

## Of Journals and Journeys: Reflections

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Scholarly journals occupy a necessary, if often underestimated, place in the life of the academy. The content of some (mostly older) journals is dictated by disciplinary structures (and strictures), especially when they are the flagships of the field or the publishing arm of professional associations. Others transgress disciplinary boundaries, advocate certain causes (indigenous rights, for example, or the environment) and experiment with the prevailing modes of thought. Yet others adopt a broad church approach and welcome diversity and difference among their contributors. But all, in their own ways, encourage or constrain particular kinds of submissions and scholarly enquiries. In doing so, they both reflect the state of the field as well as help shape it. With the advent of new technology in the last two decades and new ways of practising scholarship, it is timely to reflect on the intellectual and cultural role academic journals play today.

I have chosen for my reflection *The Journal of Pacific History* (*JPH*) with which I have been variously associated since the early 1980s – as correspondent, editorial board member and editor.<sup>2</sup> The journal has been in continuous publication since 1966 and is still the only scholarly journal concerned primarily with the history of the Pacific Islands. It is the flagship of the field, and for many years,

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally presented to a conference on Journals organised at Columbia University, New York, by Gyatri Spivak. It was written on the eve of my retirement as editor of the *Journal of Pacific History*. I am grateful to Doug Munro and Vicki Lucker for comments on an earlier draft, which improved it immensely.

<sup>2</sup> For the record, I serve on the Editorial Boards of *Compass* (UK), *Pacific Affairs* (Canada), *The Contemporary Pacific* (USA), and Chair the Editorial Board of *Fijian Studies* (Fiji).

and for many of my generation, *the* place to publish to get noticed and to get ahead. It is widely regarded as the arbiter of scholarly quality and respectability. It relates as well as reflects the dominant scholarly trends in the field. *JPH* is a wonderful exemplar of a particular kind of narrative historical writing that emerged in the post-WW II period.

*JPH* at its inception was like other mainstream scholarly journals in its tone, content and geographical as well as intellectual insularity. This was the way things were done in the ‘long 1960s’ which saw the advent (some might say proliferation) of new scholarly journals. It was a major development on the academic scene made possible by the phenomenal growth of the university sector across the western world. Most were probably area-oriented journals, such as *JPH* (to cater for what had become a specialisation in its own right), *Journal of African History* and the *New Zealand Journal of History*, but there was a fair sprinkling of thematic journals as well, such as the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (UK), and *Journal of Social History and Comparative Studies in Society and History* (USA). Some of these journals over time and in response to increasing volume and diversity of scholarly output became specialised. So did older ones such as the *Journal of Polynesian Society* (NZ) and what is now the *Australian Historical Studies* (Munro, 1996: 47-8). In the 1960s and through to the mid-1970s, there was a fair bit of cross-over, but evermore the journals catered for niche-markets. Sometimes, however, the reverse occurred, as in the case of *Labour History*, which initially catered for trade union history but has since branched out amorously.

Despite its conventional character, *JPH* was eclectic from the outset. It welcomed contribution from scholars working in many fields but whose principal site of investigation was the Pacific islands. Over the years, it published articles by, apart from historians, archaeologists, demographers, strategic studies specialists, practitioners of theatre studies, anthropologists, political scientists, international affairs experts, linguists, educationists, journalists, administrators, lawyers, independent scholars, and more. In this way, the journal not only disseminated scholarship about the islands, which of course was its principal mission, but also facilitated communication in a wide-ranging and hugely dispersed community of people with a common general or specialist interest in the island region. This role in the early years was important, especially as there were few other outlets for information on and scholarship about the Pa-

cific islands until the 1970s. The 'broad church' tradition has continued, though the availability in recent years of more specialist scholarly outlets has lessened dependence on the *JPH* as the leading publisher of Pacific social science research.<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning, the *JPH* had certain innovative features which have persisted, to the great advantage of researchers of the early days but perhaps with declining relevance now in the age of cyberspace. In addition to the main peer-reviewed articles, book reviews and longer review articles, the journal had regular contributions on 'Current Developments in the Pacific' (now renamed 'Pacific Currents') in the islands, mostly about constitutional and political issues. The section served not only a valuable archival purpose, but also kept historians and readers of the journal abreast of contemporary developments about which they might otherwise have not known. This novel feature was not surprising given that one of its founding editors, J W Davidson, about whom more is discussed later, was intimately involved in the political affairs of the islands then on the threshold of independence and were keen to make sense of recent events whose historical antecedents they were researching.

Today, 'Pacific Currents' no longer forms a regular part of the journal. Other journals, notably *The Contemporary Pacific*, provide a regular comprehensive coverage of political developments across the whole region as well as country-by-country. Moreover, the internet provides an avalanche of factual information through newspaper websites, dedicated blogsites and email correspondence that renders detailed, minute factual chronicling of political developments redundant. The facts are plentiful and easily accessible. There is, however, room for interpretive, synthesising assessment, and the journal has an important role to play in this. Indeed, this may be its most important role in this regard: to make sense of things, to provide perspective and context, to elucidate patterns that daily journalism is unable by its very nature to do.

The second innovative feature of the *JPH* was its bibliographic section. The journal published, from the very beginning, a comprehensive 'Publications Section,' and from 1979 in a separate publication called 'Pacific History: Bibliography and Comment, which (never satisfactory as a separate publication, and incorporated back into the journal around 1990) brought to the attention of readers a

<sup>3</sup> To name a few: *Pacific Studies* and *The Contemporary Pacific* (Hawaii), and *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* (New Zealand).

vast range of published and unpublished material relating to the Pacific islands, and not only to Pacific islands history but to a whole range of disciplines concerned with the island region. The section listed theses and dissertations from all parts of the world where Pacific studies was done, which was immensely beneficial to researchers. Equally valuable, for a similar reason, was the publication of information about bibliographies and indexes, reference works, biographies and memoirs, current developments and political studies, publications in different disciplines, book chapters and articles as well as publications on different island groups in the region. In an era without Google, the bibliographic service was a god-send. The internet has now usurped that function, and it might be desirable to jettison it and dedicate the saved space to some other purpose.

The *JPH* has played a foundational role in the institutionalisation of knowledge about the Pacific islands. The journal has a particular history, unique even. The role of personalities and institutions which shaped its character and the particular historical context in which it appeared have had a decisive shaping influence on its orientation. The history of the sub-discipline and the particular nature of the journal are inter-twined; it is difficult to talk about one without talking about the other.

The story of the emergence of Pacific islands history as a specialty in its own right is too well known to repeat here. Its manifesto is spelled out by JW Davidson in his 1954 inaugural lecture, a revised version of which was published twelve years later in the first issue of the journal in 1966 (Davidson, 1966). The focus of new historical research under his leadership was not the islanders' helplessness and vulnerability. The thrust of the new research was to question the validity of the tragic tale of culture contact most forcefully asserted by popular writer Alan Moorehead in his widely read (and narrowly criticised) book, *Fatal Impact* (1968). In books and monographs that followed and articles in successive issues of *JPH* islander-agency was strenuously asserted and sought to be demonstrated, whether, for instance, in the case of Pacific island labour recruiting or in various types of trading activities that took place in the islands, such as sandalwood, beche-de-mer or coconut oil or in stories of conversion to Christianity.

The new published research, which became the new orthodoxy, was almost triumphalist in its proclamations. It was heresy to suggest the counter view point: that islanders did not always triumph, that diseases and alcohol and guns took their toll and that in

settler societies (New Zealand, New Caledonia, Australia, and Hawaii) indigenous communities were dispossessed of their lands and succumbed to the demands of outsiders. Cultural and social structures were subverted for the administrative interests and purposes of the colonial powers. Gunboat diplomacy and various pacification projects told their own sad stories of demise and destruction. The islands' sovereignty did come to an end. All this, too, was inescapably a part of Pacific history though not on the agenda of its practitioners.<sup>4</sup> The new Davidson focus had done well to restore a semblance of balance to the historiographical debate surrounding the early cultural encounters in the Pacific islands, but the more tragic, as opposed to triumphalist, view, was rarely aired in *JPH*.

There were several reasons for this. One was that the actual practitioners of Pacific history, nearly all of whom in the early years came from Canberra, were active proponents of the new orthodoxy. In the circumstances, their rejection of the tragic view was not surprising. But there was another reason. There was a tendency to view the Pacific past through a frankly romantic prism. This was certainly the case with both Davidson and Maude. They had direct personal experience of the islands, mixed well with the island elite, and sympathetically identified with their concerns and aspirations. All around them, they saw culturally vibrant, self-sufficient communities and island dignitaries at ease in the modern world. They hadn't succumbed, nor had their lives been irretrievably altered. All this was true, but up to a point. Nonetheless, the romantic gaze ignored the distressing realities in the settler societies.

Polynesia featured prominently in the early work, including Fiji, partly because the level and intensity of the encounter with the outside world was greatest and was, moreover, amply documented and accessible in metropolitan repositories. Melanesia featured less prominently for a variety of reasons. Melanesian geography, cultural complexity, linguistic diversity and malaria defeated many a colonial design.<sup>5</sup> Their stories of cultural encounters with the outside world were less easily assimilated into neat narratives of historical encounters. The most important research work on Papua New

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion, see Lal (2007).

<sup>5</sup> As historian Stewart Firth has pointed this out on a number of occasions. See Firth (1983).

Guinea came not from Davidson's department but from elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

*JPH* reflected the lines of exclusion and inclusion which developed over time. There was also a narrowing in the geographical area which came within the purview of the journal. In time, a journal of 'Pacific History' became, in effect, a journal of 'Pacific islands history.' The shift had significant implications. Davidson, I think, had a larger, more inclusive definition of the 'Pacific' in mind, which embraced Southeast Asia and what we now call the Pacific Rim. In the 1950s, he had even proposed adding South Asia to his department of Pacific history, a battle he lost with the indomitable Sir Keith Hancock, who annexed scholarship on the subcontinent to his own empire.<sup>7</sup>

As a demonstration of his more inclusive intent, Davidson welcomed in his own department of Pacific history the presence of historians of Southeast Asia,<sup>8</sup> believing that island nations had problems in common which could potentially form the basis for comparative research. But that was not to be. In the early issues of the journal there was hardly anything on the regions bordering the islands, not even Southeast Asia where some comparative work might have been expected. Nor was there anything on the larger problems of the Pacific islands in scholarly journals published elsewhere. Mutually assured demarcation was the order of the day, not only in the Pacific but in the academic world globally.<sup>9</sup>

The editors of *JPH* had promised that the journal would welcome 'articles on other geographical regions, such as Africa and Southeast Asia, or of a theoretical character where these are concerned with problems of significance in the Pacific' (*JPH*, 1966: 3) But the welcome remained largely unfulfilled. There were many reasons. The deliberate and continuing focus on the island Pacific to

<sup>6</sup> Hank Nelson (UPNG), Bill Gammage (ANU), Stewart Firth (Oxford). JD Legge and Francis West were the earlier scholars. West, although based in Davidson's department, was not a member of the 'Davidson School.' Others included Jim Griffin, Charles Rowley, Ian Willis, Nigel Oram.

<sup>7</sup> See Lal and Ley (2006: 5). ANU Interim Council in 1951 stated that India would be within the ambit of the Research School of Pacific Studies 'insofar as developments [there] affect Australia and Pacific Islands territories.' See De-noon (1996: 203).

<sup>8</sup> In 1973, the department was renamed the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History and eventually Division of Pacific and Asian History.

<sup>9</sup> Ballard (1999) identifies Indonesia/PNG boundary as the break between Asia/Pacific, and one most respected by academics.

the virtual exclusion of anything else was one, the detailed explication of a particular historical problem in one island after another. Another was the conscious rejection of the broader imperial framework which, together with the increasing specialisation of the subject 'led to the tendency to remove the history of the Pacific Islands (and especially Pacific island history' from the broader context of international influence and change,' as Barrie Macdonald has suggested (1996: 32). Other experiences and models for comparative purposes were disregarded; geographical boundaries framed the boundaries of scholarly discourse.

A further contributing factor was the location of the journal's editorial board itself. For more than two decades, the *JPH* was housed in, and published by, the Department of Pacific history at the Australian National University. All its editorial board members were Canberra-based research only academics. The editors were required to be 'tenured members' of the academic staff of the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian history who voluntarily agreed in their personal capacity to edit the journal. The proprietorial attitude of the staff towards the journal is understandable for after all, it was their department which bore the cost of preparing the journal for publication. Jim Davidson insisted that part of his earnings from commissions should go to the journal (Munro, 2013: 69).

Over time, *JPH* acquired a reputation as the publisher of solidly researched, factual pieces 'written in the ordinary language of civilized communication,' as the editorial in the first issue promised, in order to reach a wide audience. The *JPH* remains, for the most part, a model of lucid scholarly writing, though it did not have as wide a reach as it was hoped. It is the fate of many scholarly journals to quietly gather dust on the library shelves, read in hard copy, if read at all, by a small and gradually diminishing number of researchers. *JPH* is not an exception to this unhappy trend, although it is currently available online in 8000 libraries and research institutions around the world, thanks to the publishing prowess and reach of Routledge's Taylor and Francis Group. Like so many of my generation, I prefer an attractively produced, aesthetically pleasing hard copy of a journal or a book as an essential vehicle of scholarly discourse, indeed, as an essential apparatus of scholarly communication generally. But I am not sure if the journal in hard copy retains its importance as an integral part of the cultural infrastructure within which we all work, especially in competition with the offerings of the internet.

There was a strong early aversion to theory although this trend was not peculiar to Pacific historians, and this was reflected in the journal. The dominant trend in the historical profession throughout the Anglo-Australasian world in the post-WWII years was empiricist, realist and literary. The historian, so it was said approvingly, 'was failed novelist,' whose primary task was to capture the particularities of the lived human experience in the past through skilled, imaginative reconstruction. A GM Trevelyan, perhaps, or a Lord Macaulay or JH Plumb was held up as the ultimate model to aspire for (though of course not ever expecting to actually achieve it). Davidson was not averse to theory, according to Niel Gunson (1992), but he believed that theory should derive from experience, rather than the other way around. However, as one Pacific historian has said to me, 'The problem for Pacific Islands history under Davidson was that it was generally derivative in its theory and it then did not take the Pacific island cases to feed back into and modify that theory.'<sup>10</sup>

Deryck Scarr, Davidson's student and long time editor of the journal, was positively hostile to any theory, especially from Pacific historians who were 'fringe dwellers' and 'castaways in or from anthropological shallows,' who were given, he said, to 'transcendentalising the trivial' (1990: 236).<sup>11</sup> Greg Denning was correct to note that Pacific 'Research is dominated by a narrow geographic area, an institution, a period. History is what happens or what the sources let us know what happens within those limitations. No problem, no theory, no methodology, takes the researcher outside those confines.' Even the great debates of our time, such as those between Derek Freeman and Margaret Mead or Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere escaped the pages of the journal, though it may be argued that since the debate focused largely around issues of anthropological theory, and was therefore of tangential concern to a history journal.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Comment on a draft of this paper. I have preferred to keep the name anonymous.

<sup>11</sup> See also Scarr (1992: 33).

<sup>12</sup> Except for a review article by Kerry Howe on the Sahlins-Obeyesekere debate and an earlier one on Derek Freeman's book, *The Making of Margaret Mead*. The latter looked at the book's reception by the American anthropological fraternity and came down largely on Derek's side.

Aversion to theory aside, there was a reluctance to look inwards to assess research directions throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Nicholas Thomas' critique of Pacific historiography appeared in 1990 (Thomas, 1990) and several others followed. Pacific historians engaged with overarching questions of historiography, such as Kerry Howe and Doug Munro, found other publication outlets such as *Pacific Studies*, the *Journal of Social History* and the *New Zealand Journal of History*. Hank Nelson has written several theoretical pieces, but none of them published in the journal, except for his *Kokoda* and *Comfort Women*. 'Not sure why,' he says when asked why the journal was not the outlet for his theoretical articles. These were Howe's words exactly. My own Fiji theoretical pieces on the nature of the indenture experience in Fiji and elsewhere were published elsewhere, perhaps from the feeling that *JPH* might not be interested. The assumption could have been wrong, but they certainly informed my decision to seek other outlets for my more reflective theoretical papers. 'Despite the intimacy of the early years, interdisciplinary relations have been cordial rather than creative,' notes Donald Denoon (1996: 206).

The trend was visible enough for Kerry Howe, one of the more historiographically-minded Pacific historians, to raise the alarm of 'monograph myopia' endangering the field. Noting that 'modern Pacific islands history is in danger of becoming a rather pleasant, self-indulgent backwater,' he added that 'researchers have been so diligently ferreting out and publishing their detailed findings that a good many have lost any basic sense of direction,' 'finding out more and more about less and less' (Howe, 1979: 83). That critique was published not in *JPH* but in *Pacific Studies*. I distinctly recall murmurs of disapproval of the article by some Pacific historians in the Coombs Building long after it was published as being too preachy and programmatic. There were many islands of history in the world's largest ocean, but without an overarching oceanic view.<sup>13</sup> The consensus among historians was that too much was still unknown, there was still much to do, new facts to discover, hitherto untouched topics to explore, that the field had not yet reached the stage for historiographical introspection. 'Do history, not talk about

<sup>13</sup> That came in OHK Spate's majestic three volume history of the oceanic Pacific: *The Pacific Since Magellan* (*The Spanish Lake*, vol 1; *Monopolists and Freebooters*, vol. 2, and *Paradise Lost and found*, vol. 3). See also Spate (1988). Spate was a geographer turned historian.

it,' was how one old timer put it to me.

Publishing richly researched and well written texts was a task that *JPH* performed, and continues to perform, exceedingly well, and there are many practitioners who would prefer to keep things that way, safe from the intrusions of non-historians, especially from the adjacent fields of 'cultural studies.' The journal also promoted certain ideological agendas. I have already mentioned the longstanding advocacy of islander agency through minutely studied examples of culture contact studies which dominated the early pages of the journal. Only one article (by literary scholar WH Pearson) questioning this thesis ever appeared in the journal though it has to be said that there were probably no contrary views to express, given Canberra's total dominance of the field. Critiques came much later, and largely from those already outside the boundary (Pearson, 1969).

There was also a passionate celebration of the decolonisation process under way in the 1960s and the subsequent emergence of the independent nation states in the islands. Davidson told his biographer, Doug Munro, that he would not countenance the publication of material critical of the decolonising project (Personal communication from Doug Munro). Their authors could seek other outlets. Davidson himself was deeply involved in advising several island states on their path to independence, beginning with Western Samoa in 1959, followed by the Cook Islands, Nauru, American Micronesia and Papua New Guinea. His enthusiasm 'expressed the sense of liberal scholars that decolonisation was desirable and inevitable, and the link between historical agency and the recovery of sovereignty was often explicit' (Denoon, 1995: ix). And so it remained for a long time.

Davidson's colleague and co-founding editor of the journal, Harry Maude, went a step further. Pacific history, he said, 'is not only a fascinating specialization in its own right, studying a regional laboratory of historical variables in miniature that will enable it to make an increasing contribution to the discipline as a whole, but that it also has a very practical and therapeutic role to enact in assisting the rehabilitation of the Pacific peoples at the end of a traumatic era of European political, economic and technological ascendancy by renewing their self-respect and providing them with a secure historical base from which to play their part as responsible citizens of independent or self-governing communities in a new world' (Maude, 1971: 24). This approach underpinned the historical agenda, and the pages of the journal carried few, if any, major criticisms of the Pa-

cific islanders. It was tantamount to heresy to do so.

The romantic gaze continued until fissures began to appear in some of the post-colonial states afflicted with bad governance, endemic corruption, mismanagement of state resources, violence and coups. The event which most effectively demonstrated disjunction in the islands was the Fiji coup of 1987. Continuing instability in the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea showed that Pacific islanders were not romantic 'others' but people just as capable of violence and greed as human beings everywhere. The cleavages papered over by the colonial rule, began to fray. 'An occasional and unfortunate consequence of the search for indigenous agency' writes Donald Denoon, 'was the assertion of a homogenous Islander agenda, minimising the diversity of interests spawned by gender, ethnicity and social condition' (1996: ix). Political convulsion in the post-colonial states corrected the earlier misperceptions and brought into view the social complexity in the islands that lay hidden beneath the surface.

Over the last decade or so, a number of developments have helped re-shape the character of the journal. One is the expansion of the editorial board in the 1990s, following the agreement that one of the editors of the journal should come from outside Canberra. This was an acknowledgement that there were other centres around the world, especially in New Zealand and Hawaii, where important historical research was being done. Canberra's monopoly hold on Pacific historical knowledge had been successfully contested, and the invitation to 'outsiders' on the board was a tacit acknowledgment of this fact. The expansion of the editorial board was also facilitated by the advent of new internet technology, though with some trepidation, long since dissipated, about the protection of the confidentiality of submission to the journal. The editorial process was revolutionised.

Expanding the editorial base of the journal is a welcome development. The journal now has several younger scholars, several women, some from the Pacific islands themselves. It is hoped that their induction will not only inject fresh perspectives and enthusiasm about the field but also introduce to the field new approaches from adjacent fields where many work. The blurring of disciplinary boundaries is vital for the good health of the discipline. Without it, we will probably lose many of the younger scholars and become even more marginal to broader debates taking place in the profession.

There is room for optimism. In recent years, the journal has published innovative and theoretically sophisticated research on topics which once might not have been considered 'proper history'. For example, 'No passports necessary: music, record covers and vicarious tourism in post-war Hawaii,' or 'Gendered objects: embodiments of colonial collecting in Dutch New Guinea,' or 'The impacts of Indonesia's civil war and the US-Soviet tug of war over Indonesia on Australian diplomacy towards West New Guinea.' The geographical scope of the latter two articles is interesting and encouraging. *JPH* will continue to publish mainstream articles, and that is to be expected; but the gradual appearance in the journal's pages of articles on non-traditional areas and topics is to be welcomed and encouraged.

Another important development has been the engagement of many scholars with comparative and theoretical research. There are many Pacific historians whose works have reached beyond the pages of Pacific journals. To mention just a few names, Paul D'Arcy's work on the Pacific Ocean has generated much interest and debate in the fields of environmental and maritime history.<sup>14</sup> Doug Munro (1993) attempted to relate his extensive work in Pacific labour history to broader issues in the history of global labour migration. Bronwen Douglas' work (2006) on race and cultural encounters in Oceania, among many others, has found a large audience beyond the Pacific. Chris Ballard's work has intersected with the adjacent fields of archaeology and anthropology. Hank Nelson has written on the memories of the Second World War, on 'comfort Women and on 'Kokoda' which have fed into major international scholarly and public debates. Donald Denoon has published both on Pacific islands history as well as on settler societies.<sup>15</sup> Niel Gunson has been interested in Christian missionary history generally as well as the history of the Aboriginal community in Australia. My own work on the history of Indian indenture in Fiji has proved useful to scholars of the Indian indenture experience in other parts of the world. But *JPH* is not by and large where such comparative or theo-

<sup>14</sup> His book, *People of the Sea* attracted a 8-person (most non-Pacific specialists) 60-page book review roundtable in the world's top maritime history journal, *International Journal of Maritime History*. A shorter 3-person book review appeared in *JPH* 44(1) (2008).

<sup>15</sup> These are all members of the Division of Pacific and Asian History at ANU. There are scholars at other institutions who are doing similar work.

retical research first appeared.

The question is why not? A part of the reason may be that they find other outlets culturally and intellectually more congenial and publish their research through documentaries and films.<sup>16</sup> It is also possible that the reputation of the journal as the publisher of a particular kind of research, one which might not look altogether favourably on research from the field of postcolonial thought or cultural studies, could be a factor. I think the anxiety is misplaced, especially now when many editorial board members are sympathetic to, and practitioners of, new approaches. Perhaps, these scholars find more appropriate outlets, such as *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, which gives them a much larger readership and connects their work comfortably to those being done in adjacent fields.

Some other indigenous scholars prefer to express themselves through alternative genres of conversations and interviews and dialogue pieces that often express personal opinions and reflections and not archive-based historical accounts favoured by scholarly journals.<sup>17</sup> For them, too, a refereed scholarly outlet may be seen as inappropriate, perhaps even irrelevant. Various websites offer other opportunities. Being published in a refereed scholarly journal with limited circulation and readership is not now necessarily the only way to upward scholarly mobility. The nature of scholarship in the islands has changed, and I am not sure that academic journals have kept pace. *JPH* has 'Comments' section which invites more reflective, perhaps even contentious pieces from contributors. This could become a forum to invite contributions from alternative perspectives from scholars in the islands and beyond. This is not bending over 'blackwards' to use the words of a former colleague; it is to acknowledge a gap and to seek ways of addressing it.

Area-focused journals, whether *The Journal of Pacific History* or any other, have played a particular role in giving identity to regional scholarship. That is their primary purpose and their great strength. They are therefore understandably protective of their niche market. Without it, they would lose their distinctive character. But

<sup>16</sup> Such as Vince Diaz's 1997 'Sacred Vessels: Navigating tradition and Identity in Micronesia,' a 29 minute video documentary about the survival of traditional seafaring in Pulawat, Central Carolines, and its revival in Guam. Salesa published Salesa (2001), and other articles in the *New Zealand of History*.

<sup>17</sup> See the 'Dialogue' section of *The Contemporary Pacific: A Journal of Island Affairs*. See also Teaiwa, Nicole, and Durutalo (1996).

the preoccupation with the nation-state as the main point of reference, the main framework for scholarly discourse, can also be problematic. Focus on a particular region may have had some validity, or therapeutic value in Maude's terms in the past, but it is important to recognise the changed circumstances. The islands have been independent for over three decades. They are now deeply enmeshed in world affairs. The currents of globalisation lap loudly and clearly on island shores.

There are more Cook Islanders, Samoans, Tokelauns, Niuanans, living in New Zealand and more Torres Strait Islanders living in mainland Australia. The centre of gravity for Fiji's Indo-Fijian community has shifted to North America and Australia and New Zealand. The emergence of these diasporic communities has been one of the more remarkable if unremarked social phenomena of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The contribution that the migrant communities make to the economy of their island homes is enormous (see Watters, 1987). The islander-oriented approach of the past has lost its relevance. How, indeed, do you define a 'Pacific Islander,' someone still living in the islands or someone found in the metropolitan areas? Does one cease to be a Pacific islander upon leaving the islands for other places? What about mixed-race communities which can exercise choice over identity? Sooner rather than later, the emergence and experience of these diasporic, transmigrant communities will have to become the concern of scholars. The broadening of borders will, one hopes, also facilitate comparative research across a whole range of areas which will serve to underline both the uniqueness as well as the universality of the Pacific islands historical experience.

'We live in a constantly dissolving moment as the world leaps boundaries of technological and cultural change which appeared uncrossable just a few years ago,' writes Peter Hempenstall. 'Our certainties crack open, our confidence about history is undermined. We have no 'History' any more, just discourses about complex groups and communities, whose foundations are re-drawn with every twist in intellectual fashion in the West, or around militant senses of ethnicity and cultural uniqueness in the Islands' (Hempenstall, 2001: 1). This sentiment will be shared by many, but how do we cope with the complexity of scholarship in today's world?

There is need for change, but change is not easily achieved. A part of the problem lies with us. Jim Davidson was right when he observed that at a certain level, historians (and, I might add, editors

of history journals) are 'intellectual laggards, influenced more by the established outlines of their subject than by the form of the contemporary desire to illuminate the present through an understanding of the past.' 'All too often,' he went on, 'they devote themselves to the answering of questions that were first asked by members of earlier generations' (Davidson, 1966: 21). The nature of knowing itself has changed, been profoundly affected by modern technology. Methods and protocols of scholarly enquiry have changed. Our assumptions and understandings of what constitutes knowledge have changed. The first step forward would be the acknowledgement of this fundamental change.

While academic departments may be slow to react to change, a journal such as the *JPH* could take the lead and show the value and potential of comparative research. A special issue on diasporas, for instance, which is the subject considerable contemporary appeal around which a sophisticated body of theoretical literature has developed, could have much appeal to scholars in anthropology, cultural studies, demography, sociology and post colonialism. One could trace the migration roots and routes (Polynesians in New Zealand, Islander communities in Australia, Asian communities in Fiji, Hawai'i and elsewhere); questions of cultural identity and social change; the impact of remittance economy on small island states; literary representation of immigrants' experiences; the tensions between the demands of indigenous rights and the rights of the more recent arrived migrants. The centrality of land issues; about ownership and access in communities throughout the Pacific and South-east Asia is another topic which could be productive of comparative research.

The *JPH* has regularly used the format of a special issue to address a particular problem or issue from a variety of multidisciplinary perspectives (in the sense of scholars from a number of disciplines examining a particular aspect of the problem (juxtaposition) rather than through integrating interdisciplinarity in their own analyses (integration). Recent special issues have been on the political crisis in the Solomon Islands and on Colonial Photography. There is a tension between the production of 'regular' issues and 'special' issues, but I believe the advent of 'regular special issues' could be one fruitful way to encourage innovative approaches.

'How can unwritten histories of gender, and in particular colonial histories, be recovered from oblivion,' asks Anna-Karina Hermkens in a recent issue of *JPH* (Harmkens, 2007). It is a ques-

tion many Pacific island scholars have asked over and over again, including the novelist Albert Wendt. 'If we look at written Pacific history we find that most of it is the work of *papalagi*/outsiders, and most of it is based on records written and kept by *papalagi* explorers/missionaries/clerks/etc. So we can say that that history is a *papalagi* history of themselves and their activities in our region; it is an embodiment of their memories/perceptions/ and interpretations of the Pacific' (Wendt, 1987: 86; see also Wendt (1983)).' He advocates a more creative, imaginative engagement with the past. Wendt has a point though the question needs to be asked: why have Pacific Islanders not engaged with their past, either creatively or historically? Blaming the *papalagi* is an easy escape route.

Tongan anthropologist and social philosopher Epele Hau'ofa has written about the problems of aid and development in the Pacific islands using the devices of fiction.<sup>18</sup> Like Wendt, he, too, is searching for ways of authentically representing the past. 'We could learn from the works of ethnographic historians and historical anthropologists, as well as from mainline historians, but we Oceanians must find ways of reconstructing our pasts that are our own,' he writes. 'Our histories do not begin with the coming of Europeans. If we continue to rely for the reconstructions of our remote pasts mainly on the works of archaeologists, linguists, botanists, zoologists, and the like, we will still be trapped with our pasts as pre-history.' Instead, Hau'ofa wants to 'resort very seriously to our ecologically based oral history' (2000: 456).<sup>19</sup>

I myself have been concerned in recent years about how to write historically about a past where written documents do not exist and social memory is not properly archived. I have used the device of 'faction,' that is, methods of fiction to recapture the truth of the lived human experience. As I have written elsewhere, in this endeavour, 'the writer gives his solemn word to tell the truth as he sees it. He is on oath. The rules of engagement here are more flexible; there is space for imaginative reconstruction and rumination. But all within limits.' The material is given to the writer 'and preserving its essential truth (as opposed to its factual accuracy) is his primary

<sup>18</sup> See especially his *Tales of the Tikongs*.

<sup>19</sup> This collection has some other stimulating recollections by Pacific island scholars on questions of scholarship and epistemology.



concern' (Lal, 2008).<sup>20</sup>

The kind of imaginative reconstruction of the past I enjoy is not peculiar to my part of the world. In recent years, it has become a global phenomenon. 'The boundaries between history and fiction have blurred,' writes Mark McKenna about the situation in Australia and elsewhere. David Malouf is quoted expressing a view that is apparently widely shared: 'Our only way of grasping our history – and by history I really mean what happened to us, and what determines what we are now and where we are now – the only way of really coming to terms with that is by people's entering into it in their imagination, not by the world of facts, but by being there' (McKenna, 2006). The broader point I am trying to make is that increasingly the discipline of history is practised in a whole variety of ways which do not always find a place in mainstream academic journals. A special issue of *JPH*, or any other similar outlet, could profitably bring this emerging phenomenon into sharper relief.

But reality is reality. Editors inspect what they get, not what they expect, as my once co-editor Kerry Howe has said somewhere. I do not know how other journals work, but *The Journal of Pacific History* has, certainly in the last decade or so, become a very democratic enterprise. Our editorial board members, located in various parts of the world, read as many of the submissions to the journal as they can and provide advice to the editors. The editors ultimately make their decision based on the advice they receive, and they communicate their decision to the editorial board. They can nudge and encourage, but they work within the collegial framework of participatory democracy. This ensures transparency and fairness in the review process.

The editors' power to lead is limited, as is their tenure at the helm, which is limited in the case of *JPH* to three year periods to prevent the entrenchment of power in a single hand. Given the structure and distribution of responsibility on the editorial board, the opportunity for an editor to stamp his or her mark on the character of the journal is limited. Change will come about only with the consent of the editorial board. There are also practicalities to consider. It should also be stressed that for most editors that I know, journal editing is a labour of love, done in conjunction with the numerous responsibilities they carry in their fulltime jobs. Sometimes, simply

<sup>20</sup> This book and *Mr Tulsi's Store: A Fijian Journey* (2001) are my attempt at faction writing.

getting an issue to the publishers on time is no mean achievement.

The institutional and administrative constraints are many and real, but they should not stifle creative thought about where we might go. 'In our own time,' JW Davidson wrote, 'the European Age has ended. And the world order that has emerged is one in which the peoples of all countries lay claim to equal recognition, in terms of legal rights and human dignity' (1966: 21). For the Pacific historian, he continued, 'this change has consequences of fundamental importance. His central concern must be with the character of this transformation.' It was in this historical and political context that *The Journal of Pacific History* was born. But both the context and the time have changed. The nascent nation states of the decolonisation era struggle to cope with the challenges of globalisation and internal problems of governance and lawlessness. Our insularity has diminished. Travel and technology have complicated essentialised ethnographic notions of place and space, disturbed certainties. The era of romance and innocence about the islands ended a long time ago. Similarly, new approaches alert us to the complexities of knowledge and of ways of knowing. Borders and boundaries, both physical and intellectual, which once seemed sacrosanct, are being transgressed with alacrity. Academic publications such as scholarly journals have a moral as well as intellectual responsibility to reflect the transformed and transforming character of our own age with truth and accuracy and eloquence.

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