P. van der Grijp

T. van Meijl

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INTRODUCTION: POLITICS, TRADITION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC

This special issue¹ contains a selection of papers that were originally presented at the First European Colloquium on Pacific Studies, which was organized by the newly established Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands, in December 1992. The colloquium aimed to bring together European scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds who are engaged in research in the Pacific. The conference attracted 150 people, most of whom were affiliated with European research institutions, but included a considerable number of people from the USA, Canada, and, of course, the Pacific, including Australia.²

The topic of the conference, *Transformations and Traditions in the South Pacific*, was deliberately formulated to cover a broad range of subjects, to allow a wide range of scholars with divergent research interests the opportunity to participate. By the same token, the organizers of the colloquium aimed at generating debate on contemporary issues in the Pacific, a region presently undergoing rapid change under the impact of global influences.

Since World War II, the South Pacific's strategic location in between the continents of America and Asia has become increasingly apparent.³ Consequently, the world market has also been expanding into the Pacific, particularly over the past two decades. Notwithstanding their increased integration in the world economy, however, many Pacific nations have in recent years severed the historical bonds with their former colonizers and gained independence. In most cases, the independence of Pacific states has, nevertheless, only had effects on the political level, while the economies of Pacific states continue to rely heavily on development aid funds and foreign investments by former colonizers. At the same time, the

¹ We would like to thank Ton Otto for his assistance with the preparation of this issue, including his comments on an earlier draft of the introduction. The articles in this issue were copy-edited by Rita DeCoursey (for KITLV Press) and Jane Merit.

² For a full report of the First European Colloquium on Pacific Studies, see the *Oceania Newsletter* (Centre for Pacific Studies), no. 11-12, February/August 1993, pp. 2-20.

³ The increasing interest in the Pacific in modern world history is reflected in the relatively new concept of the *Pacific Rim*, which decentralizes America and Asia by defining them in relation to the Pacific.

small island states have become increasingly dependent on remittances by Pacific migrants presently living in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. In this dynamic yet paradoxical situation of political autonomy and economic dependence, indigenous traditions have acquired new meanings and values. They are often revalued, reconstituted, if not 'reinvented', in the search for a distinct ethnic or national identity against a background of continuously increasing global influences.

Since the early 1980s, contemporary revaluations of tradition have been drawing the attention of anthropologists and historians working in the Pacific. In 1982, Roger Keesing and Robert Tonkinson edited an influential special issue of the Australian journal *Mankind* on 'The Politics of Kastom in Island Melanesia'. *Kastom* or *kastam* is the Melanesian Pidgin word for 'custom' and refers to the large-scale revival of Melanesian identity and corresponding indigenous culture. Throughout Melanesia, *kastom* has also become the political symbol *par excellence* of the anti-colonial and post-colonial struggle for autonomy.

Representations of *kastom* generally focus on the expressive aspects of traditional culture, such as ceremonies and rituals, arts and crafts, and songs and dances, which were often the object of colonial 'civilizing' strategies. The political goal, now, of the revival of *kastom* is to reassess traditional culture in the light of political and economic dependence or independence. However, the emphasis on those cultural practices which were symbolic of colonial rule also indicates that *kastom* serves not only as a revaluation of Melanesian culture and tradition, but also as an expression of opposition to continuing European domination. In addition, it demonstrates that *kastom* is largely phrased in terms of the ideology of colonization which aspired to exterminate the 'primitive' way of life.

Indigenous traditions are being revalued not only in Melanesia, but also in Polynesia, where Jocelyn Linnekin (1983, 1985) was among the first to describe this revival. On the basis of her research in Hawaii, Linnekin argues that the reconstitution of tradition serves to reinforce nationalist feelings. She observes that notions of a traditional 'Hawaiian style' enjoy popularity primarily in anti-American discourse, thus revealing the purpose of validating a distinct ethnic identity within an increasingly western society.

The issue of ethnic identity is most acute for such minorities as native Hawaiians, Australian Aborigines and New Zealand Maori, who face a foreign majority in their own lands. However, with the increase of western influences in the Pacific, the representation of tradition has become a political item of utmost importance throughout Melanesia and Polynesia. 'Tradition' not only dominates public debate in Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand, where it is referred to as 'Hawaiiana', 'black fellas way' and 'Maoritanga', respectively, but also in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu,

Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and other small Melanesian and Polynesian states. Subject to increasing economic influences from Australia, New Zealand and the USA after the Second World War, and as a result of increased migration of Polynesians and Melanesians to the economic powers on the Pacific Rim, indigenous lifestyles are perceived to be under threat. In view of the possibility of becoming overshadowed by western influences, conceptions of traditional culture are being reconstructed and revived.

In regional discourses, traditional practices are couched in terms of 'the Melanesian way' or 'the Polynesian way', which is distinguished from a stereotypical view of 'the European way'. Variations of pan-Pacific discourses of tradition are locally called *kastom* or *kastam* in Melanesian societies, *vakavanua* or 'the way of the land' in Fiji, *anga faka Tonga* or 'the Tongan way' in Tonga, *fa'a Samoa* or 'the Samoan way' in Samoa, *la coutume* in New Caledonia, and *peu ma' ohi* in Tahiti. Local representations of indigenous traditions are also invariably articulated in opposition to a stereotypical view of European culture referred to as 'white fellas way' in Australia, 'the way of money' in Fiji, 'haole style' in Hawaii, 'Pakeha culture' in New Zealand, and *fa'a palagi* or 'the European way' in Samoa.

Over the past decade, the reinvention of tradition, the politicization of ethnic identity, and the upsurge of nationalism in the Pacific have become major topics for anthropological and historical research. Several volumes, special issues of journals, and articles reviewing the parameters of the discussion have been published, notably by Linnekin and Poyer (1990), Jolly and Thomas (1992), Keesing (1989), and White and Lindstrom (1993). In this short introduction, rather than summarizing other people's works, we focus on two important implications of the debate on the politics of tradition in the Pacific which have not yet been adequately addressed. The first concerns the relation between 'invented traditions' and social change in post-colonial circumstances, and the second concerns the implied but misleading distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. In our opinion, both issues are of crucial importance.

Invention of tradition or ongoing change?

The study of the revival of tradition in the Pacific has become popularly known as the discourse of the 'invention of tradition'. This phrase was initially adopted rather uncritically from the catchy title of the volume edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). The concept of 'invention', however, is theoretically problematic because no link between the discourses of tradition and attempts to come to terms with ongoing change is normally established. In his introduction Hobsbawm (1983: 1)

defines the phrase 'invented tradition' as 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition'. Hobsbawm (1983: 1) adds that invented traditions automatically imply continuity with the past. However, since an invention in the ordinary sense of the word requires patent law to protect its originality, and since inventions in general invariably appear to exclude historical precedents, it seems a contradiction in terms to label attempts to consciously (re-)establish links with a distant past as purely inventions.

The continuity of so-called 'invented' traditions is also problematic in Hobsbawm's distinction between 'tradition' and 'custom'. The former concept applies to 'the modern world', is described as 'factitious' and implies 'invariance'; the latter refers to 'traditional societies' and is intended 'to give any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history', even though it 'often expresses not a historical fact' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 2). Here, Hobsbawm is skating on thin ice. He fails to acknowledge that all traditions in both 'modern' and 'traditional' societies are inseparable from their interpretations, and that they invariably serve ideological functions, as Wagner (1975) has cogently demonstrated. The essays in Hobsbawm and Ranger's collection nevertheless testify to that proposition in a brilliant manner.

The central theme of their book (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) addresses the construction of tradition as a model of the past making an implicit statement about the present and the change that has taken place in the interim. In spite of pathbreaking insights into the fluidity of all traditions, being an historian, Hobsbawm cannot resist holding on to the positivist distinction between real and fictitious, between genuine and spurious traditions (see Handler and Linnekin 1984). Ultimately, Hobsbawm does not reject the organic, naturalistic conception of tradition which is supposed to be separate from its interpretations.

The implied distinction in Hobsbawm's work between genuine and spurious traditions has not necessarily been carried over to the new scholarship under the banner of 'invention of tradition' in the Pacific, but so far, the continuity in traditions associated with the notion of 'invention' has been underexposed. The possibility of traditions being reconstructed and revived to establish a conscious link with the past in order to come to terms with rapid social change, as well as to regain control of the direction and pace of change, has not yet attracted the attention it should (Van Meijl 1990; see also Friedman in this issue). In that sense, the analysis of contemporary reconstructions of tradition in the Pacific is still largely trapped within the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, which emerged during the Enlightenment and has influenced a long-

standing intellectual tradition in social sciences.

The history of tradition as an analytical concept in social sciences only dates back to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, engendering what was hailed as the birth of Modern Society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Contemporary ideas about modern society implied an oversimplified view of differences between traditional and modern societies, and the transition from one to the other. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity has been reformulated by many theorists from different backgrounds concerned with social change, ranging from Marx to Tönnies, Durkheim, Parsons, Redfield and Kroeber, to name just a few. Most recently, the influential debate on the articulation of modes of production was largely phrased in terms of the same dichotomy.⁴ The common denominator of these different perspectives on social change is the conception of traditional and modern societies as natural systems consisting of a finite number of interrelated variables. The variables in each system are considered mutually exclusive, and change is perceived as the replacement of the variables of one system by those of another (Bendix 1966: 307-308). According to this approach, change occurs in one direction only, and it invariably involves declining traditionality and rising modernity.

Although studies of social change in colonial and post-colonial societies may be impossible without some sort of 'before-and-after' model, the terms 'tradition' and 'modernity' should only be the beginning of an analysis of social change, and should not be mistaken for analysis itself (Van der Grijp 1993). Both Eisenstadt (1973) and Shils (1981) have, in different ways, pointed out that tradition is a hodiecentric model of the past which is reviewed, reformed and redefined according to present needs and desires. Shils has defined tradition in an elementary sense as 'anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present'. This meaning of the term 'tradition' is derived from the Latin word *traditio*, which simply means a 'saying handed down from former times' (Lewis and Short 1958). In this basic form, traditions do not necessarily have to be fixed entities that can only be lost and not retained in a changed form. The political discourse of tradition in the Pacific attests to that proposition in an exemplary manner, although to date no attempt has been made to spell out the implications of the debate for theories of social change. Why certain traditional concepts and customs are reconstructed and revived, and others, such as cannibalism and warfare, are not, are questions that have not yet been addressed. It seems

⁴ For more subtle contributions to this debate, however, see Godelier (1984) and Wolf (1990).

certain that traditional concepts and customs become central in discourses of tradition only insofar as they play crucial roles in indigenous attempts to cope with rapid change in the struggle to maintain explicit connections with a past which is valued but perceived to be under threat. For this reason, too, we would like to see more comparative research exploring this hypothesis. Ultimately, such research should help social sciences to move further away from the persistent dichotomy between tradition and modernity.

Authentic inventions of tradition

The reasons why the implications of the study of 'invented or reinvented traditions' for theories of social change are rarely addressed are undoubtedly intertwined with an implied distinction between 'invented - inauthentic' interpretations of the past and so-called scholarly knowledge of 'how it really was'. A closer look at the explicit distinction which Hobsbawm (1983: 2) makes between tradition and custom may clarify this point. Hobsbawm mentions that the study of land-claims by peasant movements reveals that an historical basis for such claims is often lacking, and that they mostly originate in resistance against landlords. However, the search for particular histories of traditions is based on a problematic equation of self-consciousness with inauthenticity and, by implication, unselfconsciousness with authenticity (Jolly 1992). Self-conscious, counterhegemonic reifications of tradition, however, should not simply be dismissed as inauthentic. To debunk the grounding of peasant ideology in tradition by examining it on its historical and empirical merits may well cause researchers to overlook the political message of such an ideology demanding change in the system of land tenure. More importantly, unmasking historical discontinuities of 'invented' traditions should not be seen as denying their continuity.

Over the past few years, the distinction between authentic and inauthentic representations of the past has confronted many anthropologists and historians concerned with the politics of tradition in the Pacific. The issue became particularly acute after Allan Hanson's (1989) analysis of 'the making of Maori tradition' was criticized by Maori people themselves for undermining the authenticity of Maori culture (*New Zealand Herald*, 1-3-1990).⁵ For similar reasons, Haunani Trask (1991),

⁵ Hanson's paper was also discussed in the *New York Times* (20-2-1990) and *The Australian* (26-2-1990). In the second issue of the *American Anthropologist* in 1991, Robert Langdon, Hal Levine and Jocelyn Linnekin commented on Hanson, who replied to all three (pp. 440-450).

an indigenous inhabitant of Hawai'i, objected to Keesing's (1989) introductory article on the ways in which the past is being reinterpreted in the contemporary Pacific.⁶ The political sensitivity of the debate on the innovation of tradition and the dynamics of cultural customs has prompted Jean Jackson (1989) to raise the question: 'Is There a Way to Talk About Making Culture Without Making Enemies?'

Ironically, however, criticism of the discourse on the essentialization and objectification of tradition are themselves often based on reified conceptions of culture and tradition which ultimately are firmly situated within the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, in which tradition is viewed organically as something which is bound to pass away and which cannot survive in modified form. It goes without saying that the concept of invention is rather cumbersome in connection with indigenous discourses on the past as it incorrectly suggests that what people themselves represent as 'traditional' is inauthentic, but this contemporary commonplace must no longer be used to justify conceptions of tradition as permanent and perpetual. The object of debate should instead be moved from the representation, if not reification, of tradition to the internal orchestration of processes of social change in Pacific societies.

The need to dispose of traditional anthropological models that perceive ethnic groups, societies or cultures as both static and homogeneous, has been argued most compellingly by Terence Turner (1979) in an important paper on the politics of indigenous peoples' struggles. In his view, the notions of stability and internal indivisibility are based on the assumption of radical alterity between societies, which, in turn, is associated with the persistent misconception of the relative autonomy of 'traditional' societies. In an unusually creative manner Turner advocates substituting a focus on diverging conceptions and views within indigenous societies for the exotic and 'orientalist' representation of the Other as relatively autonomous, which implies both an essentialization and a politicization of radical alterity.

An important ramification of this shift is that it will create the necessary conditions for a more adequate understanding of the internal dynamics of 'traditional' societies. Cultures and traditions of indigenous peoples will automatically be conceived of as perpetually changing (see, for example, Otto 1991). At the same time, the focus on internal differences and changing traditions has important implications for the struggle for political autonomy, in some cases sovereignty, by Pacific peoples. When people are no longer forced to represent their cultures and traditions as principally static, their 'ability to control, create,

⁶ See also Keesing (1991; 1992) and Linnekin (1991).

reproduce, change or adopt social and cultural patterns for their own ends' will also improve substantially (Turner 1979: 12). Thus, the displacement of reified notions of tradition and the introduction of a wide-ranging perspective on internal differences and how these may generate changes will also have a positive influence on the ways in which Pacific peoples themselves control their representations of their way of life in the past and in the present, both internally and externally in relation to European discourses. In that case, articles such as the ones published in this special issue, especially in the second part on the politics of culture and identity in the Pacific, can no longer be considered as potentially undermining the authenticity of indigenous representations of 'tradition'.

The articles in this issue

Although scholarship on the politics of traditional culture and ethnic identity in the Pacific has insufficiently identified the implications for theories of social change, the recent focus on the revival of tradition in contemporary politics has paralleled a rapprochement between anthropology and history, which, in turn, is partly due to the inevitability of addressing rapid social change in the region. For this reason also, many contributions to the First European Colloquium on Pacific Studies were not primarily concerned with the politics of traditional culture, but, instead, with the relationship between anthropology and history, or with social change at large. Accordingly, the first part of this special issue contains articles concerning the integration of anthropology and history in the Pacific, and the changing political relationships in the region.

This issue opens with a survey by Alan Howard of historical approaches in Polynesian anthropology. After European explorers, missionaries and anthropologists *avant la lettre*, history was largely neglected by researchers oriented towards functionalist, structural and cognitive approaches to Polynesia. The work of Sahlins (1958) and Goldman (1970) provided new impetus for anthropological studies incorporating an historical orientation. A major problem, however, was the vanishing of flesh-and-blood human beings in real time, as Howard calls it. He hopes to rediscover real people in studies with a strong biographical touch.

In 'The Making of a Modern Chiefdom State' Paul van der Grijp deals with transformations in Tongan politics in the second half of the nineteenth century. A key figure was the High Chief, Taufa'ahau, who had become the first King of Tonga with the support of Methodist missionaries. In the period analysed in this article, Taufa'ahau needed the

help of the Australian journalist Charles St Julian and the renegade missionary Shirley Baker as mediators for political change in his rapidly developing kingdom.

In his article on the historical development of the Maori King Movement, Toon van Meijl shows how a pan-tribal identity of New Zealand Maori people emerged in the encounter with European explorers and settlers. Special attention is given to cultural misunderstandings underlying the Treaty of Waitangi, in which the Maori ceded sovereignty to the British in exchange for continuing possession of their land. The British, however, used the Treaty of Waitangi as an instrument to disfranchise the Maori. In response, the Maori established the Maori King Movement to counter the threat of European domination. Although presently dominated by a largely European nation-state, many Maori people still rely on the Maori King Movement for their cultural identity.

In his contribution on homicides and blood feuds on Bellona, Rolf Kuschel analyses the relatively high rate of homicides in this Polynesian outlier in the Solomon Islands. He unravels the backgrounds of the frequent feuds and the way in which they were organized. He advocates an analytical distinction between social and psychological dimensions of the killings, and points to the wider kinship implications of honour in the blood feuds on Bellona.

In 'Violence and Political Change in Papua New Guinea' Andrew Strathern examines the conditions of political legitimacy of state power within the context of a multitude of small-scale societies. Particularly in the Highlands, Strathern's focus, violence - and peacemaking - was, and is, prominent. Physical attacks have become a model of interpersonal and intergroup relations in the relatively new state, in spite of official efforts to control violence. The author proposes a reorganization of the balance of power between politicians and public servants.

The second part of this special issue focuses on the Politics of Culture and Identity, and opens with Jonathan Friedman's intervention in the heated debate on Hawaiian cultural identity. He draws attention to the clearly changing role of anthropologists who no longer study what people do, but rather what and how they say they are: their identity. This implies, however, a changing authority of anthropologists as authors; they no longer are the only ones representing foreign people in academia. In other words, anthropologists no longer hold the ethnographic truth. The competition between anthropologists and indigenous intellectuals about the validity of representations is becoming increasingly obvious in the context of the revival of traditional culture.

In 'Cultural Politics among the Siassi' Anton Ploeg discusses the relationship between the nation-state of Papua New Guinea and the small-scale societies which are part of it. With illustrations taken from the

Kovai, a group on Umboi Island in the strait between New Guinea and New Britain, the author discusses the concepts of nation and nationalism. A major problem is the imposition by force of the state structure in a multitude of societies with diverging political and cultural characteristics. The idea of one national culture does not seem to hold.

In 'Cultural Identity as a Coping Strategy towards Modern Political Structures' Christin Kocher Schmid describes the circumstances surrounding the construction of a cultural centre. This is not seen as merely a tourist attraction, which it may also be, but rather as a focus of political and cultural identity. In the case of the Nayudos, the author shows how the cultural centre became a symbol of the new social unity, a focus of integration and consolidation, a source of cash income, a nucleus for future interlineage economic co-operation, and, finally, a focal point for a 'traditional' identity.

In 'Indigenous Essentialism?' Edvard Hviding presents a case study of encounters between mining companies and local leaders in the Marovo area of New Georgia, in the western Solomon Islands. In negotiations on exploitation of gold and other mineral resources, customary leaders presented unilineal models of landownership as being traditional, arguing that the bilateral kinship relations of their ancestors were too complicated for the mining companies' representatives to understand. Tradition had to be reinvented in this case, according to the local leaders, to become understandable for Europeans. The author analyses the theoretical implications of this paradoxical situation in terms of a counterhegemonic strategy.

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