eurocentrism on descriptions of non-Western cultures. In many situations the preconceptions of Western observers amounted to blindness. To what extent, for example, did European male explorers and traders possess a vocabulary—categories, a ‘cognitive map’—for thinking about women’s position and agency in Island societies?

The notion of ‘interest’ is important to the theory of constructed knowledge. Even without a direct material interest or a conscious political agenda, the argument runs, a writer has a ‘stake’ in pursuing a question and arguing a position. The contributors to this volume aspire to neutrality, if not to the chimera of objectivity, but they do not represent a unified point of view and the reader should be forewarned of disagreements, as well as differences of voice, emphasis and interpretation. Several chapters and sections are authored by Islanders and elsewhere we draw on statements of Islanders from a variety of sources. Using such primary material is one way to include the voices of Islanders who are subaltern (or subordinate) in their own societies.

The product of collaboration between historians and anthropologists, this volume aims to be more than a chronicle. A striking feature of Western scholarship in the Pacific Islands is the dominance of Anthropology since the late nineteenth century. The fieldwork methods and the intellectual concerns of academic Anthropology have also had a profound influence on other social sciences, including Linguistics, Human Geography, Political Science and Archaeology, as well as History. Anthropologists have been concerned with the past since the inception of the discipline, but their gaze tended to focus on cultural wholes and broad patterns of change rather than unpredictable events and outcomes. Until recently, anthropologists emphasised the structured, routine aspects of events such as market transactions and ritual performances. They rediscovered history as a theoretical problem in the 1980s—when historians were extending their own gaze beyond particular sequences of events. This conjunction has resulted in productive collaborations. Blending the insights of their disciplines, the authors of this volume elaborate the contexts and consequences of events in a comparative framework, offering generalisations qualified by the particularities of culture, geography and event.

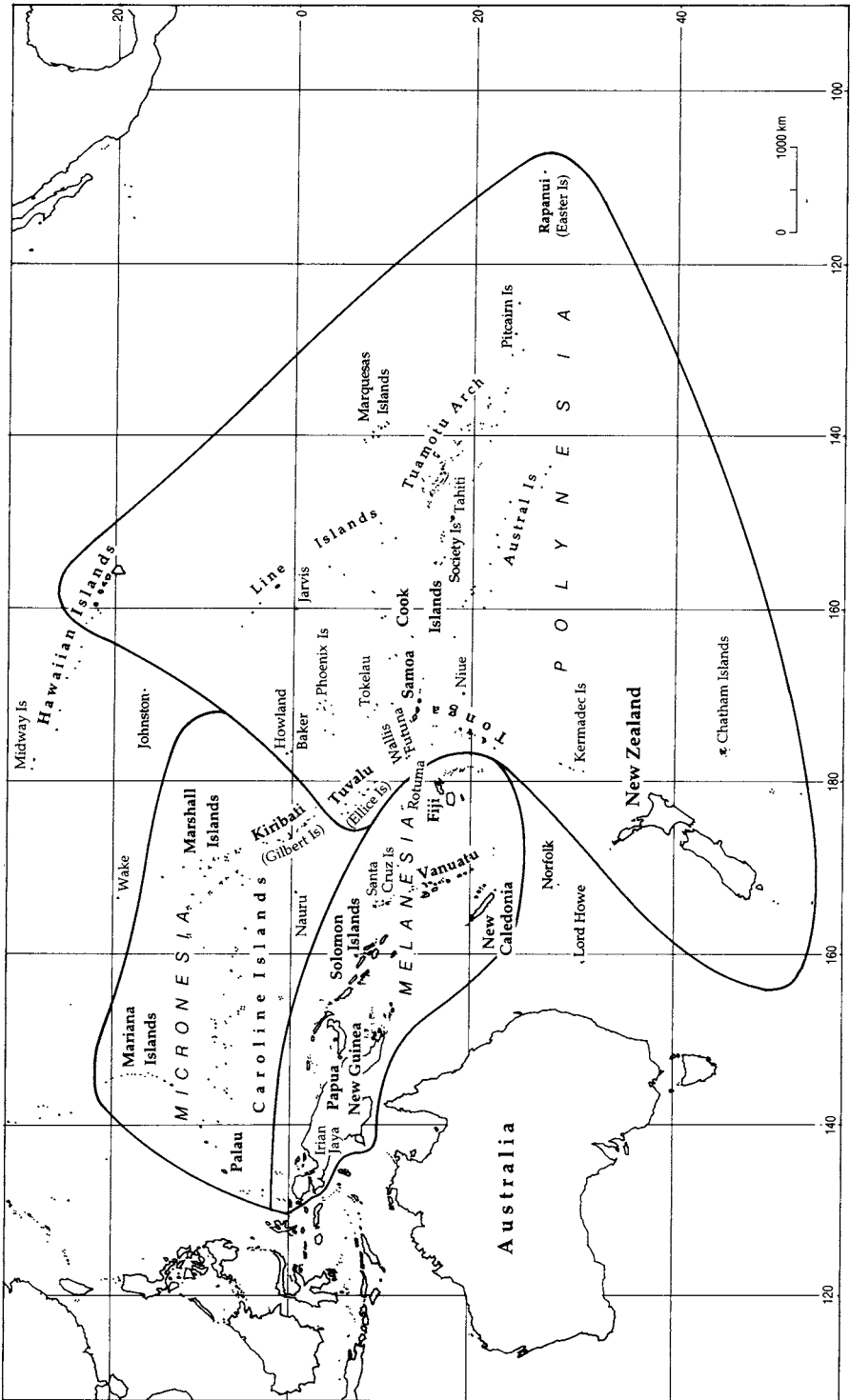
As Hereniko’s reflection suggests, transformations in cultural identity, politics and economics are very much part of Islander histories. Moreover, the apparent ‘insularity’ of Pacific peoples appears less significant than the connections between people. Only recently have scholars begun to give full weight to the complex entanglements that have linked Pacific peoples to one another and, more recently, to Westerners. One of the pervasive effects of Western intervention and colonial administration was the decline of many maritime systems of trade and exchange. By the early twentieth century therefore, when

serious academic research began in the region, inter-island connections were markedly less important than they had been—and have often been ignored as a result. Archaeologists, for example, long interpreted Hawai'i's social and demographic evolution in terms of geographic isolation. A recent iconoclastic theory suggests that voyages to Hawai'i may have been more frequent than previously supposed, and may have originated in several island groups rather than a single jumping-off place, hitherto presumed to be the Marquesas. As this example illustrates, emphasising connectedness rather than isolation has sweeping implications for the way we represent such issues as ethnicity, identity, mobility, and 'Western impact'.

Long before the appearance of square-riggers, Islanders maintained long-distance exchange and marriage relationships with one another. It is difficult to deny, however, that the most sweeping transformations followed colonisation by Western powers. From the eighteenth-century era of exploration to the cataclysm of World War II, Islander histories have been intimately linked to the actions of Westerners. With few exceptions Islanders have been the colonised rather the colonisers, and this unifying experience is perhaps the most compelling justification for a single-volume history of the region. Modern Pacific political leaders have argued that Islanders share not only common interests but, in the broadest sense, a cultural heritage which is in many ways antithetical to that of the industrial, erstwhile colonial nations.

BOUNDARIES

In the first epigram above, Vilsoni Hereniko develops a metaphor for culture change and the profound losses occasioned by Western contact. Hereniko's own background illustrates the complexities of cultural boundaries and affiliations in the modern Pacific. An author and playwright from the island of Rotuma, Hereniko earned a PhD from the University of the South Pacific in Fiji and is now on the faculty of the University of Hawai'i. Rotuma is termed a Polynesian outlier because its language and cultural institutions appear to have closer affinities with the island groups to the east; yet Rotuma belongs politically to the nation of Fiji, which is assigned to Melanesia on geographic and linguistic grounds. Several Fijian cultural institutions are considered characteristic of Polynesia, however, notably hereditary chieftainship and the *kava* ceremony. Depending on the situation, Hereniko can properly identify himself as Rotuman, Polynesian, a Fijian citizen, or as a Pacific intellectual, among other possible affiliations. One theme of this volume is that collective categories and self-ascribed identities have a history of development, and vary according to the demands of the present. Group identities and labels are not primordial or fixed, but arise and change. The categories which foreigners applied to indigenous peoples typically reveal more about outsiders' preconceptions than they do about indigenous models of group identity. Similarly, modern political boundaries are historically created rather than preordained or inevitable.



Map 1 Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia

The most popular paradigm for discussing the Island Pacific has been the regional division of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. Though it has long been a stock feature of scholarly writing, the scheme has a history of its own. The tripartite division is credited to the French explorer Dumont d'Urville, in an address to the Geographical Society of Paris.³ Though defined largely through geography, the division has a basis in linguistic and cultural affinities; hence the notion of 'Polynesian outliers' in Melanesia and Micronesia. D'Urville and his contemporaries saw the three regions as coterminous with human 'races'. Melanesia means 'black islands', and nineteenth-century writers deterministically equated culture and behaviour with perceived racial categories. Polynesians were sensual and hospitable; Melanesians were typically described as savage. The tripartite division both derived from and buttressed prevailing European stereotypes about non-Western peoples.

'Race' and 'culture' were equated in Western scholarly and popular thought until the emergence of anthropology as a coherent discipline in the early twentieth century. The conceptual separation of race and culture was a central tenet in the scholarship of Franz Boas, one of American anthropology's founding figures and the mentor of Margaret Mead and many others who studied Pacific peoples. Boas is credited with articulating anthropology's guiding ethic of 'cultural relativism', the doctrine that all cultures are equally valid as human life-ways, and are not to be judged from the vantage point of Western values. Boas impressed upon his students the necessity of fieldwork, with the goal of producing detailed, ideologically neutral documentation of non-Western cultures. As the intellectual wellspring of American anthropology, Boasian 'historical particularism' had far-reaching influence on Pacific studies generally, particularly in the vehement rejection of racial determinism and the goal of value-free description.

Received categories such as Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia have become increasingly vulnerable. They were in their inception artificial creations by Europeans—labels to make sense of the cultural, linguistic, and phenotypic contrasts and commonalities that they encountered. Attention has been called to their origin in Orientalist and racist European thought; at least one writer has levelled the accusation that modern scholars who employ the tripartite division share the racist presuppositions of their nineteenth-century forebears.⁴ Archaeologists and prehistorians find a distinction between Near Oceania and Remote Oceania more useful for describing the stepwise settlement of the Pacific Islands. There is the immediate sense that regional divisions have little relevance in the current era of transnational diasporas, global economy, and telecommunications, when Auckland is the most Polynesian city in the world and Cook Islanders watch Rambo films with the aid of generator-powered VCRs. Scholars have increasingly asserted that the 'regions' never were discrete entities, and if the labels suggest social, cultural, or racial isolation then they may be more mis-

3 D'Urville, *Voyage de la Corvette L'Astrolabe*, vol. 2, 614–16; Thomas, 'The Force of Ethnology', 30–1.

4 Thomas, 'The Force of Ethnology', 33–4.

leading than illuminating. Most modern scholars agree that cultural boundaries have always been dynamically changing and permeable.

Having noted the historicity and vulnerability of this scheme, however, we concede that the labels are a useful shorthand and we employ them to a limited extent. While acknowledging recent critiques, most of the writers believe that 'Melanesia' and 'Polynesia' retain some utility for describing regional cultural homologies and linguistic relationships. The cultural diversity of Micronesia makes that label useful primarily, again, as a geographic shorthand. However, we emphatically do not impute timeless, fixed, or finite boundaries to these 'regions' and we explicitly reject any equation of 'races' with the geographic labels. Similarly, we reject the premise that some island groups represent an 'authentic' or 'pure' cultural core or essence.

If we envision a historical continuum of human movements and transactions across the Pacific, then demarcating the scope of this volume becomes especially difficult. Many commonly used categories reflect the agendas of those who invented them, but for practicality's sake we must also limit the volume's range of inquiry. Aboriginal Australian peoples, for example, are not conventionally included in the category 'Pacific Islanders' although they are indigenous Pacific peoples. The rationale is that native Australian languages and customs do not appear to be closely related to those of the island Pacific, reflecting the ancient separation of Australia from the Islands. However, Aboriginal peoples in the Torres Strait and northern Australia have long had casual contacts and exchange relationships with 'Melanesians' in New Guinea and outlying islands. Rather than exclude those populations because they seem to fall into a different ethnic pigeonhole, we discuss Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal peoples in the north and east of Australia to the extent that they have interacted with Pacific Islanders. The indigenous peoples of West Irian (Irian Jaya) are also included, despite the paucity of scholarship concerning them. Categorized by scholars as Melanesians, the Irianese fall on the other side of a recent political boundary, and the western half of the island of New Guinea is now a province of Indonesia.

The problem of boundaries also arises in treating the predominantly European nations of the South Pacific. We do not attempt a comprehensive history of modern Australia and New Zealand, but these settler states can hardly be ignored. They have been major players in Islands history and are today the most frequent destinations of emigrating Islanders. Our purview also includes migrant communities such as the Indians of Fiji and the French colonists in New Caledonia, but our focus is the experiences of indigenous Pacific peoples.

HISTORY AND ETHNOHISTORY

A long-standing convention in Western scholarship was that historians studied events while anthropologists studied cultures. To cultural anthropologists, 'ethnohistory' meant the reconstruction of past life-

ways by analysing documentary materials. The major Pacific societies have all been treated extensively in this sense, ethnohistorians often beginning with the era where archaeologists left off. Ethnohistorical reconstruction embodies an obvious paradox: the aim is to formulate inferences—informed guesses—about a society that is no longer extant, using materials from the period of European contact. Nearly all the sources are written by foreigners. Participant observation and interviewing—the anthropologist's stock-in-trade—are impossible, and the mundane features of daily life are usually the most elusive details to establish.

To the academic audience, the significance of ethnohistorical work usually hinges on its thoroughness, and originality is measured by the extent to which the scholars ferret out unpublished sources and make sense of fragmentary records. Marshall Sahlins's researches on early Hawai'i and Fiji set a standard for the comprehensive and innovative use of archival sources. Both history and ethnohistory are document-oriented: published explorers' accounts, unpublished correspondence, ships' logs, and early missionary reports are the ethnohistorian's starting-point. With luck, the researcher may find archival records which lend depth and quantitative substance to the analysis: census reports, land deeds, court testimony, wills, tax rolls, petitions and the like often throw light on local conditions and daily life. Such materials are the basis for many statements in this volume, particularly for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Anthropologists working with ethnohistorical sources face much the same dilemmas as historians. Travellers' reports are, at best, highly selective. Early visitors to the Pacific were following their own agendas—exploration, trade and missionisation, usually in that order—and these purposes influenced what they reported and the value judgements they made. Ideally, the observer's bias should be ascertained and taken into account, but there are no hard-and-fast rules for evaluating sources. The decision whether and how to use a particular source involves judgement by the researcher, assisted by received wisdom about the reliability of particular observers and by certain common-sense criteria. Was the writer present for a day, a week, or several months? Did he or she disembark, or view the island from shipboard? Are the comments based on personal observation, or on interviews with a castaway or other resident foreigner? Are specific statements corroborated by other writers? And when one finds apparent corroboration, how can we determine whether the author simply plagiarised another writer's work? Needless to say, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century standards of citation and attribution were less rigorous than today's.

Early visitors to the Islands did not think in anthropological categories, and important details about kinship, politics and other cultural matters are typically embedded in reports on other matters. Gender relations and women's status are particularly difficult to reconstruct. European explorers and traders—all men—came from a highly gender-stratified, male-dominant society. In the social classes which produced literate observers during the period of exploration, women were largely

relegated to domestic duties while men dominated the public domain. This public/domestic separation is not universal in human societies, but the division with its implicit gender hierarchy prevailed among middle- and upper-class Europeans and Americans at the time. Western naval officers and merchants expected to conduct most of their dealings with their Islander counterparts, persons of authority; commonly this meant male chiefs and local leaders. Local women were often seen merely as potential sexual release for the crew. We cannot know how Hawaiian women construed their first sexual encounters with Captain Cook's crew, but the journals of the Third Voyage show clearly how the men interpreted their advances. A surgeon's mate gleefully described giving one nail for a woman's company for the night. The women may well have understood such gifts as love tokens from high-status visitors, but the seamen defined the exchange as prostitution.

Women in Island societies seldom fulfilled the European preconceptions of passivity, devaluation and dependency. But because male visitors interacted primarily with Island men, men's activities are relatively well documented while detailed information on women's lives scarcely exists. Marxist feminist scholars argue, following Friedrich Engels, that sexual asymmetry and male dominance are the artefacts of capitalism and state formation. However, most writers on gender in the Pacific believe that a male bias in public authority was not solely a European introduction, but was and is endogenous to many cultures. Particularly in Polynesia, women were significantly more autonomous, assertive, and culturally valued than women in the West. Even so, it would be difficult to argue that Pacific societies were gender-egalitarian before the coming of foreigners.

Historians and anthropologists have increasingly incorporated into their work the insight that Europeans approached the Pacific with a complex set of preconceptions—a 'vision', an interpretive paradigm, which shaped their interactions with Islanders. The state-sponsored explorers were particularly concerned to identify authorities with whom they could negotiate, and their reports focus in part on politics and governmental forms. Even these descriptions differed in emphasis, depending on national interest. 'Social organization to the Englishman was centered on kingship', Denning comments; 'for the American and Frenchman it was seen in terms of democratic republicanism.'⁵

A path-breaking work was Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768–1850* (London, 1960). An art historian, Smith was far ahead of his time in addressing how Europeans constructed knowledge about indigenous societies during the period of exploration and colonisation. He analysed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century graphic representations of non-Western peoples, to reveal pervasive European constructs such as the 'noble savage'. Smith did not neglect diversity and change in elite European thought, showing how Edenic portrayals gave way in the early nineteenth century to less optimistic images of wildness, savagery and barbarism. He characterised the contending

5 Denning, 'Ethnohistory in Polynesia', 37.