COPYRIGHT NOTICE
Hermann/Changing Contexts—Shifting Meanings

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, © 2011, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.
Introduction
Engaging with Interactions: Traditions as Context-Bound Articulations

Elfriede Hermann

Interactions, Changing Contexts, Shifting Meanings

The meanings ascribed to cultural traditions constantly shift in the course of interactions between people and their ideas, actions, and objects. They are always articulated from specific perspectives that social actors have staked out within historically developed interconnectivities and multifaceted power relations. Being formed and expressed in relation to particular circumstances, they can be said to articulate the specific contexts in which interactions take place. Thus, cultural traditions can be seen as context-bound articulations.

The chapters in this volume examine various interactions within various changing contexts. We scrutinize social interactions to imagine how these played out in the past and still do so today, turning our attention to the specific meanings that social actors give under certain circumstances to their own actions, objects, and ideas and to the material and immaterial manifestations of others. We also look at structural interactions of cultural orders, with a view to the context-sensitive meanings resulting from these. Focusing on these multivalent interactions, we gain far-reaching insight into how cultural traditions change through time. It is via interactions between social actors that new ideas, practices, and materials are adopted from others and reconceptualized from within the cultural repertoire of one’s own group. And it is via interactions with the products of social activities that these products change—and their meanings along with them. Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin has drawn attention to this dynamic when speaking of how we see objects acquired during James Cook’s voyages that are now part of the Cook/Forster Collection at the Georg August University of Göttingen:

[O]ur point of view changes with every new epoch, and the significance of the objects has also changed for the members of the cultures from which they originated. The objects as such are therefore not merely objects in themselves as we perceive them, because perception is dependent not only on the individual, but also on the particular time and culture in which the individual lives. In this way, the objects continuously “change” as well. (Hauser-Schäublin 1998: 11)
And if we adopt a perspective that allows us to explore objects, culturally specific concepts, and actions as interacting with changing contexts, it becomes clear that such interactions can cause structural formations to shift in a variety of ways.

But to contemplate the shaping and reshaping of meaning from a scientific distance is not to obscure the fact that the meanings transmitted to us by members of cultural communities are a product of how they have interacted with us. Often enough, social actors from the contemporary cultures we have been studying have exerted influence and power over us. And not infrequently, historical personalities also make a lasting impression on us. We recognize their agency every time we try to render at least some of them visible as persons, audible as voices, understandable as actors. These are the contexts of encounters in which we analytically interact with sociocultural and structural relationships alike. The research results presented in these pages are, therefore, to be seen as products of our attempting to engage with interactions.

**Interaction and Cultural Transformation**

To talk of interaction and cultural transformation is to evoke, in the field of anthropological debate, the name of Marshall Sahlins. His book *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* (1981) is for the present volume a key benchmark, for two reasons. First, he delivered an explanatory model for how Hawaiians reacted to the appearance of Captain Cook, a model referred to by many of the present essays about early encounters between Pacific Islanders and European voyagers. Second, through his model of the “structure of the conjuncture” he developed a theoretical approach to analyzing transformation, one which we frequently refer to and reflect upon. Within his model, Sahlins focuses explicitly on how the contexts of praxis relate to the meanings of cultural categories, as when he writes: “contextual values, if unlike the definitions culturally presupposed, have the capacity then of working back on the conventional values” (Sahlins 1981: 35). New meanings are created and integrated into the already existing cultural structure (Sahlins 1981: 68). This process leads to the structure being transformed even as it is being reproduced.

As Aletta Biersack (1989: 73) has noted, Sahlins’ theoretical arguments point clearly to a paradigm shift in anthropology—the transition from a structural anthropology that was not concerned with history to a historical anthropology. Studies on transformations of culture that appeared soon after Sahlins’ first publications on structural history and were informed by his insights, such as those assembled by Hooper and Huntsman (1985), testify to this shift. Indeed, Sahlins’ anthropological approach to structural history has yielded wide-ranging insight into processes of cultural transformation. Emphasizing this fact, Joel Robbins (2005) observed that while Sahlins, in his major work, masterfully found cultural continuity in change, he also, in a less-known essay on “develop-man” (reprinted 2005), considered the possibility that humiliation and related emotions may lead to cultural discontinuity. Importantly, Sahlins paved the way for theorization of cultural transformation within the context of interactions taking place not only within a culture, but also—and especially—between cultures. Yet it is precisely when analyzing intercultural processes that a structural theory runs up against
its limits. Thus Francesca Merlan (2005: 173) has noted that such a theory makes the boundedness of a system of meanings into a central issue in that it views the (re)ordering of cultural categories as proceeding within that system. Whether in the course of intercultural interactions systems of meanings will remain bounded is open, however, to doubt. Thus Jean Comaroff (1985), Aletta Biersack (1995), and Martha Kaplan (1995) suggested that when considering such contexts, one should pay attention to how sociocultural systems articulate with each other. Looking at articulated conceptions and actions may be particularly promising, if, following Kaplan and Kelly (1994, Kelly and Kaplan 2001, Kelly this volume) and Merlan (2005), we apply a theoretical perspective that permits us to recognize dialogical relationships between cultures.

The advantage of analyzing the transformation of interrelating cultures in terms of articulation was shown especially by Jean Comaroff (1985) for the case of anthropological research. The concept of articulation she uses gathers together the dual meanings of “join together” and “give expression to” (cf. Hall 1986: 53; Clifford 2001: 477–478). According to Comaroff (1985: 153), what the concept of articulation lets us do is see that specific systems of praxis and meaning combine into a unitary formation, a novel product of specific historical circumstances. Based on this theoretical perspective, my own suggestion is that we conceptualize tradition as context-bound articulation. But before presenting what I mean by this, let me take a closer look at popular and academic ways of understanding tradition.

**Popular and Academic Conceptions of Tradition**

If, then, this volume is about exchanging ideas on the importance of contexts, it is only right that I exemplify this by contextualizing my arguments. This will involve touching on two discursive fields that constitute contexts—in the sense of “connecting texts” or “con-texts”—for our discussions on transformations of cultural traditions in Oceania. These are the popular-indigenous and the academic conceptions of tradition.

The popular concepts developed by the indigenous inhabitants of Oceania are for anthropologists—and also, to an extent, for other scholars of Pacific societies—the most immediate and important points of reference. Now by “indigenous inhabitants of Oceania” I mean not only those autochthonous to the region, but also the many other groups who have long made Oceania their home (see Clifford 1994: 308–309; Robertson 1998: 205ff.). All have specific concepts to describe the cultural practices they attribute to their own group, and all have self-consciously reflected on how these practices have changed through time. They have evolved their definition of tradition out of their own, culturally specific historicity. “Historicity,” as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995: 22–29) reminds us, is simultaneously a “sociohistorical process” and the “narrative constructions about that process” that members of a society have produced as subjects who articulate their thoughts and emotions with their stories about the past. Thus a society’s specific historicity is a context that should not be allowed to escape analysis (cf. Hermann 1995, 2005).

An analysis sensitive to historicity allows us to see that Oceania’s inhabitants have fashioned their ideas of cultural traditions from interacting with persons or groups of
different cultural backgrounds. These interactions were not always peaceful: In pre- and postcolonial times to an extent but in colonial times especially, these interactions were linked to the exercise of power, coercion, or violence. During such interactions, members of Oceanian societies have, at times, adopted concepts of “culture,” “custom,” and “tradition” from the discourses of other societies. They have “transcultured” these concepts, that is, they have, in the process of adoption, recontextualized and reconceptualized them to fit the needs of their own culture (Hermann 2007). Excellent examples of the products of such transculturation processes are indigenous conceptualizations of “kastom” in Vanuatu (Jolly 1982, 1992a, 1992b; Lindstrom 1982; Tonkinson 1982b), in the Solomon Islands (Keesing 1982b; White 1991); and in Papua New Guinea (Otto 1991, 1992) to name but a few of the early studies.

A case study may help to elucidate what I mean by the indigenous conceptualization of tradition, so I will briefly consider the “kastom” discourse as developed by the Ngaing of northeast Papua New Guinea during the transition from colonial to postcolonial times. The Ngaing from a village I will call Yasaburing refer to their traditional culture as ununung nining doung (“everything that belongs to us”), adding that all this comes “from before,” saguing yerak (Hermann 1997: 94). Several decades ago they transcultured the term “custom,” talking ever since of “kastom” to communicate their concerns more effectively to missionaries and colonial officers (later national officers) as well as others. After some of the cultural practices from their ancestral religion were attacked by representatives of Christian missions and the colonial administration, they partly modified what they had inherited, now designating as kastom only those aspects not negatively valued by the colonial authorities and, in turn, by themselves. In modifying traits from their cultural repertoire, they combined these in part with new elements adopted from hegemonic discourses of Western provenance. Aware of these changes, they note that though much of their traditional culture was handed down, not everything in it was. There is, however, one context where they insist they are exclusively practicing their own kastom, free of any add-ons: Recalling that they were accused in the mid-twentieth century, by missionaries and the then colonial administration, of colluding with the Yali Movement (tantamount to charging them with involvement in a so-called “cargo cult”), they strongly insist that what they were following at the time was not “kago kalt,” as they call it in Tok Pisin, but their own kastom (Hermann 1992, 1995, 1997). Listen to what Marka, a woman from the Dasit-Halaloang clan, told me (on October 10, 1990): “We really did nothing like that [kago kalt]; all we thought of was our work. And Yali, the poor man, he had thought of the work of kastom. That was all he did, the work of kastom!” Now, one needs to know that “‘cargo cult’ has become a term of disparagement,” as Peter Hempenstall (1981; cf. Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984: 120) pointed out. Therefore, the Ngaing talk of being ashamed, weary, and angry in the face of kago kalt insinuations, to the point where they now distance themselves from such ascriptions by referring to their own positively connoted tradition. In their counterhegemonic move, they articulate representations of their traditional culture with an anti-“cargo cult” discourse. What this case teaches us is that two basic principles are at work in the indigenous conceptu-
alization of tradition: tradition is represented from within a specific historicity—linked as this is to emotions—but it is also articulated with and through specific discourses on other themes.

Now it so happens that in interaction with indigenous discourses and academic debate, anthropologists have themselves devised a series of definitions of tradition. This brings me to the second of my contextualizations: I need to briefly review the genealogy of anthropological concepts of tradition if I am to argue, in dialogue with these, that it is time to take a fresh look at how traditions are transformed.

Together with the neighboring discipline of history, anthropology has witnessed, since the early 1980s, a radical transformation of how it conceives tradition. The previous approach had seen tradition as having “a core of traits” handed down internally in unbroken continuity (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 274). Studies using this earlier concept were frequently based on a series of dichotomies: tradition versus modernity; continuity versus discontinuity; genuine versus spurious tradition; internal culture versus external cultures (cf. Handler and Linnekin 1984: 273–274; White 1993: 476–477, 492; Otto and Pedersen 2005: 12; Sahlins 2005: 34). What was problematic, apart from these binary assumptions, was the widespread absence of any attempt to theorize the power relationships involved in matters of tradition.

By revising assumptions of this kind and by developing new conceptions, the study of tradition took a giant step forward. One of these new conceptions, steering research into fertile fields, was to see tradition as a political symbol. Studies of indigenous representations of traditions on the Solomon Islands and on Vanuatu have shown that, in contexts of anticolonial resentment and moves toward independence, tradition can become a symbol for political interests and action—and so, in the final analysis, for the identities that are linked to these (e.g., Keesing 1982a, 1982b; Tonkinson 1982a; Lindstrom 1982: 317–318).

Similarly trailblazing has been to see tradition as invented. This conception was first floated in The Invention of Tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). There the historian Hobsbawm defined “invented tradition” as an ensemble of “practices ( . . . ) of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983: 1), adding that this continuity is “largely factitious” (1983: 2). Soon after this conception saw the light of day, a violent controversy arose over its viability and range of application. On one side, the conception was positively received by many anthropological studies that understood it in terms of Roy Wagner’s theory of The Invention of Culture (1981) as an ongoing process of cultural creativity (Jolly and Thomas 1992a: 242). But there were plenty of authors ready to oppose the notion of “invented tradition.” It was charged that the conception seemed to imply that such tradition sprang from a vacuum, devoid of any cultural antecedents or constraints, or even that it was fabricated. For instance, the Hawaiian political scientist and professor of Hawaiian studies Haunani-Kay Trask (1991) accused the anthropologist Roger Keesing of “academic colonialism,” since the latter had intimated in an essay (1989) that, as a concomitant to postcolonial nationalism in Oceania, “ideologies” of the past had been
constructed for political ends. In her critique of this analysis, Trask (1991: 159) charged that Keesing was using his position as a white man to deny to Oceania’s peoples a knowledge of history and to dismiss indigenous representations of the past as just so many idealizations for purposes of creating political myths. Mindful that the notion of invention might include unintended meanings, anthropological conceptions of tradition were careful to stress, from that point on, that what was meant thereby was a symbolic construction of cultural continuity (e.g., Linnekin 1992).3

Influenced by the intensity of the debate over tradition, anthropologists then argued that instead of describing tradition as “invented,” it would be better to talk of it being “constructed” (e.g., Jolly and Thomas 1992a: 243; Linnekin 1992). At the same time, they took to focusing on the “politics of tradition” (see the essays in Jolly and Thomas 1992b; van Meijl 1990; Otto 1991). This switch of focus had the advantage of enabling indigenous depictions of cultural continuity to be analyzed in light of related political strategies pursued by actors on the local and national levels. Coming from a similar direction, Lamont Lindstrom and Geoffrey White explored the potential of viewing tradition as discourse. These authors stressed that this meant highlighting the historical constituting of tradition within systems of power (Lindstrom and White 1993: 469). In view of the scholarly critique of “invention,” Terence Ranger also revised the concept. The new conception he had in mind was “imagined tradition” (Ranger 1993: 81–82; 1999: 142; 2005). By shifting the focus, attention could now be steered more to the ideas, concepts, and symbols than was the case with “invention.” Alive to the criticisms voiced by Pacific Islanders, Robert Tonkinson made another innovative suggestion: tradition should be conceptualized heuristically as a resource that is strategically (and politically) deployed by specific members of a community (Tonkinson 1993: 599; 1999, 2000).

Now the conceiving of tradition in terms of its political use, such as has been done in a plethora of studies (and to great benefit too, as measured by the insights yielded), has not gone uncritiqued within the anthropological fold. Thus, for example, Sahlins (1999: 402–404) has charged those so persuaded with having adopted a functional (if not functionalist) approach by focusing one-sidedly on the practical and political utility of traditions. The responses elicited by Sahlins’ critique stress yet again the need to analyze the links existing between tradition and power. Thus Ton Otto and Poul Pedersen (2005) make the important point that there is no alternative to seeing tradition as a resource for the exercise of power. Therefore they consider it necessary to analytically include strategies followed by indigenous actors, and particularly their agency in dealing with tradition (Otto and Pedersen 2005; cf. Otto and Pedersen 2000).

Nor is it the case that these hefty debates and controversies have gone away (cf. Biersack 1991: 15; Hanlon and White 2000: 13; Hau‘ofa 2000: 454ff.; Babadzan 2000; Inoue 2000). In view of their ongoing nature (see, e.g., Rogister and Vergati 2004; Weiner and Glaskin 2006; Bräuchler and Widlok 2007), it is not a bad idea to add my own suggestion to the pile. Let us think tradition in such a way as to avoid one-sided prioritizations (and the misunderstandings these invariably cause). In the next section, I will argue that tradition may be profitably understood as context-sensitive articulation.
Tradition as Context-Bound Articulation

In dialogue with studies of tradition pointing to the importance of contexts and/or the usefulness of the idea of articulation, I suggest that conceptualizing tradition as context-bound articulation has much to offer. Just how important it is to include contexts in the study of culturally specific ways of relating to tradition is something anthropologists have repeatedly noted (e.g., Jolly 1992a: 344). Thus Geoffrey White (1993) wrote with great clarity: “Getting a better fix on the multivocal and multivalent inflections of custom requires attending to the range of contexts in which ideas about tradition are put to use” (White 1993: 475). The necessity of allowing for contexts is grounded in the insight that what people make of the past is always a function of present needs and intentions (e.g., Lindstrom 1982: 317). The Tongan anthropologist and author Epeli Hau’ofa expressed this insight clearly when talking of the cultures of Oceania: “Versions of truth may be accepted for particular purposes and moments, only to be reversed when circumstances demand other versions” (Hau’ofa 2000: 454).

So there is a consensus that contexts strongly determine the meanings social actors ascribe to certain statements, objects, and actions associated with tradition. From this we may conclude that traditions are invariably context-bound. If traditions—or, more precisely, the meanings associated with and expressed by these—are context-bound, it is because they result from the connection between these meanings and ambient discourses. This property of “being-expressed” and “being-connected” can be subsumed under the concept of articulation, which I have already discussed earlier. Jean Comaroff (1985) and Stuart Hall (1980, 1986: 53–55) pointed out that cultural orders can be viewed as articulations (i.e., clearly expressed connectivities) of such distinguishable configurations as relationships, discourses, practices, and systems. Martha Kaplan (1995: 15–16) has gone still further in studying the routinization of articulating systems. Important too is the theoretical perspective developed by Hall (1986: 53), for whom connectivities also exist between discourses and human subjects.

Turning now to the literature on tradition, we find various approaches as to how the concept of articulation can usefully be deployed. Margaret Jolly (1992a: 330) suggested, for instance, that the concept of tradition, as encountered in Vanuatu and Fiji, was best seen as consisting of divergent articulations of past and present. White noted that the indigenous concept of kastom can hold many meanings, since it “may be used in multiple ways in diverse contexts, each of which may articulate with specific, well-formed local practices” (White 1993: 477–478). James Clifford (2003: 89) opined, referring to the controversy over the academic conceptualization of tradition, that much of what had been designated as invented was ripe for rethinking in terms of Stuart Hall’s notion of a “politics of articulation.” Based on these insights, Wolfgang Kempf and I proposed, with a view to Fiji, that the articulation of relations between past and present should be conceptualized as an integral part of a dynamic that includes transformation and positioning (Hermann and Kempf 2005).

Now it is in this context that I suggest traditions be seen as context-bound articulations. This novel approach to the concept I would explain thus: Tradition involves
processes of articulation in a double sense. Practices and discourses referring to relationships between cultural past and present are linked with, even as they are expressed by, contexts and identities. In this process of such context-bound expressivity, tradition is endowed with the meaning it finally carries.

Since it is the case that political contexts and interests flow into multiple connections, any attempt to analyze tradition as context-bound articulation must include power relationships that have arisen historically. Given that articulation presupposes human action, the focus of study must be placed on the agency of individual and collective actors.

Interactions and the Transformation of Cultural Traditions in Oceania

Transcultural interactions, such as have taken place ever since the Pacific was first peopled, provided fertile ground for old meanings to be articulated within, and to articulate with, new contexts, thus encouraging the transformation of traditions. Following from the Pacific Islanders’ own intercultural encounters, contacts between Oceania’s people and Europe’s travelers prompted all parties to change their ideas and practices, at least to a degree. The encounters between the Pacific Islanders and James Cook and his fellow travelers are but one (albeit prominent) example of such momentous interactions, as has been demonstrated by Anne Salmond (e.g., 2003) and Nicholas Thomas (2003) and represented by Paul Turnbull (see, e.g., 2002) and colleagues in the South Seas Project, an innovative online resource devoted to Cook’s first Pacific voyage.

So the contributions to this volume show how social and structural interactions in Oceania yield articulations of cultural traditions and their meanings. They focus on reciprocities between these meanings and their respective contexts, past and present. With an eye set firmly on objects, cultural practices, and ideas, they trace continuities and transformations alike. The shaping and reshaping of meanings via a multiplicity of interactions is analyzed in four sections under the following headings: (1) early encounters, (2) memories, (3) ongoing global and (trans)local processes, and (4) cultural exchange and identities.

The lead essay by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin introduces our theme, namely changing contexts—shifting meanings, by examining a celebrated case: the Cook/Forster Collection. Housed permanently at the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology of the Georg August University of Göttingen, in early 2006 the collection journeyed to the Honolulu Academy of Arts, then on to the National Museum of Australia—attracting, in each case, an admiring public. In her essay, Hauser-Schäublin argues that not only these fascinating objects from the Pacific cultures of the mid-eighteenth century but their attendant meanings as well have been exposed to a continuous process of change. Since the material forms accreted specific meanings depending on the exact historical, political, social, and economic circumstances, they could not evade change—their seemingly unchanging materiality notwithstanding. As Hauser-Schäublin points out, these changes were wrought by the social actors then and now. Indeed, it is the diverse perspectives of the beholders that causes these objects always to appear in a different light, just as it is the motivations of these same beholders that put the objects to diverse uses.
Accordingly, the meanings of the artifacts foregrounded here are to be seen as products of social interactions between the Pacific Islanders themselves, between the latter and European voyagers (see also Hauser-Schäublin 2006), and between voyagers, traders, collectors, and scientists. Such interactions—especially those between the above on the one hand and the objects on the other—resulted in their meanings being specifically transformed from case to case.

**Early Encounters**

The essays in this first part look at early encounters, first among the actual inhabitants of Oceania and then between the Pacific Islanders and the European voyagers. They investigate the archaeological record, local histories, travel logs, and journals, drawing a picture of the social relationships accompanying contacts that proceeded at times peacefully, at times violently. The essays also treat the exchange of material and immaterial products, the better to address the issue of transculturation between the participating parties. Studying encounters and thus the crossing of cultural boundaries, which Dening (1980: 3, 20) poetically calls “beaches,” requires a close look at the shifting of meanings. “To know cultures in contact is to know the misreadings of meanings, the transformation of meanings, the recognition of meanings” (Dening 1980: 6). Hence, whenever sources permit, the essays inquire into the culturally specific meanings of what happened between the Pacific Islanders and what sense, or senses, the Europeans were able to read into their own and others’ actions. With a fine eye for the contextual specifics, the essays treat the transformations in such meanings as grew out of these relationships. So what we have here is a collection of historical and historical-anthropological studies—all of them “stories,” if by that is meant context-sensitive descriptions of past “encounters between human beings and their situations” (Hempenstall 2000: 46).

David Hanlon tells the story of historical links between indigenous societies on two islands: Kosrae and Pohnpei. He examines certain similarities between two historical sites (Lelu on Kosrae and Nan Madol on Pohnpei) as well as between their respective oral histories in order to uncover past interactions. The resultant cultural transformations in the two societies he views as heralding later changes in the region now known as Micronesia (Hanlon 1994). As in Micronesia so also in Polynesia, contacts between Pacific Islanders long antedated the coming of the Europeans. As a result of these indigenous links, Polynesia too was for centuries the scene of cultural transformation, but without non-Polynesians ever becoming a major influence—so is the argument of Steven Hooper (2006: 16). Furthermore, even as the European voyages got underway, these indigenous encounters continued—in parallel. Margaret Jolly tells the story of Tupaia and Mai, two men from the Tahitian group who boarded Cook’s ships and were able to contact other inhabitants of Oceania and (in Mai’s case) learn a thing or two about British society. In Jolly’s narrative, Tupaia and Mai are shown as travelers between cultural worlds, who, with no small show of ingenuity, articulate the dual perspectives of the Oceanian and European cultures. Ever alert to processes of transculturation, she illustrates the potential there was for reciprocal transformation. Bronwen Douglas has
focused on contacts, from the time of Duperrey’s expedition of 1823, between French seamen and the Pacific Islanders of Tahiti and New Ireland. She sees these encounters as points where indigenous and French agencies intersect. In her eyes, behavioral changes among the Pacific Islanders resulted from old codes and norms having to come to terms with new possibilities arising in a context of change. Anne Salmond investigates changing cultural practices on Tahiti, focusing on sexual encounters, among others, between Tahitians and (a) British seamen in 1767, (b) Bougainville’s French crew in 1768, and (c) sailors with the Spanish expeditions of 1772 and 1774. She notes that sex was associated with mythology—not just for the indigenes but for the Europeans too. These mythologies underwent, in turn, articulation, thus imprinting themselves on new apprehensions of events; at the same time, the meanings and experiences of sex were transformed for all concerned.

The shaping of meanings, such as occurred on the European side as a result of these Pacific encounters, is the subject of two other chapters. Gundolf Krüger relates the story of the young Georg Forster, who sailed with Cook on his second voyage between 1772 and 1775. He describes how Georg Forster sought to extract meaning from the material manifestations of violence on Tahiti, Aotearoa, and Tonga; in an age of enlightenment, this meant contextualizing these in the light of culture and political history. Serge Tcherkézoff studies the various meanings the idea of “Polynesia” has acquired in changing scientific contexts. As he shows, significant differences existed between late eighteenth-century definitions and those dating from the first half of the nineteenth century, when scientists like Dumont d’Urville unmistakably pegged to a racial agenda the mapping of this part of the world. Clearly, therefore, “Polynesia” acquired its various meanings by dint of its definition becoming articulated with the dominant scientific discourse of the age.

**Memories**

The cultural specifics of how members of Oceanian cultures recall past interactions in combination with the shaping of traditions is the subject of the essays in the second part. Memories in these cultures are retained not only in stories or in oral and written histories. As Vilsoni Hereniko (2000: 79–80) has noted, Pacific Islanders also express what they know of the past through the media of dance, song, and theater. Such performative practices operate on many levels, but chiefly through communication, recollection, and commemoration, as Amy Ku’uleialoha Stillman (2001: 187) argues in her study of the history of the Hawaiian hula. As practices primarily consecrated to intragroup memory, they create meaning (Mageo 2001: 13). The essays collected here treat memories with just such a creative outlet—embodied in places and persons, in social and artistic activities. What they show is that memories contain reflections about meanings undergoing transformation, that is, memories can be said to represent specific historicities.

Lamont Lindstrom sheds light on how memory is constituted by naming practices on Tanna, an island in today’s Vanuatu. Analyzed is how the Tannese confer meaningful names on places and persons—whether old names evoking unchanging structures
or new names recalling transformation and events like the first contacts the Islanders had with Cook and his party in 1774. By encoding memories into landscapes and sociosces, historicity expresses itself in the interweaving of continuity and transformation. Ton Otto discusses historicity in another context, that of the Baluan Islanders on Papua New Guinea’s Manus Island, but in similar terms of cultural continuity and transformation. Taking indigenous agency as his cue, he shows how the people of Baluan crafted their idea of tradition, *kastam*, along with its concomitant activities, by consciously pegging it to contexts undergoing constant change. Against the background of the Paliou movement pressing for social change, the people of Baluan created *kastam* as a context-bound tradition, one stressing the undiminished need to remain mindful of the ancestors and their past deeds. Wolfgang Kempf, for his part, explores how memory is created by social mimesis. He looks at mimetic practices among the Banabans, a people originally from the island of Banaba in the central Pacific but relocated to Fiji in 1945. How social mimesis plays out is exemplified by ethnic performances, in which the actors embody memories. Kempf illustrates his thesis in terms of the dance theater, specifically a play enacting the Banabans’ own conversion to Christianity; in it, the memory of this event, the island of origin, and the ancestral goddess—all three—are kept alive. In reflecting on the transformation of religion, we find a historicity being manifested that articulates, at once, sharp rupture and powerful continuity.

**Global and (Trans)local Processes**

The third section of this volume focuses on interactions between global and local processes. As Aletta Biersack states in her epilogue, such interactions can be observed already in early intercultural exchanges between European voyagers and Pacific Islanders in Oceania—or, for that matter, between the Pacific voyagers and the people in Europe’s metropolitan cities. These interactions intensify with the onset of the transpacific labor trade and colonialism, and they have been gathering momentum ever since (see Lockwood 2004: 10–16). In Oceania, as in other parts of the world, local and global systems articulate with each other, therefore, in multiple ways characterized by symbiosis and conflict (Comaroff 1985: 3). When global and local processes intersect, power differentials kick in from the start. Peter Hempenstall advances a similar argument in his epilogue when he refers to “the political economy of cultural transformation.” Between the conflicting priorities of these processes, Oceanians formed their cultural practices in their efforts at cultural preservation as well as in transformation and transculturation. Fijians, for example, are quite willing to adopt traditions from other cultures in order to enrich their own, as Ropate Qalo (1997: 132) points out. Ulrich Menter (2003: 23) illustrates with regard to cultural transfers during early contacts that transcultured objects such as European weapons did indeed serve as instruments of power for Pacific Islanders. As the essays in this volume clearly demonstrate, cultural traditions in Oceania arose as articulations within, but also with, contexts of historically evolved power relationships.

Miriam Kahn has turned her attention to transformations in the dance traditions of
Tahitians after their encounters with Cook and other early voyagers. She charts the run-up to the circumstance that in today’s context of mass tourism, Tahitian dancing is seen as emblematic of Tahitian culture and, against a backdrop of nuclear testing in French Polynesia, as the icon of “paradise.” For the Tahitian actors who creatively choreographed their presentations when interacting with the visitors, their dancing now carries a different meaning than it once did. Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris also focuses on aspects of dance and discusses its shifting meanings and values, albeit against the backdrop of migration. She tells how, after migrating to Australia, the Solien Besena, a people originally from Papua New Guinea, still consider their costume, choreography, and lyrics as inalienable wealth in exchange situations. It emerges, however, that present-day aspects of the dance traditions of the Solien Besena are the product of their interactions within, and also with, the global market. Martha Kaplan considers the global market as a context for transforming yet another product: water, sourced in Fiji and consumed in faraway New York. She traces how ethnic Fijians transform their cultural perceptions of water (and also of land and landowning) through their interactions with the Fiji Water bottling company. She goes on to study U.S. American perceptions of the consumption of Fiji Water. Her analysis makes clear that cultural traditions result on both sides from context-bound articulations of meanings—and the politics thus spawned. John Kelly studies other forms of politics of cultural transformations in Fiji, contextualizing these within the postcolonial manifestations of global and local processes. His focus is on concepts of great relevance for political interactions between ethnic Fijians and Indo-Fijians: the Fijian “mana,” glossed as “power,” and the Hindu concept of “shanti,” “peace.” In his opinion, these concepts have been developed in a gendered political dialogue into polarities, manifested today in male power demonstrations by ethnonationalist Fijians met by androgynous quietism on the Indo-Fijian side. Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon also looks at cultural transformations, this time with clear references to colonialism; she focuses on a different area with a different political status: the French Overseas Territory of Wallis-and-Futuna. She demonstrates how interactions between French law and the legal system of Wallis-‘Uvea, which is deemed traditional, have wrought transformations in the latter. Taking an actual case, she shows how much the specific meaning of justice depends on its associated context.

**Cultural Exchange and Identities**

Essays in the fourth section chiefly interlink themes resonant in many of the earlier contributions: intercultural exchanges and their role in the formation of collective and personal identities. Intercultural traditions in Oceania were already in place by precolonial times, becoming increasingly prominent in the colonial and postcolonial eras (e.g., Biersack 1995: 44; this volume; Merlan 2005). “The authenticity of the inside—the reputed source and fundament of ‘tradition’ as well as its continuities—invariably and everywhere results from historical struggles and manifestations of power: it is not the point from which these start,” states Wolfgang Kempf (1996: 13; translation W. K.; see Kempf 2002). In this context it is important to recognize that intercultural communication has long been accompanied by an awareness of cultural differences between
one’s own way of life and the ways of others (Jolly 1992b: 57–59). Such a recognition may be found in stories about culture and history—and not least about cultural traditions—which are, in turn, constitutive of identities (White 1991). Recognition of cultural difference does not necessarily preclude cultural exchanges. Interestingly, aspects of tradition that members of a cultural community regard as important for their collective identity may sometimes be the product of transculturation, as in the case of the maneapa-style meeting house in Tuvalu, which, in the convincing analysis of Michael Goldsmith (1985), displays clear traces of having been a cultural borrowing from Kiribati that was subsequently integrated into Tuvaluan society as a national symbol. Still, irrespective of what past interactions the cultural practices of the present may be traced to, once they become part of a community’s tradition they may play an important role in processes of identification. Here identification is taken to mean what Toon van Meijl (2004: 4) called “a shifting image of identity.” When members of a cultural community identify with their traditions, according to Hall (1986: 53), this can be understood as an articulation in the sense of subjects connecting with, and expressing themselves through, specific tradition discourses. This means that traditions as context-bound articulations also integrate identifications.

In his essay, Toon van Meijl proposes a new analytical concept for studying indigenous discourses on tradition: traditions as reconstructions of cultural practices analogous to similar actions performed in the past. His concept allows us to see just how much indigenous descriptions themselves use analogies in order to emphasize continuity. His studies of the Maori concepts of “iwi” (frequently glossed as “tribe”) and “aroha” (“love” in a broad sense) demonstrate that similarities between earlier meanings of these terms and today’s meanings are accentuated via analogies. Though the analogies do presuppose cultural transformations, the latter have been attenuated by the Maori politics of identity. This shows that analogies are deciding cofactors in constituting the traditions that acquire specific meaning as context-bound articulations. Paul van der Grijp is concerned with Tongan artists and the shifting meanings of their works of art, especially in contexts of an increasingly monetarized economy and the increased mobility of people, ideas, and finances. On the basis of artists’ biographies, he recounts how they—as a result of social interactions in different locations in Oceania and intercultural communications—came to re-introduce traditionally shaped art objects and to transform conventional forms so as to create new works of art. In this creative process, they exercised their agency to form for themselves individual and collective identities. Karen Nero also traces the meaning of material culture, focusing on treasures from eighteenth-century Palau that are now kept in the British Museum. She shows that these objects, for the Palauans, refer to exchange relationships between their ancestors and British voyagers of the time; moreover, they are still used today to maintain interchanges between the Belau National Museum and the British Museum. At the same time, the treasures also represent ancestral knowledge, which may well serve as a reference for fashioning present-day Palauan identities. This again demonstrates that it is social interactions then and now, as well as imaginative interactions between past and present, that lead to the creative arrangement of shifting meanings in changing contexts.
Acknowledgments

Warmest thanks to all who gave papers at the symposium, acted as discussants or chairs, or contributed comments from the floor. A number of colleagues who were invited to contribute to this volume were unfortunately unable to submit final texts. Since their oral presentations enlivened our discussions, it is only right to record their names: Adrienne Kaeppler spoke on “Objects or Collections? Collections in Search of a Subject, Objects in Search of their Histories”; Jacob Simet had scheduled a lecture on “Pacific Cultures as Heritage”; Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman discussed the topic “Modern Hula: A Crucible of Hawaiian Tradition”; Carol S. Ivory addressed us on “Reconfigurations/Recontextualizations of Art and Identity in the Marquesas Islands (Te Henua Enana/Te Fenua Enata)”; and Deborah Waite weighed in with “The Imaging and Virtual Repatriation of ‘A’a (Rurutu Island, Austral Islands).” I additionally owe much to Anne D’Alleva, Jerome Feldman, Christian Feest, Paul van der Grijp, David Hanlon, Alan Howard, and Jacquelyn Lewis-Harris, all of whom chaired one or another of the panels at the symposium and who enthusiastically discussed the papers presented there. For carefully reading and commenting on this introduction, I wish to thank Aletta Biersack, Peter Hempenstall, David Hanlon, Margaret Jolly, Wolfgang Kempf, Bruce Allen, and two anonymous readers, who provided me with very valuable suggestions. As always, my deepest gratitude is with the Ngaing of Papua New Guinea and the Banabans in Fiji (also on Banaba in Kiribati), who welcomed me in their midst, thus creating the most important context of all for understanding their traditions.

Notes

1. Sincerest thanks to Marka and all other Ngaing interlocutors for their kind explanations.
2. Handler and Linnekin (1984: 274) cite as an example the classical definition of A. L. Kroeber (1948: 411): “tradition is the ‘internal handing on through time’ of culture traits.”
3. Jocelyn Linnekin and Richard Handler had earlier, in their respective studies on Hawai‘i and on Canada’s Quebec, presented tradition as a symbolic process. Reflected in their conception is the fact that traditions arise as a result of symbolic ascriptions (Handler and Linnekin 1984).
4. Agency means the ability human actors have to bring influence and power to bear on others, while being themselves exposed to the power of these same others and also to that of the cultural systems involved (Ortner 1984: 144–145; 1999: 146–147; Strathern 1987: 22–23).
5. The South Seas online resource can be found at http://southseas.nla.gov.au.

References

Bräuchler, Birgit, and Thomas Widlok. 2007. “Die Revitalisierung von Tradition: Im (Ver-)Handlungs-
feld zwischen staatlichem und lokalem Recht.” In Die Revitalisierung von Tradition/ 
The Revitalisation of Tradition, edited by Birgit Bräuchler and Thomas Widlok. Thematic 


Chicago: The Dorsey Press.

mations of Polynesian Culture, edited by Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman, 151–175. 
Auckland: The Polynesian Society.

Hall, Stuart. 1980. “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance.” In Sociological 


Hanlon, David. 1994. “Patterns of Colonial Rule in Micronesia.” In Tides of History: The 
Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century, edited by K. R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. 
Lal, 93–118. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

Hanlon, David, and Geoffrey M. White. 2000. “Introduction.” In Voyaging through the Con-
temporary Pacific, edited by David Hanlon and Geoffrey M. White, 1–21. Lanham, Md.: 
Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.


James Cook: Gifts and Treasures from the South Seas; The Cook/Forster Collection, Göttingen. Gaben und Schätze aus der Südsee; Die Göttinger Sammlung Cook/Forster (English-German edition), edited by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and Gundolf Krüger, 11–29. Munich: 
Prestel.
Stephen Little, Peter Ruthenberg, Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, and Gundolf Krüger, 20–35. 
Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts.

No. 2:1–10. Research Centre for Southwest Pacific Studies. La Trobe University.
———. 2000. “Releasing the Voices: Historicizing Colonial Encounters in the Pacific.” In Remem-

Suva: The Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.

Hereniko, Vilsoni. 2000. “Indigenous Knowledge and Academic Imperialism.” In Remem-
brance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History, edited by Robert Borofsky, 78–91. Honolu-
lu: University of Hawai‘i Press.


Introduction


