

EsfO Verona 2008 Session 1

Cultural heritage and political innovation: relations of the state and alternative social movements in Oceania

Organizers: Edvard Hviding and Knut Rio

ABSTRACTS (in planned order of presentation)

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC.

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From a Pacific perspective, we argue that cultural heritage has always been a basic ontological anchorage of human existence from which people make sense of their world. Cultural heritage relates to specific *peoples*, with specific *collective histories*, linked directly to specific *spatial and social histories*, as well as to *objects* that may stand for these histories. Across the Pacific region – but perhaps most strikingly in the culturally diverse archipelagos of Melanesia – colonial power, the construction of nations, and ideas of the global have been historically formulated within this very potent space of cultural heritage and customary codifications. Analyzing the concept of cultural heritage in the context of political innovation allows us to develop the idea that cultural heritage represents a viable counterforce to external challenges. Hence we see a focus on social movements and political innovation as descriptive of current processes in Melanesia and the wider Pacific region that defy simplistic tropes such as “failed states” or “invention of tradition”. Our use of the concepts implies not just social and politically motivated change and transformation, but also invokes the cultural creativity that goes into experimenting with social forms themselves.

In particular we need to rethink our assumptions about how the grassroots level is configured in relation to Pacific models of the social world. In this region – even on the level of the state, whether in Parliament, law or national media – decision-making and the quest for crucial knowledge or for locating important origins this will focus on local circumstances, at village and inter-personal levels. With regard to configurations of cause and effect in political life and to the tendency of locating importance at the localized level down to the scales of persons or objects, there are interesting challenges to much contemporary thought on centre and periphery. Perhaps what we see is a “no centre, no periphery” situation, wherein the varying distribution and composition of central **persons** (a lineage leader, a diviner, a knowledgeable person, a church elder, a holder of a potent right to an object, a magician – i.e. potentially anyone but in practice someone specific), **objects** (potent cultural heritage), or **places** (as the locations of origins and rights) will determine any decision-making process on any level including the national. This bottom-up perspective of political life can serve to exemplify alternative ways of organizing the state. In recent years there has been – for example in Fiji (with its coups d’état and the support from the chiefly ranks) and Vanuatu (with the importance of the National Council of Chiefs vis-à-vis parliament, government and legal system) – notable discomfort and discord with a centre/periphery model of political life

with parliament as the centre of political authority. In these nations a model based on chiefly authority, and above all, authority located on the level of the individual person as a beholder of rights and knowledge, works in parallel to the democratic state. In this Introduction to the session we therefore highlight the potential in local social movements for influencing major cultural and political processes on the national levels of Pacific island countries. With “social movement” we understand a broad spectrum of organizations which, in shorter or longer term, mobilize people around shared desires, objects, ideals and goals.

THE STRONG ISLAND: CULTURAL HERITAGE, INSULAR IDENTITY, AND DIVINE ELECTION IN SOLOMON ISLANDS.

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The Arosi of the island of Makira in the postcolonial nation-state of Solomon Islands experience their island as geographically, politically, and economically marginal, underserved, underdeveloped, and vulnerable to social and environmental degradation by outsiders. Since the period known as ‘the tensions’ (1998-2003), which saw violent clashes between Guadalcanal landowners and Malaitan settlers around the national capital, Honiara, this sense of marginality and vulnerability among Arosi has become legible to analysis in transformations of Arosi discourses about Makiran *kastom*, the essential character of Makirans, and the global—even cosmic—significance of Makira—also known as Hanuato‘o, ‘the strong island’.

These transformations include: rumours of a secret military base under Makira that gains its power from *kakamora*, dwarf-like creatures represented in *kastom* stories as autochthonous guardians of Makira; references to an original Makiran language and *kastom* that has become corrupted by ‘mixing’ with outsiders but is preserved underground by the *kakamora*; essentialisations of Makiran temperament as ‘soft as wool, but strong as iron’; claims that the underground army is covertly working to fragment the Solomon Islands nation-state and lead Makira to statehood; and predictions of *kastom* restoration that will bring peace, prosperity, and power to Makira as the fulfilment of a divine plan.

This paper will analyse selected examples of these discourses as articulated by diversely positioned speakers. While not constituting a unified religious or political movement, taken together these and other dialogically related examples are producing an insular Makiran identity that claims a ‘cultural heritage’ of spiritual, moral, and political chosenness.

FISHERMEN DO NOT FISH WITHOUT OBLIGATION: PROSTITUTION OF VOTERS, CANDIDATES, KASTOM, AND STATE PROCESSES – THE CASE OF KIRIWINA-GOODENOUGH ELECTORATE IN THE 2007 ELECTIONS, PNG.

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For the first time Papua New Guinea officially trialed a new electoral process nationwide through its scheduled 2007 general elections. There had been prior widespread skepticism however, over its ability to ensure fairness and success. The main areas of concern were at

the implementation level starting with the Electoral Commission and all its technical support through to the susceptibilities of officers, candidates and voters alike largely stemming from their own biases and corrupt predilections. Despite all the misgivings however, PNG went through a fairly smooth election event with minimal technical setbacks, which perhaps only time will uncurl. While describing the author's experience and observations as a first time candidate in national elections, the paper highlights some principal technical applications of Limited Preferential Vote (LPV) method that should require subsequent attention and improvement at policy level. In so doing, a full and fair (i.e. democratic) electoral process may become a reality for PNG through the Limited Preferential Voting method. Applied as it is however, election results are still vulnerably plagued by the ugliness of abuse through vote buying, rigging, and an increasing exploitation of the poverty-stricken rural voters as was previously experienced in the First Past the Post (FPP) electoral method hence, its prostitution!

Notwithstanding, and drawing from previous experiences, commentaries and existing literature on elections in PNG, the author recognizes that people/voters are in charge and actually dictate the meaning and expression of culture in relation to introduced state functions as in elections. People's perceptions of culture and elections are intertwined rather than distinct from each other. The evolving competing legitimacies between the state through its constitution and that of 'kastom' is distinct only to the scholars but not the people, it seems. To the voters, 'kastom' praxis is imperative and candidates with their resources, and even their role in Parliament must be subjected to the whims of 'kastom' – share the loot by feasting. This is a subjective-objective commentary of the author's experience as a candidate in the 2007 election in Papua New Guinea.

STATE, PARTIES, CHURCHES AND INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS IN TANNA, VANUATU.

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The Tannese already have a long tradition of political inter-manipulation with different categories of outsiders: missionaries, traders, colonial agents, anthropologists, tourists, journalists, film-makers etc. Nowadays we could add ni-Vanuatu coming from other islands in the archipelago to work in Tanna: public servants, medical staff, clergymen, teachers, politicians, neo-colonial foreign official or NGO volunteers. Inter-manipulation has become even more of an issue with the adding of rivalries between Presbyterians and Catholics, British and French to former local socio-political oppositions. The strategic aspects of Tanna's proximity with New Caledonia have also contributed to increase the complexity of the local political game characterized by persistent reshaping or disruption of older social divisions. The John Frum cult, famous millenarian politico-religious movement, provides good illustrations of these inter-manipulations. At different periods of its already long history, cult leaders and inspired followers have produced new sets of symbolical representations in order to gain control over foreigner's hegemony. Both ritual and political means have been used for this struggle. In the context of a multiplication of different revivalist offshoots of the John Frum millenarian movement since the year 2000, this paper will try to investigate the reciprocal influences between, on the one hand state, parties, churches, outside "lobbies", and on the other Tannese chiefs, political representatives and cultic leaders.

ALMOST LAPAN: LEADERSHIP, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MODERNIZATION IN MANUS PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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Soanin Kilangit is not a leader by birth on his native Baluan Island, where a strong tradition of hereditary leadership (*lapan*) is upheld. However, over a span of 20 years he has come to be a significant leader in Baluan affairs. Today he personifies innovations in political practice, changes in conceptualizations of culture, and transformations of both traditional and modern forms of leadership. Kilangit has headed a Port Moresby-based dancing group of Baluan emigrants, as a returning migrant he has staged the largest culture show in living Baluan memory, and he contested the Manus open seat in the 2007 parliamentary election. By positioning himself in a discourse of ‘culture’ rather than ‘kastam’, he fuels a transformation of traditional practices from being part of exchange relations between persons, to becoming ‘heritage’ to which every ‘Baluan person’ has rights of access. ‘Baluan culture’ and ‘tradition’ is here presented as a unifying whole that can attract resources and processes of modernization from the outside – from other Manus groups, the government, tourists, or the visiting anthropologists! As a result, Kilangit can dress as a *lapan*, and act as a *lapan*, but trouble comes, when he still has to adhere to enduring local norms that he sometimes fails to acknowledge.

LAND, RELIGION AND WAR CANOES IN THE WESTERN SOLOMON ISLANDS: THE POLITICAL RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

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During 1998-2003, Solomon Islands experienced civil unrest, fights between armed militia groups, a spiralling decline of government services, and a near collapse of the national economy. Meanwhile in the country’s resource-rich Western Province, the Christian Fellowship Church (CFC) – a somewhat secretive indigenous movement founded in the 1950s as a breakaway movement from the Methodist mission – efficiently supported and stabilized large rural areas in the face of state collapse. This process is one where a social movement that bridges the secular and the religious, the “modern” and the “traditional”, as well as the “local” and the “global”, exercises traditionally-derived authority over land with resources desired by global extraction economies, while pursuing agendas of rural social stability and appropriate economic development in a situation of government absence. In this paper, I discuss this rapid rise into a political force by what was long viewed as a remote rural cult, and I examine particular aspects of the CFC’s political practice that rely on spectacular public displays of pre-Christian, pre-colonial elements of characteristically New Georgian cultural heritage. Classic models of Austronesian hierarchy play a central role in these developments.

VOYAGING BEYOND EPISTEMOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES: INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION IN FIJI AND OCEANIA

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Fiji's coups d'état (in 2000, 2006) show that the rule of governmental law along with customary law and the centrality of chiefly authority are at stake. The coups were not simply single events in which different factions competed for political or economic power. Rather, they were part of an ongoing transformative process rooted in contested views of the past that are forcing local actors to compromise and renegotiate their conceptions of their tradition, identity and cultural heritage in light of new constitutional requirements. The issue of ownership of cultural property is becoming a prime moral issue in legal anthropological parlance, a condition *sine qua non* to understand the socio-cultural evolution of indigenous traditional knowledge and expressions of culture (TKEC). The combination of the two notions, cultural heritage and cultural property, is particularly relevant to the reification of identity in the case of intangible, immaterial TKEC ownership. Pacific islanders have had their concept of 'intellectual property' for centuries. Several landmark cases recognize a pre-existing system of law among indigenous peoples inseparable from the concept of 'identity'. These cases also suggest that neglected non-western epistemologies may provide us with new concepts and modes of organizing and protecting TKEC. Collaboration with the stakeholders, and legal anthropological research points to an intensification of the meta-local, cross-border interactions and growing interdependence between local, national and trans-national actors through a de-localizing process in which social spaces, borders and customs lose some of their previously overriding influence.

NAN MADOL: A MICRONESIAN EXAMPLE OF HERITAGE AND HISTORY AS INNOVATION

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Located off the southeastern coast of the island of Pohnpei in the Eastern Carolines, Nan Madol is a visually stunning site of megalithic proportions. Nan Madol, mistakenly understood by some as the "Venice of the Pacific," consists of 93 human-made islets linked by an elaborate canal system. The individual islets vary in size, internal structural complexity, and architectural style. The immediate complex of ruins at Nan Madol covers two hundred acres, and was part of a larger political configuration called Deleur that extended for about 18 square miles along Pohnpei's eastern coast, and approximates the boundaries of the modern-day chiefdom of Madolenihmw.

There exist multiple, partial and contested histories of this incredible site that speak of the foreign identity of its builders, the system of political and religious rule established there, the assertion of that rule over Pohnpei proper, and the varying responses from different areas of the island that included a complex mix of acquiescence, appropriation, and resistance. Like Pohnpei and the larger Micronesian geographical area, Nan Madol has survived several colonial regimes over the last one hundred and twenty years. It persists as a site that speaks to issues of identity, history, culture, heritage, government, and on-going engagements with

foreign or imposed systems of rule. Nan Madol remains very much a site of power and struggle in contemporary times. In what some might understand as the ultimate colonial act, Nan Madol is listed on the United States National Register of Historic Properties. The current contestation around Nan Madol possesses local and national as well as neo-colonial dimensions. The US National Park Service, the historic preservation offices of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Pohnpei State, the paramount chief of Madolenihmw, and individual families all claim jurisdiction over the ruins. It remains to be seen how these conflicting claims will work themselves out.

This study of Nan Madol looks at a complex, contested, and colonially affected cultural property whose past may yet inspire a future that offers local and alternative possibilities to reigning assumptions about development, governance, and political stability. It offers lessons that are at once about continuity, adaptation, and innovation.

DANCING DIPLOMACY: PERFORMANCE AND THE POLITICS OF PROTOCOL

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This paper provides a comparative analysis of a number of performance events revealing how Indigenous Australians and Pacific Islanders innovatively draw on the power of dance to negotiate relationships among themselves, with the State, and in response to ‘the challenges of global political economy’. I begin with a birthday celebration on Thursday Island, Torres Strait and then move on to a number of public dance performances by Pacific Islanders from the Cook Islands and Tokelau, who have recently settled in north Queensland. I then explore the idea that the value of dance as diplomacy lies in its potential to hide as much as it reveals. I illustrate this through analysis of a particular dance performed at the Laura Aboriginal Dance and Cultural Festival in Cape York. My final example concerns the opening of the Australian Federal Parliament in February 2008, when for the first time in Australian history, the official opening began with a traditional welcome to the country by Indigenous elders.

THE RISE OF THE PLEIADES: POLITICS OF TRADITION AND REVITALIZATION MOVEMENTS IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

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From the seventies we have seen in Tahitian society a re-evaluation of some pre-Christian activities condemned by the churches - like dances and tattoo. Along with the Tahitian language these practises have become the major indicators of Tahitian identity in the Polynesian world. These actions come with an identity discourse based on words like *tupuna* (ancestors) and *fenua* (Tahiti as earth mother). Politicians have appropriated this theme, mainly the separatists and since their election in 2004, they have tried to move from discourse to action. Consequently, with the use of different agencies, the ministry of culture has engaged a politic of patrimony and exhibits the traditions in numerous events. In this way, the folkloristic vision of ancient Tahitian culture is used in a nation making process. On the other hand, grass root associations which started with ecological actions have started making

cultural claims. They have reinvested and looked after the *marae*, the places of ancient cult. Their members say that they want “to give meaning to the ancient Tahitian culture”. So they are recreating ceremonies and they are re-establishing their genealogies to invoke gods and ancestors. A part of the members of these associations is Christian. They claim that they don't want to turn back to the ancient Tahitian religion but they would like to recover the Polynesian spirituality.

These last years the social status of these associations has improved but their discourses and their practises are overtaken by the cultural services of the government and the misunderstanding between them has increased. This issue reveals the confrontation of two different conceptions of culture involved in the identical revitalization process that I propose to analyse through the example of different kind of ceremonies.

RAPANUI (EASTER ISLAND) IDENTITY AND AUTONOMY

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Rapanui, as the people of Easter Island call themselves, their language and their home, is unique in Oceania in that it is part of, Chile, a South American state and has been so since 1888. Rapanui and Chilean are aware that more people know "Easter Island" than "Chile"; at the same time, owing to rapid social and cultural changes on the island since the "revolution" of 1966, more Rapanui feel an identity with their Latin American metropolis. Tourism, soon to hit 50,000 visitors annually, has brought wealth and complications to Rapanui, an intensification of local cultural performance, a loss of the Polynesian language for Spanish and conflicting identities as most Islanders born since 1980 have a non-Rapanui parent. Since 1992, as part of a national plan – and that is how this paper presents Rapanui, as part of Chile – the central government has been urging historically informed autonomy, forces which will grow with the country's bicentennial in 2010. This paper explores the background to these changes, the ambiguities of contemporary Rapanui identity and maps how they might congeal.

THE HAWAIIAN TRANSFORMATION OF PACIFIC AND GLOBAL SPACE

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The Pacific Ocean is an ambiguous place, as it is largely a moving flux situated at the margins of global space. This has significant foundations in the history of European exploration. When the world was imagined and further constructed through the rational global grid of latitude and longitude, it was given its longitudinal centre in Europe and its margins in the Pacific. The Pacific region, thus, is a place that has been “discovered”, named, constituted in time, and controlled largely by what we may define as the Western world. However, the Pacific is not a definite entity. Since the end of Western exploration the Pacific has changed from being an exclusive ocean of “discovery” to being a truly Polynesian basin. Since the 1970s the long-distance sailing canoes of Hawai'i's Polynesian Voyaging Society have navigated, territorialized and re-territorialized the ocean's space and reconnected island

groups. In this they have also transformed this space, linking a pan-Polynesian and in particular Hawai'ian present to an increasingly more substantiated (but constructed) past, while enlarging the cultural (and thereby also individual) space of Polynesians to a global one. As a result, Polynesians – and in particular Hawai'ians – have emerged as more substantial, forceful, modern and individualised than what their former status as a marginalised, materially and culturally poor, and isolated indigenous population living in the 50th state of the USA, entailed. The paper will discuss this construction of global space, its cosmological dynamics and importance, and further present the Hawai'ian transformation of Pacific space with a focus on its cosmological and cultural meanings and political impact.