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## Cultural Divisions and Island Environments since the Time of Dumont d'Urville

PAUL D'ARCY

THERE WAS MOUNTING DISSATISFACTION WITH THE TRIPARTITE CLASSIFICATION OF Pacific Islanders as Melanesians, Micronesians or Polynesians by the 1980s, although no clear alternative had emerged. This sentiment was voiced by scholars in a number of disciplines involved in the study of Pacific cultures.<sup>1</sup> The 19th-century French explorer J.-S.-C. Dumont d'Urville synthesised the terms Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Dumont d'Urville's association of four cultural regions (including Malaysia) with two racial types had a profound influence on subsequent scholarship, and was a major factor behind recent academic criticisms of the classification. Attempts to explain or refute the association of culture and race in the Pacific have also diverted attention away from other explanations of cultural and historical patterns in Oceania.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the general preoccupation with race and culture, combined with consideration of environmental influences that is either too narrowly focused or too generalised, has resulted in a failure to explore fully how environmental and cultural influences have interacted to shape Oceania's cultures and history.

Those seeking to understand the creation and maintenance of cultures need to examine both cultural and environmental influences, as well as to focus on cultures as dynamic and interacting entities. It is argued that communities were highly localised in their affinities and expansive in their interactions. Islanders therefore embraced multiple cultural affinities, both local and regional. Cultures are best understood as components of often overlapping regions of regular interaction that were smaller than the cultural groupings devised by Dumont d'Urville. There are good reasons for adopting a more detailed focus when examining regions of regular interaction. Interaction with other communities meant that change could be relatively rapid, and changes to one community's circumstances could have regional implications. Attention must be paid to the dynamics of specific communities in particular years or decades as well as longer-term patterns to identify broader groupings.

The most sustained attack on Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia as cultural entities took place between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s. The two major criticisms levelled against these categories were that the cultural diversity within

<sup>1</sup> E.g., see Epli Hau'ofa, 'Anthropology and Pacific Islanders', *Oceania*, 45 (1975), 283–9; Bronwen Douglas, 'Rank, power, authority: a reassessment of traditional leadership in South Pacific societies', *Journal of Pacific History*, 14 (1979), 2–27; Matthew Spriggs, 'The Lapita cultural complex: origins, distribution, contemporaries, and successors', *Journal of Pacific History*, 19 (1984), 202–23; and Nicholas Thomas, 'The force of ethnology: origins and significance of the Melanesia/Polynesia division', *Current Anthropology*, 30 (1989), 27–41.

<sup>2</sup> The French term 'Oceania' is used here to designate all the Pacific Islands.

each weakened their efficacy as cultural units, and that archaeological, linguistic and genetic evidence had now given intellectual substance to contemporary ideological objections to the association of culture with race and physical appearance. Nicholas Thomas went as far as to imply that modern scholars who persisted with the old division must share the racist assumptions of its initial advocate.<sup>3</sup> The division is still used today, however, over a decade after Thomas called for it to be overturned. Most academics continue to specialise in one or other region. One suspects the main reasons for this continued use are not racist assumptions, but rather the fact that no viable alternative has emerged, and so they continue to be useful general categories for the broad cultural similarities noted across the regions they encompass.<sup>4</sup>

### *Developing Dissatisfaction 1832–1979*

Dumont d'Urville divided Oceania into geographical regions on the basis of their inhabitants' cultural and racial characteristics. Two races were identified, with darker-skinned Melanesians being defined as racially distinct from a lighter race made up of Polynesians, Micronesians and Malaysians. Melanesia stretched from Fiji to New Guinea and also included Australia. Polynesia consisted of all the islands east of a line running along the west coast of New Zealand to Fiji and up to the Hawaiian chain. The only place where another race existed in close proximity was Melanesian Fiji, a few days' sail northwest of Tonga. Micronesia consisted of all the islands from Palau, Yap and the Mariana Islands in the west across to Kiribati in the east. Its cultural borders were all clearly demarcated by large sea gaps, although his Micronesia extended much further north than the current Micronesian political entities and incorporated islands close to Japan. Dumont d'Urville's fourth grouping incorporated much of Island Southeast Asia and was labelled Malaysia. Its only close Oceanic neighbours were the peoples of western New Guinea.<sup>5</sup>

Although Dumont d'Urville acknowledged a degree of variation within each region, he asserted that each was distinguished from the others by the distinct physical and cultural characteristics of its inhabitants. Racial categories were believed to determine cultural characteristics. Polynesians not only looked more appealing to Europeans than the dark-skinned Melanesians, they were also morally superior and had more advanced political institutions, laws and forms of organised religion. Micronesians fell somewhere in between the Melanesians and Polynesians, although they were closer to the latter than the former. Melanesians were clearly seen as the least civilised of the three. Their system of government was claimed to

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, 'The force of ethnology', 33–4.

<sup>4</sup> The most concise overview of cultural traits in the three areas is found in Ian Campbell, *A History of the Pacific Islands* (Christchurch 1989), 13–27.

<sup>5</sup> Malaysia will not be discussed here as it is now generally considered not to be part of Oceania. A recent study that explores some of the linkages between Southeast Asia and Oceania is Peter Bellwood, James Fox, and Darrell Tryon (eds), *The Austronesians: historical and comparative perspectives* (Canberra 1995).

consist of fragile tribal groupings that were often presided over by petty despots.<sup>6</sup> All the races of Oceania were considered inferior to Europeans. Even the admired Polynesians fell well short of the European ideal, and were admonished for being slaves to religious superstition.<sup>7</sup>

This scheme did not change European attitudes, but was rather the most coherent manifestation at the time of existing attitudes towards, and experience of, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific.<sup>8</sup> For the remainder of the 19th century, scholarship on Oceania reflected the racial divisions outlined by Dumont d'Urville. In 1846, for example, Horatio Hale combined his observation of the distribution of physical features and cultural traits with indigenous traditions and linguistic evidence he had collected during the United States' Naval Expedition to the Pacific under Commodore Wilkes to suggest that Polynesians had derived from Maluku in Island Southeast Asia. He hypothesised that settlers from Maluku had come to Fiji, from where they had been driven to Samoa and Tonga by Melanesians. The refugees had then settled East Polynesia from the two most westerly Polynesian island groups of Tonga and Samoa. Other contemporaries also cited linguistic similarities to suggest a link between Polynesian and Malaysian peoples.<sup>9</sup>

In the latter part of the 19th century, Pacific cultural divisions and differences in physical appearance were primarily explained as the result of the diffusion of waves of races to their present locations. The two most prominent advocates of this idea were the ethnologists S. Percy Smith and Abraham Fornander.<sup>10</sup> Both believed Polynesians were a race of people from Eurasia who had moved through South Asia to Island Southeast Asia, before being driven into the Pacific by the eastward advance of peoples from the Indian subcontinent. The Polynesians had sailed to Fiji, and had spread out from there to colonise the rest of Polynesia. Smith acknowledged a degree of interaction between Polynesians and Melanesians, but cast Polynesians more as conquerors than equals in their dealings with Melanesians.<sup>11</sup> The superiority of the light-skinned voyagers over darker-skinned locals was also central to anthropologist John Fraser's 1895 conception of the Pacific. Fraser proposed that two dark-skinned races inhabited the islands, and that they were later

<sup>6</sup> J.-S.-C. Dumont d'Urville, 'Sur les îles du Grand Océan', *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, 17 (1832), 1–21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> For the precursors of this scheme see Nicholas Thomas, *Out of Time: history and evolution in anthropological discourse* (Cambridge 1989), 29; John Edward Terrell, Kevin M. Kelly, and Paul Rainbird, 'Foregone conclusions? In search of "Papuan" and "Austronesians"', *Current Anthropology*, 42 (2001), 97–107, 98; Bronwen Douglas's commentary that follows their article, 111–12; and her 'Science and the art of representing "savages": reading "race" in text and image in South Seas voyage literature', *History and Anthropology*, 11 (1999), 157–201.

<sup>9</sup> Horatio Hale, *United States Exploring Expedition. Ethnology and philology* (Ridgewood, NJ 1968, repr. of 1846 original), 117–96, esp. 117–21, 194–6. Terrell *et al.*, in 'Foregone conclusions?', also cite a similar theory in James Cowles Prichard, *The Natural History of Man: comprising inquiries into the modifying influence of physical and moral agencies on the different tribes of the human family* (London 1843), 327. The best starting point for any investigation of European theories of Pacific settlement over time remains the overviews in Peter Bellwood, *Man's Conquest of the Pacific: the prehistory of Southeast Asia and Oceania* (Sydney 1978), 47–9, 300–11.

<sup>10</sup> Abraham Fornander, *An Account of the Polynesian Race*, 2 vols (London 1878–80), 1. Fornander summarises his migration theories at the start of vol. 2, 1–4. S. Percy Smith's theories were outlined in 'Hawaiki: the whence of the Maori: being an introduction to Rarotonga history', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 7 (1898), Pt I, 137–77, Pt II, 185–223, esp. 210–23. See also *idem*, 'The Polynesians in Indonesia', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 30 (1921), 19–27, esp. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, 'The Polynesians in Indonesia', 19, 21.

joined by a superior Caucasoid race whose genius was symbolised in the distinctive stone architecture and monuments of Pohnpei and Rapanui.<sup>12</sup>

Immediately prior to World War I, the linguist William Churchill proposed another theory of Pacific settlement. While still framed in terms of waves of racial diffusion, Churchill's scheme differed from most late-19th century proposals in a crucial respect. He rejected the idea of Polynesians as Aryans from Eurasia in favour of a more immediate homeland in eastern Island Southeast Asia as Hale had also proposed. Relying primarily on linguistic evidence, Churchill proposed that Polynesia was settled by two waves of people who had utilised different routes. The first had come through Melanesia, while the second came via Micronesia. Both waves had spread throughout Polynesia.<sup>13</sup> Similar multiple wave theories followed, most notably those of anthropologists Ralph Linton and E.S.C. Handy.<sup>14</sup> Differences between cultural areas as well as differences within them were explained in terms of different waves of peoples.

The last major diffusionist theory of the inter-war years came from the Maori anthropologist Peter Buck. In his 1938 study *Vikings of the Sunrise*, Buck suggested that Polynesia was settled by two waves of settlers from Island Southeast Asia. Buck thought Polynesians resulted from the mixture of a Caucasian and a Mongoloid population in Asia, which then voyaged to Polynesia via Micronesia. This explained the similarity of Micronesians to Polynesians and the difference between Melanesian and Polynesian physical appearance, material culture and other cultural traits.<sup>15</sup> Diffusionism was also used to explain differences within Melanesia throughout this period. In 1943, for example, W.W. Howells proposed four distinct migrations into Melanesia to explain the four cultural clusters he had identified. Australian Aborigines made up the first wave of settlement. They were then followed by two different dark-skinned races and finally by minor flows of Polynesians and Micronesians.<sup>16</sup>

By the 1940s, scholarly sentiment was turning against diffusionist theories. Earlier in the century, the influential American anthropologist Franz Boas had rejected the association of race and culture implicit in diffusionist logic in favour of a strategy of examining the evolution and workings of particular cultures. His strategy emphasised cultural diversity and allowed for the independent invention of traits as well as diffusion between cultures.<sup>17</sup> Diffusionist ideas continued in the post-war period, but were increasingly relegated to the margins of scholarly debate. This shift in emphasis was heralded in Pacific anthropology by Ralph Piddington's comparison of central Polynesian cultures. He demonstrated that, although most island

<sup>12</sup> John Fraser, 'The Malayo-Polynesian race', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 4 (1895), 241–55, esp. 252–4.

<sup>13</sup> William Churchill, *The Polynesian Wanderings* (Washington, DC 1911), 175–85.

<sup>14</sup> R. Linton, *Field Museum of Natural History, Department of Anthropology, Guide, Part 6: ethnology of Polynesia and Micronesia, Hall F (Ground Floor)* (Chicago 1926), 12–19, and E.S.C. Handy, 'Probable sources of Polynesian culture', *Proceedings of the 3rd Pacific Science Congress*, 2 (1928), 2459–68, and *History and Culture in the Society Islands* (Honolulu 1930), 7–8.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Buck, *The Vikings of the Sunrise* (Christchurch 1954, New Zealand edn of 1938 edn), 20–7, 42–51.

<sup>16</sup> W.W. Howells, 'The racial elements of Melanesia', in C.S. Coon and J.M. Andrews (eds), *Studies in the Anthropology of Oceania and Asia* (Salem 1943), 38–49.

<sup>17</sup> Franz Boas, *Race, Language and Culture* (New York 1940), contains a collection of his published essays from throughout his career. See esp. 243–304.

groups within this region shared broad cultural similarities, they also demonstrated distinctive, individual cultural traits. The implication was that cultures not only evolved, but could also diversify in particular islands from a common cultural base.<sup>18</sup>

Archaeological, linguistic and genetic evidence has added weight to Piddington's line of reasoning in the post-war period. Modern reconstructions of Pacific language relationships and a consistent sequence of radiocarbon dates now strongly suggest Oceania's settlement occurred eastward from Island Southeast Asia. By the mid-1980s, it was generally agreed that non-Austronesian-speaking peoples, whose penetration was limited to New Guinea and perhaps some nearby Melanesian islands, had first settled Oceania. They were followed by Austronesian-speaking peoples (Oceanic subgroup) whose main route from Southeast Asia was along the northern coast of New Guinea into Island Melanesia, and on to Western Polynesia. Colonisation continued from Western Polynesia to central East Polynesia and expanded to the outer reaches of Polynesia; Hawaii, Rapanui and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Another colonisation from Island Melanesia struck north into eastern Micronesia and then west until they met a separate group of Austronesian speakers (Western Malayo-Polynesian subgroup) who had sailed to the western islands of Micronesia directly from Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup>

While the colonisation of the Pacific by Austronesian speakers was rapid in terms of linguistic and human evolution, it still equated to a number of lifetimes or even centuries in any locality or sub-region before the next group of colonists successfully extended the frontier of colonisation. Colonists adjusted to their new surroundings, maintained links with their immediate past homelands, and, in the case of Island Melanesia and western Micronesia, intermingled with existing local cultures in varying degrees. In other words, while sharing common ancestors thousands of years before, the culture of each island evolved slowly over time on that island, after the ancestors had taken generations to work their way across populated and uninhabited sections of the Pacific from its western margins. Samoans were not Samoans when they entered the Pacific; they became Samoans in Samoa, as did Tannese in Tanna, Tahitians in Tahiti and so on.

Despite the mounting evidence against the tripartite cultural classification of the Pacific just outlined, there was little questioning of the terms until the 1970s. In that decade, anthropologist and Melanesian specialist Ann Chowning noted that there was still no generally agreed definition of Melanesia as a cultural or even geographical entity. Indeed, one of the characteristics of Melanesia that most anthropologists agreed on was its incredible cultural diversity. She noted that 'it is literally impossible to make more than a handful of generalisations that will apply to even the majority of the societies of Melanesia, and many of these generalisations do not distinguish Melanesia from Micronesia, eastern Indonesia, or the smaller islands of Polynesia'. All she could say with any certainty about the usefulness of the

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Piddington (ed.), *Essays in Polynesian Ethnology* by R.W. Williamson (Cambridge 1939), esp. Ch. 6, 'Stability and change in Polynesian culture', 201–56.

<sup>19</sup> Archaeological, linguistic and genetic information is combined in a six-article feature on 'The Peopling of the Pacific' in *The Journal of Pacific History*, 19 (1984).

term Melanesia was that it served 'as a geographical region within which some cultural traits occur with greater frequency than they do in some of the surrounding areas'. She did, however, note that some sub-regions within Melanesia, such as the Sepik region of New Guinea, did display a large degree of cultural coherence and distinctiveness.<sup>20</sup>

In 1979, Bronwen Douglas delivered the most effective criticism of the tripartite classification yet, when she challenged a long-standing claim by Marshall Sahlins that Melanesia and Polynesia were distinct cultural entities on the basis of their different political organisation. In 1963, Sahlins had contrasted the relatively fluid 'big-man' system of leadership in Melanesia with the more fixed hierarchy of hereditary chiefdoms in Polynesia. To Sahlins, Polynesian chiefdoms were more stable, more powerful, and better able to coordinate and concentrate resources than Melanesian political systems. He noted that in the Melanesian big-man system leaders achieved influence through demonstrating prowess in socially valued pursuits such as the rearing of pigs, while Polynesian chiefs were obeyed because of the office they held and their genealogy.<sup>21</sup> Douglas suggested that Sahlins was comparing the Polynesian ideology of leadership with the Melanesian practice of leadership, noting that Polynesian leaders still had to prove their competence to retain loyalty, while the sons of big-men had distinct advantages over others in the race for influence. She also produced evidence of the great diversity of organisation within both areas. Others have noted that Micronesia's cultural diversity makes it equally difficult to make generalisations about.<sup>22</sup>

### *Culture versus Environment*

Reactions to Dumont d'Urville's cultural classification also reflect the fact that Pacific specialists were influenced by wider debates within their academic disciplines and among the community at large. Two debates were particularly germane to the recent questioning of cultural classifications of Pacific societies. The first was the degree to which cultures are constantly evolving entities rather than sets of ideas and actions that are relatively resistant to change. The other was the question of the relationship between the natural environment and culture. By the 1980s, anthropologists were increasingly inclined towards instilling a sense of historical process into explanations of the formation and maintenance of cultures, and also to acknowledging that boundaries between cultures were more permeable than had hitherto been allowed. Culture areas were not static, coherent entities, but fluid systems open to influences from beyond their boundaries and also given to internally generated transformations and divisions. This search for a new approach to culture that

<sup>20</sup> Ann Chowning, *An Introduction to the Peoples and Cultures of Melanesia*, 2nd edn (California 1977), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Marshall Sahlins, 'Poor man, rich man, big man, chief: political types in Melanesia and Polynesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 285–303.

<sup>22</sup> Jocelyn Linnekin, 'Contending approaches', in Donald Denoon (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (Cambridge 1997), 9.

focused on change reduced the focus on human interactions with the environment.<sup>23</sup>

The changes being called for in the 1980s were more a matter of changing the emphasis within existing schemes than conceptual revolutions. Raymond Firth, for example, had insisted that the need to allow for variation within cultures was a key issue facing anthropology in the early 1950s.<sup>24</sup> Those who mapped culture traits earlier in the century, such as R. Piddington and E.G. Burrows, acknowledged that particular traits were shared by a number of culture areas, suggesting either common origins or subsequent interaction.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the move towards more dynamic conceptions of culture in the 1980s had precedents among an earlier generation of anthropologists such as Ian Hogbin and Cyril Belshaw, who produced dynamic models of culture change to explain indigenous reactions to European inroads, and Raymond Firth, who detailed the indigenous history of Tikopia.<sup>26</sup>

Dumont d'Urville's classification was not based on the rigid division of racial groups, but acknowledged interaction between them, and that certain cultures had changed over time. He noted the variety of human types within a number of island groups and postulated that this was the result of other lighter-skinned races coming into the Pacific after Melanesians had settled much of Oceania. While these later colonisers expelled or annihilated some of the local Melanesian populations they came into contact with, at other times they lived in peaceful co-existence and even interbred to create mixed races. Fijians, for example, were more civilised than most Melanesians because they lived in close proximity to Tongans and frequently interacted with them.<sup>27</sup>

Sahlins was perhaps the most influential advocate for combining historical processes and structural relationships with elements of culture in anthropology in the 1980s. His 1981 study, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, explored how the structure of Hawaiian society and cosmology altered through the process of culture contact with Europeans.<sup>28</sup> This change in anthropology occurred at a time when historians were emerging from a two-decade period of seeing history as primarily a sequence of events to one more focused on the social, economic, and ideological structures underlying events and actions. Works such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* highlighted the history of those usually neglected in historical narratives, while other historians such as Fernand Braudel demonstrated the influence of more gradual environmental rhythms on the com-

<sup>23</sup> A good overview of recent debates on concepts of culture is Cristoph Brumann, 'Writing for culture: why a successful concept should not be discarded', *Current Anthropology*, 40, Supp. (1999), S1-S27, esp. SS.3-5.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., S5, citing Raymond Firth, 'Contemporary British social anthropology', *American Anthropologist*, 53 (1951), 478.

<sup>25</sup> Piddington, *Polynesian Ethnology*; and E.G. Burrows, 'Western Polynesia: a study in cultural differentiation', *Etnologiska Studier*, 7 (1938), 1-192, and 'Culture-areas in Polynesia', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 49 (1940), 349-63, esp. 349-50, 360-3.

<sup>26</sup> Ian Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization: the effects of European culture on a native community of the Solomon Islands* (London 1939); C.S. Belshaw, *Changing Melanesia: social economics of culture contact* (Melbourne 1954); and Raymond Firth, *The History and Traditions of the Tikopia* (Wellington 1961).

<sup>27</sup> Dumont d'Urville, 'Sur les îles', 13.

<sup>28</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: structure in the early history of the Sandwich Island kingdom* (Ann Arbor 1981).



paratively frenetic chaos of day-to-day human events.<sup>29</sup> The working of underlying structures into the narrative of events is no easy task. What has tended to emerge from attempts to marry structure and event is what Thomas calls 'systemic history' — analysis that is more structure than process.<sup>30</sup> The idea persists that cultures change at the margins as a result of interaction, but the cultural 'core' remains intact, changing very gradually, if at all.<sup>31</sup>

The idea that cultural penetration is usually gradual and incremental rather than rapid and overpowering is a cornerstone of Pacific history. This argument is the counterpoint to the so-called 'Fatal Impact' thesis, which proposed that Pacific Island communities were fragile and inflexible, and they had collapsed under the onslaught of Western diseases, goods and ideas.<sup>32</sup> Thirty years ago, J.W. Davidson, the founder of Pacific History at the Australian National University, argued against this perception when he adopted a similar tone to that now advocated and claimed '[t]he indigenous cultures of the Pacific were like islands whose coastal regions outsiders might penetrate but whose heartlands they could never conquer'.<sup>33</sup> Since then, Pacific scholars have portrayed contact as a transformative process, whereby objects, ideas and individuals move between cultures, mediated by power relations and a process of acculturation for both the visitor and the host.<sup>34</sup> While these assumptions are commonplace in studies of contact between Europeans and Islanders, they have not been utilised as much for studies of interactions between indigenous cultures in the Pacific.

The attention given to culture as a diverse, fluid and porous entity in the 1980s was also part of an ongoing dynamic between environmentally determined and culturally determined explanations of history and society within academia. The preoccupation with race and culture at the heart of Dumont d'Urville's scheme has obscured this vacillating relationship, and relegated environmental explanations in contemporary Pacific scholarship to a secondary role. Sahlins, for example, began his career by arguing that island ecologies were an important influence on Polynesian political organisation. In *Social Stratification in Polynesia*, he proposed that atolls and smaller high islands lacked the resource bases to sustain either a large enough population or to provide enough natural resources to allow or require distribution of surplus beyond immediate subsistence needs. In contrast, large high islands like Tahiti provided ample opportunity to produce substantial surpluses for ambitious chiefs that could be controlled and redistributed to allow and support

<sup>29</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1968). Although published in 1949, the 1966 English edition of Braudel's *The Mediterranean* significantly enhanced its influence. See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II* (2nd edn New York 1966).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Out of Time*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, 'History and anthropology: the state of play', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 217; Brumann, 'Writing for culture', S3–S5.

<sup>32</sup> The name derives from Alan Moorehead's *The Fatal Impact: an account of the invasion of the South Pacific 1767–1840* (London 1968).

<sup>33</sup> J.W. Davidson, 'Lauaki Namalau'ulu Mamoe: a traditionalist in Samoan politics', in J.W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits* (Canberra 1970), 267–99, 267.

<sup>34</sup> Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: discourse on a silent land, Marquesas 1774–1880* (Honolulu 1980).

bureaucracies and coercive forces.<sup>35</sup> A decade later, Irving Goldman produced a cultural theory about the rise of Polynesian chiefly power, arguing that Polynesian social stratification had more to do with competition between chiefs for status than environmental factors.<sup>36</sup> By the 1970s, Sahlins was moving away from his initial materialist roots and focusing on the importance of cultural factors in determining human affairs. This reorientation was perhaps most evident in *Culture and Practical Reason*, published in 1977.<sup>37</sup>

In *Nature, Culture and History*, historian Kerry Howe demonstrates that the vacillation between environmental and cultural explanations of behaviour in Pacific scholarship has a long history, with periods of ascendancy and decline that are measured in decades rather than years. While recent scholarship has focused on European cultural chauvinism towards Pacific Islanders in the 19th century, Howe notes that the dominant sentiment among European intellectuals then was, in fact, the power of nature over humans. He observes that after the Pacific was opened up to large-scale European trade and settlement in the wake of Captain Cook's mapping and documenting of its vast expanse, the dominant themes in European descriptions of the Pacific were paradise lost and the dangers Pacific environments and cultures posed to Europeans. In the eyes of Europeans, Oceania was 'a wretched place, characterised by danger, poor living conditions, sickness, tropical torpor, degeneration, and sometimes death for white men'.<sup>38</sup> While these sentiments were not without cause, as Dumont d'Urville himself found out at Vanikoro, they also reflected the theories of climatic determinism that prevailed for much of the 19th century in European thought. The idea that each race was suited to a particular climate dominated European biology. Northern Europeans were healthy and vigorous because of their temperate climate, but might degenerate into lethargy and moral decay in the tropics as humans were poor adapters and fared badly outside their natural zones.<sup>39</sup> Dumont d'Urville introduced an element of environmental determinism into his thesis when he noted that the progress of Maori towards a more civilised state had been retarded by a harsh climate and lack of suitable food crops.<sup>40</sup>

It was only with technical and medical advances in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that Europeans began to believe that humans could control nature. Rail, steam and telegraph helped Europeans to conquer distance, while quinine allowed them to penetrate malaria-ridden parts of the globe such as Asia and the West Pacific. Advances in military technology enabled European forces to conquer other peoples with relative ease. The importance of culture was revived and linked to the

<sup>35</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (Seattle 1958). Sahlins's intellectual history is outlined in Robert Borofsky (ed.), *Assessing Cultural Anthropology* (New York 1994), 394.

<sup>36</sup> Irving Goldman, *Ancient Polynesian Society* (Chicago 1970).

<sup>37</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago 1978).

<sup>38</sup> K.R. Howe, *Nature, Culture, and History: the knowing of Oceania* (Hawaii 2000), 14–16, 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–40. See also Nancy Stepan, 'Biology and degeneration: races and proper places', in J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman (ed.), *Degeneration: the dark side of progress* (New York 1985), 97–120, 103. This work was first brought to my attention by Evelyn Wareham while I had the pleasure of co-supervising her MA thesis, 'Race and realpolitik: the politics of colonisation in German Samoa', MA thesis, Victoria University (Wellington 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Dumont d'Urville, 'Sur les îles', 8.

idea of progress. By the early 20th century, social environments were considered alongside natural environments as shapers of human affairs.<sup>41</sup> Howe believes that culture is now the main variable used by those seeking to explain human behaviour and history in Oceania.<sup>42</sup>

Exactly how island environments influence cultural boundaries has not been examined in detail, although a number of studies have looked at the interaction between Pacific communities and their environment. Most ecologically oriented anthropological studies of Oceania in the 20th century focus on single communities, in keeping with the discipline's emphasis on in-depth analysis of cultures as complex and distinct entities. More recently, the emphasis has moved towards viewing cultural perceptions of landscapes as cultural orders imposed upon a neutral topography. The physical environment is set apart from the cultural order, and culture rather than nature determines the perception and use of the environment.<sup>43</sup> Studies that extend beyond this localised level tend to be written by geographers who focus on issues of food security and economic development, particularly in the colonial and post-colonial periods.<sup>44</sup> Pacific historians have not been inclined to consider the environment as a significant influence upon cultural and historical patterns. In most books and articles, the environment is relegated to the general introduction, which outlines environmental and cultural structures to set the stage for a particular human drama which then unfolds.

There are signs that the contemporary dominance of research emphasising cultural agency over explanations focused on human relations with the environment may be waning. Broad trends within the disciplines of anthropology and history might be signalling the beginning of another paradigm shift. There has been a revival of interest in human relations with the environment in anthropology, particularly in the 1990s as the profession found itself increasingly embroiled in disputes between the indigenous groups they study and developers. This decade also saw increasing concern for the state of the global environment as symbolised by the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The prominence of environmental issues in the 1990s was reflected in the dramatic growth of sub-disciplines such as environmental history, environmental economics, environmental law and political ecology.<sup>45</sup>

The current ascendancy of cultural explanations in Pacific studies noted by Howe is less apparent in archaeology. In the 1990s, for example, Patrick Kirch returned to a debate about the role of subsistence systems in the development of political power in Polynesia. He argued against an idea, first proposed by Karl

<sup>41</sup> See Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: technology and European imperialism in the nineteenth century* (Oxford 1981); and Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: science, technology, and ideologies of western dominance* (Ithaca 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Howe, *Nature, Culture, and History*, 55–6.

<sup>43</sup> R.R. Rappaport, *Pigs for the Ancestors: ritual in the ecology of a New Guinea society* (New Haven 1968) remains a classic in its field. A good example of the new approach is James F. Weiner, *The Empty Place: poetry, space, and being among the Foi of Papua New Guinea* (Bloomington, IN 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Typical examples include Harold Brookfield with Doreen Hart, *Melanesia: a geographical interpretation of an island world* (London 1974); T.P. Bayliss-Smith and Richard G. Feachem (eds), *Subsistence and Survival: rural ecology in the Pacific* (London 1977); John Overton, *Land and Differentiation in Rural Fiji* (Canberra 1989).

<sup>45</sup> J. Peter Brosius, 'Anthropological engagements with environmentalism', *Current Anthropology*, 40 (1999), 278–9.

Wittfogel in the late 1950s, that linked the concentration and consolidation of political power to the use of large-scale irrigated agriculture. Wittfogel's thesis was that not only did these systems require co-ordinated management from leaders to work effectively, but also that they produced enough surplus food to allow rulers to support military and administrative forces.<sup>46</sup> Timothy Earle followed with a detailed study of the relationship between irrigated systems and the rise of chiefdoms in Hawaii.<sup>47</sup> Kirch proposed an alternative route to the enhancement of chiefly power. He noted that Hawaii also had intensive dry-land agricultural complexes, and that these occurred in areas characterised by expansive and unstable chiefdoms. Kirch proposed that variable rainfall in these areas reduced the reliability of harvests, forcing local chiefs to conquer other lands to compensate.<sup>48</sup> While Kirch was now linking agricultural systems to cultural patterns gleaned from traditional sources, his main focus remained environmental. Earle, on the other hand, was arguing by the late 1990s that military power and the ideology of chiefly power were as important as economic systems in the structure of indigenous power.<sup>49</sup>

Archaeologists who study the distant past beyond the reach of recorded traditions have retained their environmental focus to a much greater extent than most other researchers on Pacific societies. Roger Green, in particular, has advocated the use of Oceania's bio-geographical divisions as units for studying human colonisation.<sup>50</sup> Green emphasises the distinction between Near Oceania and Remote Oceania when describing the settlement of the region. Near Oceania encompasses most of the islands designated as Melanesian by Dumont d'Urville. This area demonstrates a great deal of environmental continuity with Island Southeast Asia in terms of its large 'continental' islands, and small gaps between islands. In contrast, Remote Oceania, broadly coinciding with Micronesia and Polynesia, is characterised by large gaps between islands and archipelagos. It is also notable for its very limited land area relative to ocean area.

The boundary between Near and Remote Oceania lies east and south of the present-day Solomon Islands.<sup>51</sup> It then passes east and north of the Bismarck Archipelago, extending westward off the north coast of New Guinea before turning north to pass east of the Philippines. To the west of this line, humans can usually travel between islands without losing sight of land because of the high mountains on these islands and the relatively narrow sea gaps between them. In contrast, Remote Oceania is made up of islands clustered into archipelagos that are now separated by at least 350 km of ocean. Islands in this region tend to be smaller than

<sup>46</sup> P.V. Kirch, *The Wet and the Dry: irrigation and agricultural intensification in Polynesia* (Chicago 1994); Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven 1957).

<sup>47</sup> Timothy K. Earle, *Economic and Social Organisation of a Complex Chiefdom: Halelea district, Kauai, Hawaii* (Ann Arbor 1978).

<sup>48</sup> Kirch, *The Wet and the Dry*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Timothy K. Earle, *How Chiefs Come to Power: the political economy in prehistory* (Stanford 1997), 8, 140, 184. It is interesting to note that Wittfogel later modified his stance when he realised that the systems of oriental despotism he linked to hydraulic agriculture also occurred in areas lacking irrigation; see Karl Wittfogel, 'Ideas and the power structure', in W.T. de Bary and A.T. Embree (eds), *Approaches to Asian Civilizations* (New York 1964), 96.

<sup>50</sup> R.C. Green, 'Near and Remote Oceania: disestablishing Melanesia in culture history', in Andrew Pawley (ed.), *Man and a Half: essays in Pacific anthropology and ethnobiology in honour of Ralph Bulmer* (Auckland 1991), 493–5.

<sup>51</sup> Excluding the Santa Cruz Group 352 kilometres to the east of the main chain.

in Near Oceania, and their floral and fauna more attenuated. This is because it was populated by an extremely limited Indo-Malayan biota dispersed from the larger islands in Near Oceania. New Caledonia and Aotearoa/New Zealand are exceptions. Both are continental in terms of size and have a diverse resource base, although New Caledonia is nevertheless relatively impoverished compared with islands of a similar size in Near Oceania. Both lie west of the Andesite Line, which is the main geographical division within Remote Oceania. East of this line no andesite lava or continental rocks occur. The only island landforms in this eastern sector are high volcanic islands, raised coral islands and different kinds of atolls. Green demonstrates a close fit between settlement phases and the bio-geographical divisions. Given the current discontent with the conventional cultural divisions, the application of these bio-geographical divisions to later phases of Oceania's history is worthy of consideration.

### *Insular Settings and Culture Formation*

The above debates suggest that successors to Dumont d'Urville's cultural boundaries should, ideally, focus on cultures as dynamic and interacting entities, and give greater consideration to environmental influences. While some environmental criteria do offer a viable alternative to Dumont d'Urville's classification, Green's Near and Remote Oceania scheme is problematic in that it actually creates larger, more culturally diverse classifications when applied to later stages of Oceanic history. There is also great environmental variation between localities within Near and Remote Oceania, particularly in terms of relative isolation and availability of resources. In Remote Oceania, for example, there are only 10 inhabitable islands within an 800-km radius of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, while the same radius centred on the Ha'apai group in the Tongan archipelago encompasses hundreds of islands with 2,400 square km of land.<sup>52</sup>

Resources and relative isolation from neighbouring landmasses are the two most crucial environmental influences on cultural development in insular settings. Island configurations, wind patterns, storms and resource distribution influence interaction between island communities, while seasonal patterns of rainfall and natural hazards such as volcanic activity affect other aspects such as subsistence, settlement patterns and social organisation. The ideal unit for studying cultural formation and evolution is one that knits zones of regular cultural interaction witnessed in historical records with their corresponding regional, environmental zones.<sup>53</sup> A more explicit way to examine the effects of culture and environment on cultural evolution is to compare the cultures and histories of different areas with similar environments. The potential for such a strategy has already been demonstrated in a few, relatively unheralded works in Pacific studies.

<sup>52</sup> G. J. Irwin, 'The colonisation of the Pacific Plate: chronological, navigational and social issues', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 107 (1998), 111–43, 125.

<sup>53</sup> Similar lines of argument are found in Roy F. Allen, *Environment, Subsistence and System: the ecology of small-scale social formations* (Cambridge 1982), 8; Thomas, 'The force of ethnography', 27; and R.C. Green, commentary following Terrell et al., 'Forgone conclusions', 112–13, 112.

William Alkire has explored the advantages of adopting regional perspectives to examine cultural history. He divides the atolls of the Pacific into four groups on the basis of their relative isolation and accessibility to different kinds of resources. He argues that these variables play a significant role in determining cultural patterns.<sup>54</sup> Essentially, Alkire's thesis is that the larger the environmental system, the greater the cultural development, until the population reaches the limit of the environment's carrying capacity. While Sahlins had argued along similar lines in 1962, Alkire's thesis makes more allowance for local variation on the basis of the interplay between environmental features and the cultural configurations in the locality involved.

Alkire's four categories, in ascending order of resource availability, are: isolates, clusters, complexes and fringing reef islands. He demonstrates that environmental constraints and cultural patterns differ significantly between categories. Isolates are atolls and raised coral islands, such as Niue and Kapingamarangi, which are separated from their neighbours by large enough bodies of water to make travel infrequent or impossible. Clusters are small groups of coral islands and atolls in close proximity whose inhabitants can use the resources of the group as a whole. The Tokelau chain is an example. Complexes are coral islands that are part of an extensive chain of islands that either contains high islands, or are near to high islands. Complexes contain a range of island types and sizes, as well as climatic diversity. The Caroline Islands and the Tuamotu–Society Islands group are examples. The final category is fringing reef islands like Kayangel and Peleliu in Palau. These are coral islands so close to high islands that they can be considered part of the latter's cultural and environmental systems.

The optimal geographic unit to analyse the formation and maintenance of insular cultures is one where geography and climate foster interaction. A number of zones of regular interaction are apparent in the historical record besides those noted by Alkire. These include: Fiji–West Polynesia, Te Ika a Maui (North Island) and Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Marshall Islands–Eastern Caroline Islands region, the Santa Cruz Islands, the 'kula' network in the Massim Islands, the Vitiaz Straits area, the Northern Solomon Islands, and areas in the Highlands of New Guinea.<sup>55</sup> These areas vary in size, with the largest containing a number of smaller, and often overlapping interaction networks.<sup>56</sup> The frequency of external contacts probably waxed and waned over time, as did the impact of interaction. While all these localities have been studied by modern scholars, there is still a need to replace the tripartite classification with one based on close examination of smaller regions. Such work should explicitly examine the effects of external contacts and internal processes on cultural change, and the

<sup>54</sup> William H. Alkire, *Coral Islanders* (Arlington Heights, Illinois 1978), 65–9.

<sup>55</sup> A good survey of the secondary literature on regional exchange systems is Douglas L. Oliver, *Oceania: the native cultures of Australia and the Pacific Islands*, 2 vols (Honolulu 1989), I, 521–84.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Paul D'Arcy, 'Connected by the sea: towards a regional history of the western Caroline Islands', *Journal of Pacific History*, 36 (2001), 163–82.

relative contribution of cultural and environmental influences on societal development.<sup>57</sup>

Comparative, regional frameworks are also potential tools for understanding the relationship between environment and culture in the development of cultural patterns. In an article comparing the Tongan and Yapese 'empires', anthropologist Glenn Petersen examines the appropriateness of the European concept of empire to Pacific contexts. What is novel about Petersen's scheme is that themes replace cultures as the basis for comparison. He cuts across the Micronesian/Polynesian divide to compare political and economic interaction in two archipelagos. His examination of the cultural similarities and particularly the differences of the Tongan and Yapese systems offers important lessons for those seeking to find what makes cultures distinct. Each interaction sphere was characterised by high levels of inter-group contact, equitable exchange relationships, the use of exchange goods to demonstrate socio-political status, similar ideas of socio-political ranking based on genealogy, and the association of power with religious status in the absence of a consistent ability to project military force overseas to enforce compliance. His analysis of difference is revealing in that it suggests that particular environmental conditions and cultural combinations influence the development of cultures. Yap was a high island at the western end of a zone of atolls, while Tonga was a relatively resource-deficient fulcrum point between two larger, resource-rich archipelagos. The ideology of centralised power was more developed in Tonga than in Yap. Petersen also notes that the Yapese empire has tended to be studied by anthropologists, while historians have studied the Tongan empire, leading to the former being portrayed as more fixed and static than the latter.<sup>58</sup> Recent reinterpretations of the Yapese empire by historians suggest that the usual emphasis on long-term continuities has masked periodic disruptions and reconfigurations of the system, some of which resulted from natural hazards.<sup>59</sup>

Studies of regular zones of interaction, either individually or comparatively, are not only in keeping with the current anthropological conception of culture, but would also answer a long-held need within Pacific history. In their search for ways of understanding Islander viewpoints, historians have tended to immerse themselves in the intricacies of individual cultures in a similar manner to anthropologists' approach to fieldwork. This methodology, combined with an environment of discrete, island communities geographically demarcated from their neighbours, led to the neglect of inter-island exchanges. There have been calls for Pacific historians to broaden their gaze and embrace multiple island, regional history since the late

<sup>57</sup> See Thomas, *Out of Time*, 90–4, for a good discussion of some of these approaches in his extended commentary on Jonathan Friedman, 'Notes on structure and history in Oceania', *Folk*, 23 (1981), 275–95. The most accomplished regional overview to date is I.C. Campbell's 'Fiji, Tonga and Samoa: separate nations, common history', Pt 1, *History Now* (Oct. 1995), 1–11, and Pt 2, *History Now* (May 1996), 8–16. Campbell reviews, albeit briefly, the history of this region of interaction from first settlement to the 1990s.

<sup>58</sup> Glenn Petersen, 'Indigenous island empires: Yap and Tonga considered', *Journal of Pacific History*, 35 (2000), 5–27, esp. 18–19.

<sup>59</sup> M.L. Berg, 'Yapese politics, Yapese money and the Sawai tribute network before World War I', *Journal of Pacific History*, 27 (1992), 150–64, and D'Arcy, 'Connected by the sea', 163–82.

1970s.<sup>60</sup> Few heeded the call. In his 1994 article 'Our Sea of Islands', Epeli Hau'ofa still felt compelled to urge historians to embrace visions of wider zones of interaction, and to explore the wider sense of community and belonging that this implied.<sup>61</sup>

### *The Value of Regional History*

The potential for this approach can be demonstrated by contrasting older, generalised models of interaction in West Polynesia with an examination of more historically specific processes of interaction. West Polynesia is the most fluid border between the old tripartite cultural categories. Ethnologist Adrienne Kaeppler and archaeologist Janet Davidson describe how the exchange of goods between Tongans, Samoans and Fijians was integral to social and political interaction.<sup>62</sup> Tongans received mats from Samoa and pottery, canoes and red feathers from Fiji in return for whales' teeth. At the same time a formalised pattern of chiefly marriage partners passed between the islands. The goods exchanged between the three 'cultures' were mainly prestige items, the possession of which had status implications within the three respective island groups.<sup>63</sup> While Davidson allows for some variation in interaction over time, it is time on the grand archaeological scale, measured in centuries rather than decades or years.

There are good reasons for adopting a more detailed focus when examining regions of regular interaction. Attention must be paid to the dynamics of specific communities in particular years or decades as well as longer-term patterns to develop broader cultural groupings. Historical patterns in Western Polynesia suggest it is misleading to group the region's cultures into these three large geographical blocks consisting of a culturally stable core and more fluid periphery. Rather, communities were highly localised in their affinities and expansive, even regional, in their interactions. This conception challenges less contested classifications such as Tongans and Samoans as well as Dumont d'Urville's tripartite classification. It does not overturn them, however. What it suggests is that Islanders embraced multiple cultural affinities, both local and regional. Interaction with other communities meant that change could be relatively rapid, and changes to one community's circumstances, such as the relocation of the Lemaki clan from Samoa to Fiji in the late 18th century discussed below, had regional implications.

A more detailed examination of interactions between 1770 and 1850 also suggests that environmental factors played a significant role in influencing exchanges. Wind patterns and island alignments promoted inter-archipelagic travel. The Fijian and Tongan archipelagos were particularly favoured in this regard,

<sup>60</sup> K.R. Howe, 'Pacific Islands history in the 1980s: new directions or monograph myopia?', *Pacific Studies*, 3 (1979), 81, 86–9. See also O.H.K. Spate, 'The Pacific as an artefact', in Niel Gunson (ed.), *The Changing Pacific: essays in honour of H.E. Maude* (Melbourne 1978), 32–45, 34.

<sup>61</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our sea of islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6 (1994), 148–61.

<sup>62</sup> Adrienne Kaeppler, 'Exchange patterns in goods and spouses: Fiji, Tonga and Samoa', *Mankind*, 11 (1978), 248–51; and Janet Davidson, 'Western Polynesia and Fiji: the archaeological evidence', *Mankind*, 11 (1978), 383–90.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, *Out of Time*, 91.



forming easy navigational targets as long island chains across the paths of the prevailing winds. With the right winds, the Ha'apai and Vava'u groups in Tonga were just three days' sail from the Lau group in Fiji.<sup>64</sup> However, storms and other natural disasters could also hamper travel and threaten communities. They were dangerous because they were unpredictable. Just as social scientists and those in the humanities have come to reject the idea of cultures as closed, static systems, ecological scientists now also increasingly emphasise variation across time and space. Research into climatic sequences now suggests that annual variation may have been as important as seasonal variation in the lives of Islanders. Climatic conditions and weather patterns can vary dramatically from year to year. Geographer R.F. McLean notes that 'Rainfall data in the dry belt suggest a biennial oscillation and throughout the central Pacific a 5.3 year cycle is indicated. Drought is thus a frequent and persistent feature of the region's climate.'<sup>65</sup> McLean suggests that tropical storms and hurricanes in this region may operate on a variable three to five year cycle. His investigation of recent weather patterns in the central Pacific revealed that over 30 years the number of tropical storms and hurricanes in a season ranged from one to 12.<sup>66</sup>

The period 1770–1850 was notable for the frequency and scale of community mobility and interaction. Tongans were perhaps the most wide-ranging voyagers in West Polynesia. They were increasingly drawn to eastern Fiji in the late-18th century for items that were rare in Tonga. Vesi wood (*Intsia bijuga*) canoes, parrot feathers and sandalwood for scenting coconut oil were highly prized by Tongans, and could be traded for bark-cloth, sennit, stings from stingray tails for spear points, whales' teeth, pearl shells and finely woven Samoan mats. By the 19th century, they were also offering their services to Fijian chiefs in their wars in return for their hospitality and valuables.<sup>67</sup>

Voyaging groups identified as much with specific kin and community groups as with larger cultural groups. In addition to frequent Tongan voyages within the archipelago and visits to Fiji, strong links were maintained between specific Tongan and Samoan communities. Ties were especially strong between communities on Manono, Savai'i and Upolu's A'ana district in Samoa, and those of Vava'u in Tonga. A number of Tongan and Samoan chiefly lines had strong links, involving ongoing marriage ties, frequent visits and occasional large-scale movements between the two island groups to assist in power struggles, or to settle. Tongan fleets that sailed to Samoa in this period generally consisted of 300–500 people.<sup>68</sup> Samoans also travelled to Tonga. Some Tongan chiefly retinues contained *muli*, or foreigners, who were valued for being outside the Tongan tabu restrictions, and

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Thomas West, *Ten Years in South-Central Polynesia* (London 1865), 221–3.

<sup>65</sup> R.F. McLean, 'Spatial and temporal variability of external physical controls on small island ecosystems', in H.C. Brookfield, *Population-environment Relations in Tropical Islands: the case of eastern Fiji* (Paris 1980), 170.

<sup>66</sup> McLean, 'Spatial and temporal variability', 170–1.

<sup>67</sup> There is a wealth of primary material on exchanges between Tonga and Fiji in this period. The best overviews are Edwin N. Ferdon, *Early Tonga as the Explorers Saw it, 1616–1810* (Tucson 1987), 234; and Alexander Philip Lessin and Phyllis June Lessin, *Village of Conquerors: Savana: a Tongan village in Fiji* (Oregon 1970), 3.

<sup>68</sup> The most thorough study of these connections is Niel Gunson, 'The Tonga-Samoa connection 1777–1845', *Journal of Pacific History*, 25 (1990), 176–87. See esp. 176–7 on the scale and nature of these exchanges.

therefore able to attend to their chiefs without infringing their sacred status.<sup>69</sup> A number of young Tongan chiefs organised expeditions for adventure, fuelled by frustration at domination by more senior chiefs at home.<sup>70</sup> William Mariner witnessed the return of one such chief after an excursion of 14 years.<sup>71</sup> These chiefs particularly favoured Fiji as a destination. By the 1790s, contingents of Tongan warriors led by chiefs such as Fīnau 'Ulukālala I were a force to be reckoned with in Fiji.<sup>72</sup> Some resettled in Fiji. Sawana in Vanua Balavu was one such Tongan settlement. Its inhabitants maintained ties with their home villages in Ha'apai and Vava'u.<sup>73</sup> Others returned to Tonga with their years of fighting experience behind them and became a potentially destabilising force in local politics.

The development of new sailing canoes known as *drua* in Fiji in the late-18th century epitomises the fluid relationship between communities within Western Polynesia. Although made in Fiji, their development owed much to skills and ideas developed elsewhere. Their design and handling techniques came from Tonga and 'Uvea, while their fore-and-aft rig was Micronesian, probably introduced by way of Kiribati. The craftsmen who built the *drua* were from Tonga and Samoa. They were first built in Fiji by the Lemaki, a clan of plank-building specialists from Manono brought to the Lau Group by Tongans in the second half of the 18th century. They eventually settled permanently on Kabara.<sup>74</sup> These craftsmen were notable for their method of joining and fastening planks, which made joins on canoe hulls far more waterproof than the previous Fijian method of binding joins.<sup>75</sup> These improved hull designs allowed far bigger hulls to be constructed, which in turn increased carrying capacity. The new sails, rigs and reversible hulls gave them greater manoeuvrability than previous canoes. The old designs faded in the late 1700s as the new technology arose.<sup>76</sup> These new canoes facilitated travel within Western Polynesia, allowing Tongan communities to play an increasing role in the politics of Fiji, and making Tongan exiles in Fiji an important factor in Tongan politics.<sup>77</sup>

THE QUESTION we should perhaps be asking is not whether Samoans became Samoans in Samoa, but when? Was the intense pattern of moving and interaction just described the exception rather than the rule over the centuries, or could Samoans become Samoans and *remain* Samoans despite this fluidity of residence

<sup>69</sup> See E.W. Gifford, *Tongan Society* (Honolulu 1929), 140–1, 148–50, on the role of *muli* in Tonga.

<sup>70</sup> William Diapea, *Cannibal Jack: the true autobiography of a white man in the South Seas* (London 1948), 111–12.

<sup>71</sup> John Martin, *Tonga Islands, William Mariner's Account*, 2 vols (4th edn, Tonga 1981), I, 183–96, relates Kau Moala's adventures in detail.

<sup>72</sup> Good discussions of the impact of Tongan chiefs in Fiji are found in Lessin and Lessin, *Village of Conquerors*, 3–4; and Fergus Clunie, *Yalo i Viti: shades of Fiji* (Suva 1986), 178.

<sup>73</sup> Lessin and Lessin, *Village of Conquerors*, 18–23.

<sup>74</sup> Clunie, *Yalo*, 15, 171 n.142.

<sup>75</sup> The method of binding joins is outlined in Clunie, *Yalo*, 144–5, and Diapea, *Cannibal Jack*, 112–13.

<sup>76</sup> This 'nautical revolution' is outlined in Gordon S. Parsonson, 'The nautical revolution in Polynesia', TS, 1976, Dunedin, Hocken Library; and Campbell, *A History of the Pacific Islands*, 37–8. See also Thomas Williams, *The Islands and their Inhabitants*, vol. 1 of George Stringer Rowe (ed.), *Fiji and the Fijians*, 2 vols (repr. of 1858 edn, Suva 1982), 76.

<sup>77</sup> Clunie, *Yalo*, 15.

and movement? If so, what processes were at play in this process of cultural evolution? Historian and museum curator Fergus Clunie observes that the introduction of whales' teeth from Western whalers in the early-19th century into the balanced system of exchange in West Polynesia was deeply destabilising, although the 'system' adjusted to cope.<sup>78</sup> In considering how typical this episode was, it is worth recalling that linguist Paul Geraghty recently proposed that traditions of Pulotu might actually refer to a time well before the disruptions witnessed in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, when the flow of prestige items from southern Lau broke down and political upheaval there resulted in the migration of groups from Lau in Fiji to other archipelagos in West Polynesia.<sup>79</sup> Geraghty's interpretation is speculative, but we must still admit the possibility of instability, as Jonathan Friedman hypothesised for Oceania some years ago. Archaeologists now commonly propose that the instability of interaction networks, particularly long-distance interaction, is normal and explains the often erratic and punctuated archaeological record of imports and exports.<sup>80</sup> Niel Gunson indicates that Samoan and Tongan influence over each other waxed and waned through time,<sup>81</sup> while Ian Campbell notes that archaeological, linguistic and traditional evidence all suggest that the period from *c.* AD 1100 to 1500 was an era of significant upheaval and inter-island movement through much of Oceania.<sup>82</sup>

Can we fully integrate the *longue durée* of archaeology with the systemic history timescale of anthropology and the more detailed focus of narrative history? Past attempts suggest not. Different questions require different spatial and temporal perspectives. Near and Remote Oceania are valid categories for examining the colonisation of Oceania, but are less useful for understanding the formation and maintenance of cultural groupings. The pattern of highly localised affinities and expansive interactions revealed in West Polynesian history, however, suggests investigations of cultural formation and interaction are best studied by examining regions of regular interaction over periods lasting decades rather than centuries. The cultural patterns and divisions of Oceania may make more sense when viewed as a series of overlapping spheres of regional interaction that vacillated between periods of instability and relative stability than when viewed as Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The tripartite culture areas are too large to deal with fluid interaction networks. Smaller zones of regular interaction are more suited to examining the relationship between the means and desire for island community interaction and circumstances of island proximity, which were crucial to the formation and evolution of Oceania's cultures. It is also an approach that can accommodate recent and more longstanding debates within Pacific studies, and answer calls by scholars such as Howe and Hau'ofa for pursuing a regional focus in Pacific history.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 159, 176–7.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Geraghty, 'Pulotu, Polynesian homeland', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 102 (1993), 343–84.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Friedman, 'Catastrophe and continuity in social evolution', in C. Renfrew, M.J. Rowlands and Barbara Abbot Segraves (eds), *Theory and Explanation in Archaeology — the Southampton Conference* (New York 1982), 175–96. Geoff Clark alerted me to the current consensus on this issue in Pacific archaeology.

<sup>81</sup> Gunson, 'The Tonga–Samoa connection', 187.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, *A History of the Pacific Islands*, 36.

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## ABSTRACT

Dumont d'Urville's association of cultural regions with racial types channelled subsequent scholarship into attempts to explain or refute this connection. As a consequence, other explanations of cultural formation were neglected. Mounting dissatisfaction with this scheme in the modern era has not given rise to a commonly accepted alternative. Recent trends towards viewing cultures as constantly evolving entities and mounting concern with human relations with the environment suggest a way forward through breaking the historical vacillation between cultural and environmental explanations and instead combining them. A closer look at Western Polynesian history suggests communities combined highly localised affinities with expansive spheres of interaction and awareness. The optimal unit to analyse the formation and maintenance of cultures is one where geography and climate foster regular interaction between communities.

