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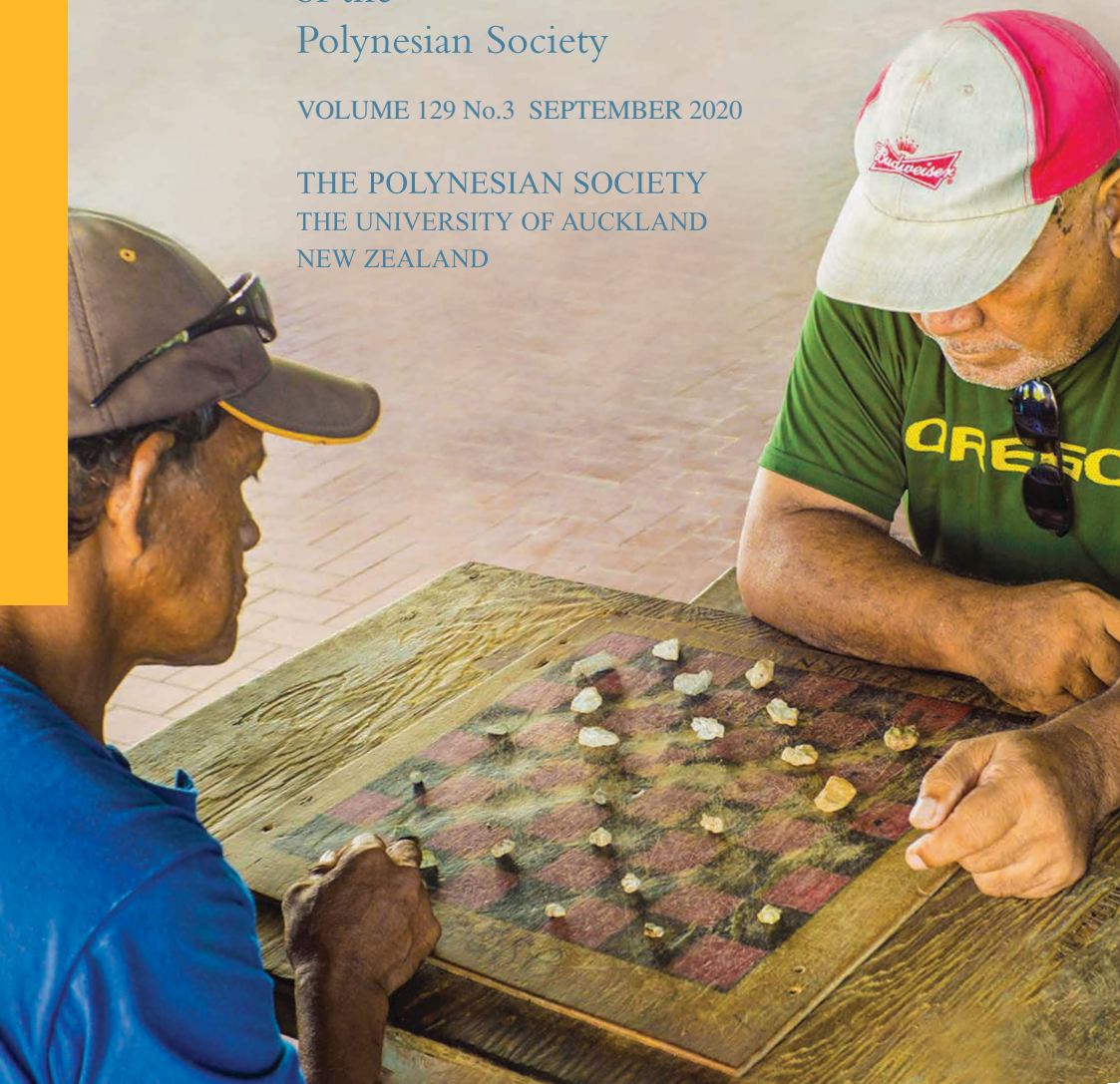

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Cover image: Competitive players from the Marshall Islands engrossed in a game of checkers. Photograph by Alex de Voogt, 2017.

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Inquiries should be made to:

Secretary
jps@auckland.ac.nz
The Polynesian Society
c/- Anthropology, School of Social Sciences
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland

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Contributors to This Issue

Stuart Bedford is a Fellow at The Australian National University and Associate with the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Jena. He has had the privilege of being involved in archaeological research in the Republic of Vanuatu for 25 years, covering initial colonisation 3,000 years ago to the historic period. His current projects revolve around ceremonial architecture, post-Lapita transformations, Polynesian Outliers and natural catastrophes. His latest substantial publication is *Debating Lapita: Distribution, Chronology, Society and Subsistence*, co-edited with Matthew Spriggs and published by ANU Press in 2019. He was awarded a Vanuatu Service Medal (VSM) in 2011.

Alex de Voogt, Associate Professor at Drew University (USA), is a 1993 graduate of the Pacific Islands Studies Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. His research on board games started in East Africa and quickly expanded to other regions. With a specific interest in master players, he published on the psychology of board games before looking at historical processes through extensive fieldwork and archaeological surveys. He co-authored the book *Ancient Egyptians at Play* in 2016 (Bloomsbury), which brings together leading insights in the archaeology of board games. He is one of the founders of the *Board Game Studies Journal* and initiated the annual *Board Game Studies Colloquium*.

Denise Elena is an Aniwa Islander and the island's sole female fieldworker of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, a voluntary position she has held for more than 20 years. She is a senior leader in the Imale community. She is a passionate advocate for Aniwan culture and performed at the Vanuatu National Arts Festival held on the island of Malakula in July 2019.

James L. Flexner is Senior Lecturer in Historical Archaeology and Heritage at the University of Sydney. His primary interests are the long-term transformation of Pacific Island landscapes and colonial encounters in the region. James has been leading archaeological fieldwork in southern Vanuatu since 2011, focusing on mission landscapes dating from the 1840s and indigenous settlement during the last 1,000 years. His book *An Archaeology of Early Christianity in Vanuatu* was published by ANU Press in 2016, and in 2019 he co-edited *Archaeologies of Island Melanesia* with Mathieu Leclerc, which was also published by ANU Press.

Brianna Muir graduated from The Australian National University with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in 2019. Her thesis examined mortuary ritual and social differentiation at the Vietnamese site of Con Co Ngua, and was awarded the Peter May Prize. Her primary research interests include investigations of identity, agency and personhood in the past, and how these factors may have affected and shaped a person's lived experiences. Additionally, she is passionate about science communication and community archaeology, and the ways in which professionals working within historical disciplines can better interact and communicate with the public at large.

Émilie Nolet is an Associate Professor in ethnoarchaeology of Oceania at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Her thesis focused on traditional sociopolitical organization in the Tuamotus and its singularity within the Polynesian world. She also has conducted research in Fiji on ancient and modern chiefs and the management of resources and natural disasters at the community level. Currently, Nolet's research focuses on two main issues: transformations in material practices and living conditions in French Polynesia in the nineteenth century, and contributions to the research programme The History and Memory of Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia, with an emphasis on the sociocultural impacts of nuclear testing. The latter is a collaboration between the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme du Pacifique (MSHP) and the Centre for Research on Economies, Societies, Arts and Techniques (CRESAT).

David Samoria is an Aniwa Islander and a senior chief of Imasa Village. He has been a fieldworker with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre for almost 20 years, only retiring recently due to ill health. A number of members of his extended family are buried in the cemeteries surrounding the Aniwan church.

Frédérique Valentin is a Senior Researcher in Oceanic archaeology at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (UMR 7041, MSH Mondes, Nanterre) in France. She specialises in funerary archaeology and biological anthropology. Her work focuses on the human populations and societies of the Pacific. She has worked in the field and in laboratories in many archipelagos of Oceania, such as Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Tonga and Sāmoa. The main focuses of her publications are burial archaeology and funerary practices as well as morphology, genetics and dietary behaviours. In 2016, she co-edited *Spatial Dynamics in Oceania / La pratique de l'espace en Océanie*, with Guillaume Molle, which was published by the Société préhistorique française.

Toon van Meijl is Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He obtained a doctorate from The Australian National University in 1991 and has been engaged in long-term anthropological research among the Tainui Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1982. His research concentrates on issues of cultural identity and the self, particularly among young people in multicultural societies, and on sociopolitical questions emerging from the debate about property rights, especially of indigenous peoples. Since his appointment to the chair of cultural anthropology in 2011, he coordinates the research programme of the department, which focuses on the relationship between diversity and inequality, with special attention to issues of citizenship, democracy and dialogue.

AUTHENTICITY IN ANALOGY BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT: TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF CULTURAL CHANGE

TOON VAN MEIJL
Radboud University

ABSTRACT: The question of authenticity emerges in contexts of cultural innovation when people question whether innovative expressions of culture imply discontinuity with the past. In this article, it will be argued that this modernist concept of authenticity is alien to Pacific modes of thinking about cultural innovation and change. It draws on extensive fieldwork in Māori society of Aotearoa New Zealand, where people rarely, if ever, refer to cultural practices as inauthentic. Instead, they focus on analogies between the past and the present, for instance in kinship terminology and aesthetic practices such as tattooing. In so doing, they defy connotations of inauthenticity and sometimes even cultural change at large. This is not to say that change is denied as it is implied in the comparative analogy between past and present that aims at accounting for cultural change. Thus, Māori somehow characterise change as continuity. Although analogies in Māori society are distinctive in cultural terms, speaking to the continuance of cultural practices irrespective of the disastrous impact wrought by colonisation, it is suggested that this understanding of change is more broadly applicable, e.g., as a means to understanding home-making strategies of youngsters in a migration context.

Keywords: analogy, authenticity, continuity, anthropology of cultural change, interculturality, Aotearoa New Zealand Māori

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The question of authenticity emerges in contexts of cultural innovation when people question whether innovative expressions of culture imply discontinuity with the past. As such, it invariably invokes the connotation of unreal or spurious traditions that are not genuine (Handler and Linnekin 1984). An analysis of the historical emergence of this meaning of authenticity in western thinking brings to light that the concept proceeds from a dichotomy between tradition and modernity that has been deeply embedded in western models of sociocultural change since the Enlightenment, ranging from Marx and Durkheim to Hobsbawm (Shils 1981). An important assumption of this view is that change can only take place in one direction, namely the direction of modernity (Bendix 1966). At the same time, it is assumed that traditions themselves cannot change. They can only be lost and not retained in changed form. Ultimately, most traditions are expected to be replaced with modern counterparts.

In this article, it will be argued that this modernist concept of authenticity is alien to Pacific modes of thinking about cultural innovation and change. This argument will draw on my fieldwork among Māori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, who rarely, if ever, refer to cultural practices as inauthentic. Instead, they focus on analogies between the past and the present, thus defying connotations of inauthenticity and even cultural change at large. After all, by drawing analogies between past and present, changes that have taken place in the interim are neglected by an exclusive emphasis on continuity. This is not to say that change is denied as it is implied in the comparative analogy between past and present that aims at accounting for cultural change. As such, Māori may mark change as continuity. I begin by revisiting the Māori renaissance that originated in the late 1960s and not only entailed a revival of so-called "traditional" cultural practices but also generated a debate about the authenticity of the widespread reintroduction and renewal of Māori "traditions".

MĀORI RENAISSANCE

The colonial history of New Zealand had dramatic consequences for the Māori, the indigenous population of the country. During the first century of contact with Europeans, they were gradually eclipsed by a foreign majority of western colonists and other migrants, which simultaneously resulted in a large-scale dispossession of their territory. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, they had lost 94.1 percent of their lands following wars, confiscations, misleading deals and other types of "legal" alienation (Kawharu 1977: 35). A tragic ramification of the entire process was the decimation of some 60 percent of the original population, resulting in a figure of only 40,000 Māori people remaining in 1896 (Pool 1991: 76). This small minority of indigenous people had little option but to search for employment in wider New Zealand society. Over the years, many Māori therefore moved to the cities, with approximately 85 percent residing in urban areas towards the end of the twentieth century. In contemporary New Zealand, the vast majority of Māori hold an underprivileged position, with many locked in a vicious circle of poverty: leaving school at an early age and often without any qualifications, lower-paying jobs and high unemployment rates, poor health, high crime rates, including domestic violence against women and children, and a life expectancy that is significantly lower than that of their European counterparts (Ministry of Social Development 2016).

Since the early days, Māori have never ceased seeking redress for the alienation of their lands, but protest against their dispossession and marginalisation was reinforced towards the end of the 1960s. Initially, it focused mainly on the recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi, a covenant signed between Māori and the British Crown in 1840 that protected Māori

customary rights, including their rights to land, but which was systematically violated and abused by the New Zealand government. In 1987, however, the Treaty of Waitangi was finally recognised after a number of court victories about a range of different claims. Subsequently, a settlement process was initiated to redress Māori colonial grievances. This process is still ongoing.

An upshot of Māori protest in the context of the claims settlement process is that a tremendous revival and revaluation of Māori culture and traditions has taken place since the 1970s. This cannot be seen in isolation of a worldwide revival of local traditions in response to globalisation, but Māori culture and traditions received a particular boost during the hearings of the Waitangi Tribunal that was set up in 1975 to investigate Māori claims.[1] During those hearings, the loss of land has consequently been linked to a loss of cultural traditions, which in indigenous cosmology are intimately connected to the land (Sorrenson 1989). Thus, the scope of Māori claims far exceeds the alienation of Māori land. Indeed, the underprivileged position many Māori occupy in contemporary New Zealand not only is explained with reference to the loss of their lands and natural resources but is intrinsically related to a lack of recognition of Māori culture. Not only will the land have to be returned, but in order to reshape New Zealand into a country in which the indigenous population holds an equal position to that of settlers, their different cultural values and traditions will have to be accepted and appreciated as well.

Māori campaigns for change focus on all dimensions of society, although from the outset priority has been given to education. In view of the high number of Māori children leaving school with lower or without any qualifications (Ministry of Social Development 2016: 84), education is assumed to provide the key to change (Benton 1988). In this context, it is interesting that the plea to improve education is focused on the introduction of bilingual education and the incorporation of cultural programmes into the curriculum in order to make schools more amenable and therefore also more accessible to Māori children. The assumption of this strategy is that teaching the Māori language and offering Māori cultural programmes will enhance the self-esteem of Māori youngsters, which is believed to influence their school performance in a positive way.

In 1983, Māori campaigns to improve education received a first impulse with the introduction of so-called *kōhanga reo* 'language nests', kindergartens in which preschool children are immersed in Māori language and values. This programme was important since in the early 1980s the majority of fluent speakers of the Māori language were older than 50 years of age, with only 4.5 percent of children being raised in the Māori language (Reedy 2000: 158). The establishment of kōhanga reo aimed at bridging the gap between the ageing generation of "native speakers" and the fast-growing generation

of young children. Twenty years later some 700 kōhanga reo had been set up, teaching more than 13,000 children the principles of the Māori language and the values conveyed with it (Reedy 2000: 159). The impact of Māori-language immersion kindergartens, however, should not be overestimated, because for children it is equally important to further develop their language skills at primary school. For that reason, too, some 60 bilingual primary schools were set up, especially in smaller towns in which a majority of the population was Māori. Towards the end of the 1990s, approximately 15 percent of all Māori children were taught bilingually at primary schools. In five places, bilingual high schools were set up. At the same time, more and more young Māori people moved on to higher education, where courses offered by the rapidly expanding departments of Māori studies became very popular (Reedy 2000: 161; see also Gallegos *et al.* 2010).

In 1987, the growing recognition of the Māori language culminated in the Māori Language Act, offering the language a legal status. This act not only made the Māori language the only official language in New Zealand, as English never received that status officially by law, it also entailed an obligation for the government to publish official documents both in English and in Māori and also to facilitate the introduction of Māori radio channels and television stations. Not unimportant either was the changing presentation of all government institutions with bilingual and often also bicultural logos. An implication of this transformation was that many government institutions also hired Māori consultants in order to avoid accusations of "window dressing". Needless to say, this had an unprecedented impact on government policies as well.

In sum, then, it may be argued that in recent decades significant progress has been made with the recognition of Māori language and culture as an inherent part of New Zealand society, ranging from education and health to economics, politics and justice. As a corollary, socioeconomic indicators of the Māori population have also begun improving, although the gap between the indigenous people and European New Zealanders is still a cause for concern. Yet optimism is generally prevailing since in contemporary New Zealand it has become unavoidable to take into account a so-called Māori perspective on a broad range of policy issues. Recognition of Māori cultural traditions is especially apparent in the public domain. Official meetings or even seminars at universities usually begin and end with a Māori *karakia*, often translated as 'prayer', although 'incantation' would be a better term since traditionally they call for inspiration or blessings from ancestors. They indicate that the renaissance of Māori culture and traditions has gradually transformed New Zealand into a society that is aware and even proud of its location in the South Pacific, far removed from England, its original coloniser. At the same time, it evokes the question regarding the

contemporary meaning of culture and traditions that have been revived as part of the Māori renaissance that paralleled the political struggle of seeking redress for the illegal dispossession in the nineteenth century.

THE DISCOURSE OF "INVENTION"

From the early 1980s, the global revival of local traditions has attracted the attention of numerous scholars. In 1983, the historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger published the classic collection of essays entitled *The Invention of Tradition*. This volume offered many anthropologists and other social scientists inspiration with some great stories about national symbols, rituals and other traditions that are represented as ancient traditions in order to promote national unity or to legitimise the existence of particular institutions or the use of cultural customs. One year before this illustrious and influential collection appeared, the anthropologists Roger Keesing and Robert Tonkinson (1982) published a special issue of the Australian journal *Mankind* with a strikingly similar title: "Reinventing Traditional Culture: The Politics of Kastom in Island Melanesia". Contributions to this issue also described a revival and revaluation of cultural traditions, foremost in resistance to (post)colonial domination, all with a focus on Oceania. Indeed, the use of the term "reinvention" inevitably suggested similarities with the central concept of "invention" in the book by Hobsbawm and Ranger.

The independent appearance of these two publications in short succession indicated that a sense of fundamental cultural change was emerging. As a consequence, many anthropologists, including myself, began focusing their research on the revaluation and politicisation of cultural traditions. After I had finished field research for my doctoral dissertation, I was surprised to attract a large audience to my first post-fieldwork seminar at the Australian National University with the catchy title "The Re-invention of Māori Tradition" (Van Meijl 1989). With my thesis, too, I attempted to contribute to the emerging discourse about the political meaning of cultural traditions in New Zealand and wider Oceania (Van Meijl 1990). In the early 1990s, this debate culminated in a large number of prominent publications (e.g., Jolly and Thomas 1992; Linnekin 1992; Linnekin and Poyer 1990; Norton 1993; Sahlins 1993; Thomas 1992; Van der Grijp and Van Meijl 1993; White and Lindstrom 1993).[2] Interestingly, however, the question of what these analyses of the revaluation and politicisation of cultural traditions have contributed to anthropology at large has rarely, if ever, been addressed.

A preliminary reflection on the debate about the reconstruction of cultural traditions, however, brings to light that, first, it is argued that cultural traditions are primarily expressed by people who resist the continuing influence of a colonial or postcolonial worldview in their societies (Tonkinson 2000: 169). A revival of cultural traditions is furthermore assumed to facilitate

the construction of a distinct cultural identity that is believed to be under threat, especially in societies that are still struggling with a colonial past. This particular meaning of traditions for the expression of autonomous identities in postcolonial circumstances was also thought to clarify why culture and identity are not infrequently constructed and reconstructed in opposition to stereotypical representations of former colonisers, usually from western societies (Norton 1993: 741). The political aspirations that inspire the revaluation of cultural traditions for the construction of distinctive cultural identities were also contended to make clear that not in all cases is a linear continuation of historical practices involved (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Linnekin 1983). The absence of cultural continuity, finally, was argued to explain why cultural traditions that are politically motivated are generally also being reified and essentialised (Norton 1993: 742).

All insights into the cultural renaissance in the Pacific notwithstanding, two high-profile debates in 1989 and 1990 brought to light that some assumptions of the discourse on the politics of culture, traditions and identity are highly problematic. In 1989, Allan Hanson published a controversial article about the making of oral traditions in Māori society, such as the myth of the migration of the Great Fleet of seven Māori canoes to Aotearoa and the narrative about the introduction of the supreme god Io. He documented in some detail that these stories had initially been constructed by European scholars, after which they were incorporated into Māori oral traditions. Hanson's reconstruction was far from original among scholars with expertise in Māori studies, but still his article was reviewed in the *New York Times* (Wilford 1990), which in turn attracted the attention of a New Zealand journalist who summarised the academic paper with the provocative headline "Modern Maori Image 'Invented' " (Freeth 1990). Needless to say, Māori were offended by the suggestion that their culture would not be authentic (Nissen 1990; see also Hanson 1991; Langdon 1991; Levine 1991; Linnekin 1991a).

In the same year, Roger Keesing (1989) published a remarkable article in the first issue of the now renowned journal *The Contemporary Pacific*, entitled "Creating the Past". He contended that traditional culture was primarily reinvented in societies with a colonial past in which people idealised their precolonial traditions in order to resist the continuing influence of their former colonisers. The Hawaiian academic and activist Haunani-Kay Trask (1991) fiercely criticised Keesing and reprimanded him as an arrogant male who mainly buried himself in colonial libraries because he could not listen to indigenous peoples (see also Keesing 1991; Linnekin 1991b).

The indigenous response to these anthropological analyses of cultural traditions suggesting, directly and indirectly, that revitalised cultural practices might not be authentic made immediately apparent that for the time being the discipline lacks deep insight into intercultural conceptions

and experiences of cultural change. Obviously, anthropologists have drawn conclusions from the unintended offense that was caused by some writings. The concepts of "invention" and "reinvention" were immediately abandoned since it is beyond doubt that continuity is invariably involved in discontinuity (Otto and Pedersen 2000, 2005). The precise relationship between continuity and discontinuity, however, continues to be subject to empirical inquiry. In addition, the connotation of inauthenticity that was evoked by the concepts of "invention" and "reinvention" has been rejected explicitly (Goldsmith 1992). The search for particular histories of traditions is after all based on a problematic equation of self-consciousness with inauthenticity and, by implication, unself-consciousness with authenticity (Jolly 1992), but self-conscious, counterhegemonic reifications of traditions should not simply be dismissed as inauthentic.

In spite of these key contributions to the debate about the revival of cultural traditions, I would argue that the underlying cause of the controversy about the concepts of "invention" and "reinvention" and their suggestion of a putative absence of authenticity has not been resolved completely. In my view, the fundamental problem is that since the Enlightenment the concept of tradition is invariably placed in a dichotomy with modernity, and also in the debate about the cultural renaissance that has taken place since the 1980s but that ended in a deadlock with the controversies around 1990. With the rise of so-called modern society following the beginning of industrialisation in the second half of the eighteenth century, a rigid opposition emerged between tradition and modernity (Bendix 1966). Underlying this dichotomy is a model of change that is based on a conception of traditional and modern societies as relatively autonomous social systems that can change in one direction only. This unilinear model of change conceives of all forms of change as a transition, in the sense of progression, from traditional societies to modern societies, involving declining traditionality and rising modernity.

This dichotomy between tradition and modernity has been expressed in many different ways by numerous influential thinkers, including Edward Tylor (primitive versus civilised), Karl Marx (precapitalism versus capitalism), Ferdinand Tönnies (*Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*), Émile Durkheim (collective versus individual), Talcott Parsons (particularism versus universalism) and, for example, Robert Redfield (folk society versus urban society; cf. Bendix 1966: 307). How deeply rooted the dichotomy between tradition and modernity is in widely shared perspectives on colonial history came to light again when it was reintroduced by, amongst others, Hobsbawm and Keesing. These scholars held in common the view that so-called "invented traditions" not only were shaped by politics but also that they are characteristically modern, which, in turn, was based on the assumption that the emergence of modernity is omnipresent and irreversible.

As such, they equated the contrast between tradition and modernity with the distinction between an era before the arrival of western colonists and an era after the arrival of western settlers. Although in postcolonial societies it is unavoidable to make a distinction in periods before and after the beginning of colonisation, it is incorrect to assume that no changes were taking place in non-western societies before the arrival of voyagers, missionaries, explorers and other western colonists (Anderson *et al*. 2014). The distinction between precolonial and postcolonial periods should therefore be considered as a point of departure for academic analysis only, and not as a conclusion of inquiry into social and cultural change. The parallel between, on the one hand, the distinction between precolonial and postcolonial and, on the other hand, tradition and modernity explains nevertheless why some anthropologists were confused when in the course of the cultural renaissance it became obvious that traditions not only can be lost but that they can also be retained in a new form, that they can even change and acquire new meanings. Indeed, the positive meaning of cultural traditions in recent decades is new and unprecedented, as in the colonial past traditions were frequently rejected as negative. Thus, one of my informants, James, a wood carver, appeared to be ahead of his time when he remarked on the very first day of my arrival in the field that Māori people "are changing their traditions by using them".

IN ANALOGY WITH THE PAST

In this article, I would like to revisit and revitalise the debate about the renaissance of cultural traditions by elaborating on a remark made by Francesca Merlan (1998, 2005), who drew attention to another important presupposition underlying the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, that is the assumption that societies operate and change in relative autonomy (see also Keesing 1989; Sahlins 1993, 1999; Thomas 1992; cf. Van Meijl 2011). Indeed, after two centuries of colonisation and sweeping changes it can no longer be assumed that postcolonial societies are genuinely autonomous in generating and innovating cultural practices. It seems more likely that colonial and noncolonial dimensions, or indigenous and nonindigenous, are intrinsically connected in intercultural relations and that both domains of postcolonial societies use, borrow and apply aspects of one another's worldview in social and cultural interaction.

Merlan elaborated on the notion of interculturality with reference to the concept of dialogue as introduced by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin ([1975] 1981, [1929] 1984) early last century. Bakhtin also struggled with dualist thinking, including the distinction between synchrony and diachrony. He found a solution for this dilemma in the concept of dialogue, which he used in order to explain the dialectical interplay between the reproduction of language codes and the transformation of language following

individual variations in speech. Quite some time ago, this insight also demonstrated that social structure and social meaning do not function as relatively closed systems, but that both continuously attune to one another in mutual interaction. An intercultural explanation of change that takes into account the interaction between societies also exceeds the boundaries of culture by focusing on the constant exchange of cultural differences and similarities (Merlan 2018).

The implication of this argument is that in postcolonial societies change does not take place autonomously but in the form of an interactive dialogue with former colonisers. Contrary to the argument made in the discourse about the "invention of traditions", Merlan (2005) demonstrates that postcolonial societies do not simply derive aspects of culture from their colonial rivals, nor do they shape and reshape indigenous forms of culture exclusively in opposition to their counterparts. Instead, she suggests that very frequently analogies are made between indigenous and nonindigenous cultural practices, which simultaneously offer the opportunity to minimise external influences and emphasise indigenous values, or to combine and unite the best of both worlds. In both cases, cultural change follows an intimate interaction between two different societies and value systems. Cultural change, in other words, comes about in a process of dialogue between interactive practices that are compared and contrasted both negatively and positively.

The focus on intercultural interaction and the role of analogies in the comparison between cultural practices of different societies not only is useful for explaining intercultural change but also offers suggestions for improving insight into indigenous experiences and accounts of change in postcolonial circumstances that may also be characterised as intercultural or multicultural. The cultural renaissance in Māori society, for example, shows that in highly dynamic situations people draw analogies not only with other societies but also with cultural traditions in their own society. An analogy between past and present enables people to highlight continuity in cultural values and practices without taking into consideration all forms of possible discontinuity. Accordingly, I would argue that analogies are crucial in indigenous accounts of change and associated strategies for coping with changing cultural practices, especially when a lack of control over change is experienced. Yet, to my knowledge, the concept of analogy has never received any serious attention in anthropology (Van Meijl 2011, 2013b). For that reason, too, I will briefly explore the etymology of analogy and the meaning of the concept in other academic disciplines.

The vague status of the concept of analogy in the social sciences, including anthropology, is very different from the central position of analogies in linguistics (Barfield 1967; Biggs 2006; Hofstadter and Sander 2013) and above all in the natural sciences, including mathematics, physics and

biology, in which it is a key concept (Lorenz 1974). Just as Archimedes spontaneously formed the idea behind the law of communicating vessels when he sat in a bathtub, many scientific discoveries have been spawned by observing analogies that had not been noticed before. In the natural sciences, analogies are used to formulate hypotheses or to suggest the existence of a certain principle or even a law, in particular when it seems possible to make a comparison between the functions of elements in two different systems. Thus, Darwin ([1859] 1948), for example, made a great leap from geology, via biology, to demography in his theory of evolution. The role of analogies in these sorts of scientific comparisons is in line with the etymological meaning of the concept that is derived from the Greek *analogia*, which means, literally, 'proportion' or 'similarity' (Philippa *et al.* 2009). In this way, this term was used exclusively in a mathematical context, but under the influence of philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato the concept of analogy was gradually also used for the explanation of ambiguous relations in terms of unambiguous relations.

In his magnum opus *Let mots et les choses*, the French historian Michel Foucault (1966: 32–40) demonstrated compellingly the change in meaning of the concept in the Middle Ages. In those days, the universe was characterised as an order that was structured in such a way that the macrocosmic pattern of the whole was assumed to be reproduced in the microcosmic pattern of its parts. The analogies between the whole and its parts made it possible to draw conclusions from a part about the whole. In the late Middle Ages, monks accordingly observed the existence of God in visible signs of God's presence in the natural environment. The parallels thus drawn were not considered as mere allegories or illustrations but as substantial evidence supporting a scientific argument about a range of aspects of medieval societies, in which God occupied a central position.

In medieval analogies, functional similarities were more fundamental than proportional and therefore did not require methodological procedures of verification. Following this way of thinking, however, the concept of analogy began evoking the connotation of ambiguity in theology and also in logic. Ambiguity proceeded from the fact that unknown phenomena were increasingly clarified and explained with reference to phenomena that were already familiar, but in this form analogies are misleading to the extent that differences between phenomena are neglected in the comparison. Precisely this aspect of a comparison on the basis of an analogy has become characteristic of the contemporary meaning of the concept: similarities are emphasised, whereas differences are ignored. In other words, an analogy is usually based on superficial similarities between phenomena or structures that are different in origin and that also have different meanings. Nonetheless, it seems sheer impossible to process new information without drawing a

comparison in the form of an analogy. In the cognitive sciences especially, it is widely known that analogies are crucial to processing and understanding information with which individuals are unfamiliar (Hofstadter 2001; see also Gentner *et al*. 2001).

Against this background, it is interesting to examine the role of analogies in indigenous accounts of cultural change. During my fieldwork in New Zealand, I was repeatedly struck by the frequent analogies formed between the old world and the new world in order to downplay differences between past and present. By using analogies in historical comparison, cultural phenomena were presented as relatively timeless. Changes were, however, not necessarily denied in analogies between the old and the new since they were presupposed in the comparison on which the analogy was based, but analogies enabled a construction of timelessness that made it possible to defy and resist changes that have taken place in the interim. Let me illustrate with a number of examples.

TRIBAL RELATIONS

The colonial history of New Zealand had dramatic consequences for Māori sociopolitical organisation, including kinship relations. At present, some 50 percent of the Māori population no longer identifies in terms of traditional tribes, simply because they do not necessarily play a significant role in their predominantly urban lives (Durie 1998; Kukutai 2011; Walker [1990] 2004). From the beginning, too, many Māori married Europeans, and increasingly also members of other tribes, but in spite of changing marriage patterns an idiom of kinship is still ubiquitous in contemporary Māori society, although it is phrased in different terms (Rosenblatt 2011: 413).

In response to my many questions regarding kin relationships in the community in which I conducted field research I usually received a standard response: "We are all related". Even elderly people, who were usually rather talkative and eager to teach this student of anthropology, appeared unmotivated to explain kinship relations in more detail. At a funeral ceremony, for example, I asked one of the *kaumatua* 'respected elders' whether he was related to the deceased person. With a straight face he responded: "Yip, we are all related. We all come from Rangi and Papa", or the sky father and earth mother from whom all life originates in Māori cosmogony (Grey [1854] 1971). In a nutshell, this answer makes clear how changes that have taken place in consanguineal and affinal kinship are pushed aside by drawing an analogy with the creation myth and thus emphasising kinship among indigenous Māori. Two centuries after the introduction of Christianity, references to the genesis of genealogical relations among human beings in the cosmos illustrate that in spite of all changes an ethos of kinship is being continued.

The analogy between genealogical kinship of all Māori in the creation myth and ethnic relationships among the indigenous people in New Zealand that are not directly characterised by consanguineal or affinal kinship is expressed especially in the frequent use of kinship terms in all kinds of social relations. Male friends, for example, commonly address one another as "bro", which is short for "brother", while girls and young women refer to each other as "sis" or "sissie", from "sister". When intimate relationships have not yet been established the term "cuz", from "cousin", is often used. During first meetings, it is also noticeable that Māori often try to establish connections by positioning one another in a network of tribal relations, and frequently they succeed by informally determining an indirect relationship which enables an instant representation of the stranger as "cuz".

The frequent use of words such as "bro", "sis" and "cuz" is not restricted to young people, but it is also rather common among middle-aged people and to some extent also among the elderly, Christians in particular. Thus, I heard two men referring to one another as "brothers", but I was certain they were not brothers in the biological sense of the term, and thus I asked whether they were perhaps brothers-in-law. In reply, I received a smart pun: "No, we are not 'brothers-in-law'; we are 'brothers-in-Lord' ". Indeed, among those for whom religion is an important part of their lives, kinship terms are commonly used to address one another as "brother" or "sister", while members of the older generation are consequently addressed as "uncle" or "auntie". The latter terms are not restricted to networks of religious associates, for that matter, since almost all children in Māori communities address almost all people of middle age and older as "uncle" and "aunt", including the residential anthropologist and his partner.

The frequent designation of individual, ethnic relations in terms of analogies with kinship relations may to some extent be explained by classic Māori kinship organisation, in which ambilineal rules of descent and ambilateral patterns of affiliation were historically characterised by a high degree of openness, dynamics and flexibility (Firth [1929] 1959). A preference for an idiom of kinship in the designation of relationships that cannot be classified as consanguineal or even affinal, however, is also present at the level of social groupings. Thus, the concept of *whānau* 'extended family' became very popular in the course of the Māori renaissance. Although Māori society was traditionally organised around *hapū* 'sub-tribes' (Van Meijl 1995), the concept of whānau has become so popular in Māori discourses, which are predominantly articulated in the English language, that it is now also used in untranslated form by many non-Māori (Metge 1995: 308). This change is remarkable since in the course of colonial history almost 90 percent of Māori families have adopted the European pattern of living in restricted or nuclear families (Walker [1990] 2004). The meaning

of the term whānau has changed accordingly, since nowadays it is frequently also used in reference to restricted families. The new use of the concept of whānau indicates an analogy with the extended families of the past. As such, Māori aspire to maintain the central values of kinship relations, in which distinctions between nuclear and extended family, and distinctions between parents and grandparents, are not nearly as significant as they are in western societies.

The analogy between new forms of social organisation and extended families also appears from the frequent use of the term whānau in relation to groupings that are not at all organised on the basis of descent rules. Thus, the concept of whānau has also been used in designing a model for transferring Māori children from residential youth care institutions to Māori foster families, which is assumed to be advantageous for the development of a strong and positive cultural identity (Culpitt 1995). In bilingual schools, the term whānau is also used to describe the different social relations and atmosphere that in a bilingual environment are supposed to be characterised by values derived from Māori kinship relations, including *aroha* 'love', *manaaki* 'care' and *utu* 'reciprocity' (Metge 1995: 293–312). In this context, kinship terminology is used to represent friendship relationships as relations that entail a certain kind of responsibility, just like kinship relationships do.

The Māori concept of *iwi*, which since the influential publication by Raymond Firth ([1929] 1959) has been translated as 'tribe', is also attributed new meanings in analogy with traditional tribal relationships. Thus, larger groupings of Māori who have been living together in the same suburbs in New Zealand cities for longer periods of time refer to themselves as "tribes"—Ngāti Poneke, for example, which literally means 'the descendants of Wellington', the capital city of the country (while in other cases the concept of whānau serves as a valuable alternative for urban groupings, e.g., Te Whānau o Waipareira in West Auckland). In the 1990s, some of these groups even registered as charitable trusts in order to obtain the status of corporate tribe. In view of new government policies to return land and other types of natural resources to Māori ownership as part of the process that aims at settling violations of the Treaty of Waitangi, they subsequently went to court to seek legal recognition of their status as pan-tribal groupings in urban environments. In 1992, one of the first settlements was signed between Māori and the government, when the latter decided to redress the dispossession of the Māori of their fishing rights. The government purchased fishing quotas and planned to return these to the indigenous population. Since a precedent was lacking for such a deal, the government negotiated an agreement with four chiefs, who in line with traditional protocol had received a mandate at a ceremonial meeting (*hui*). They argued that fishing rights had been alienated from tribal ownership, and for that reason they also had

to be returned to tribal organisations, despite tribal connections of some 50 percent of the population having dwindled following their migration to urban environments. The representativeness of the four chiefs was immediately disputed by pan-tribal organisations in the cities who argued that they were also iwi, referring to the etymological meaning of the term iwi, literally meaning 'bone' (i.e., ancestors) or 'people'. In the end, this objection was not only acknowledged and accepted by the Waitangi Tribunal (1998)[3] that investigates Māori claims and makes recommendations about its findings to the government, but also by the High Court, the Court of Appeal and even the Privy Council in London, the highest judicial body in states that are part of the Commonwealth of Nations (Van Meijl 2006a). Thus, the analogy between pan-tribal organisations and traditional tribes received, more or less, juridical confirmation.

Analogies between contemporary organisations and their traditional tribal counterparts, in spite of the absence of genealogical affiliations, are suggested not only by astute intellectuals who may be thought to advance historical comparisons for political purposes but also by young people with little or no schooling. I witnessed a moving example during the funeral of a "bikie", or a member of a motorcycle club, who was the victim of a tragic accident. As a member of a so-called gang, he was not in regular contact with his family, but still after his death it was decided in consultation with his "mates" to give him a traditional funeral wake followed by a burial on the ancestral mountain Taupiri.

Nowadays, the *tangi* 'funeral wake' is undoubtedly the most emblematic Māori ritual that is still organised on a regular basis (Mead 1991; Sinclair 1990; Wilson and Sinclair 2016). A tangi takes place in an ancestral meeting house on a *marae* 'ceremonial centre', where usually during three days and nights the casket is displayed with an open lid so that the bereaved family and all other relatives and friends can pay their respects to the deceased person. All guests are welcomed ceremonially with speeches and extensive ritual greetings by means of *hongi*, when people press noses and foreheads in order to share one another's breath. Afterwards, all guests are offered a meal to remove the *tapu* 'religious restrictions'.

The tangi of the "bikie" created a special atmosphere on the marae as his friends from the motorcycle gang added a distinct colour to the ceremony. They formed a guard of honour with their bikes when the casket was carried onto the marae. And for the locals it was a moving experience to press noses (hongi) with a large number of young men who had been alienated from their cultural roots. On the final evening an extraordinary event took place in the ancestral meeting house.

The final evening of a funeral wake, the *pō whakamutunga*, colloquially also referred to as "fun night", is the evening on which the extended family,

all their friends and many members of the local community gather together in the ancestral meeting house to bid farewell to the deceased. During this evening, anyone can stand up to address a few final words to the dead person and his or her surviving relatives. Later on some participants in the ceremony may try to entertain the bereaved family in order to relieve the final farewell during the funeral that takes place in the morning. After a special request from one of the elders, one of the leaders of the gang eventually got up to address his "mate" and wish him all the best. Subsequently, he endeavoured to bridge the gap between the gang and the marae community by drawing an analogy between his bike and a canoe, or *waka* in the Māori language, which is not only a traditional vehicle for transportation but also a metaphor for all descendants of one of the canoes that reached the shores of Aotearoa from the Pacific. As such, a waka is usually translated as a confederation of tribes or even a super-tribe. When the gang member compared his bike to a traditional canoe, he said:

> Just like our ancestors travelled in their canoes, so we drive our bikes to go out to meet people and have a good time.

Pointing to his leather jacket with the gang's patch on the back, he resolved one of the salient differences between the ancestors and the members of the motor club:

> We may be wearing a different style of clothes you fellas don't like, but we are still people! We all have mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters. We only don't have a job, and that's why we stick together.

At the end of his contribution to the exceptional evening he carried the analogy between gang and tribe through by referring to their "pad" as "our marae". He said:

> ... as a marae is always open to anybody, our pad is always open too. And we like to invite yous [*sic*] all to drop in sometime when you pass by.

This remarkable analogy between gang and kin groups in Māori society emphasises the similarities in social functions of both types of groups, while the differences in historical origin and social organisation are disregarded if not denied. The concepts of canoe or waka, people, tribe or iwi, and marae are used in a timeless manner in order to enable analogies between historical and contemporary forms of social organisation. In these analogies, continuity is stressed and discontinuity downplayed, which in the end makes it possible to render current forms of social organisation, including gangs, as normal, as authentic. Thus, traditional concepts continue to play an important role

in indigenous accounts of social and cultural change. The metaphorical use of waka, iwi and marae is characteristic of postcolonial Māori organisations that are not directly based on descent or other forms of kinship, but that do aspire to rehabilitating sociocultural as well as political and economic functions of traditional tribes, and also, in the case of gangs, to the quality of social relations and interactions that are associated with traditional modes of organisation. This representation and revaluation of classic values as central aspects of Māori organisation demonstrates that contemporary cultural practices can only be understood against a background of cultural continuity, in spite of their discontinuity.

The scope of the argument that analogies are crucial in indigenous accounts of change reaches far beyond the ethnographic examples presented in this article. Teresia Teaiwa (2006) has also argued that the distinction between present and past becomes blurred in analogies that are drawn in order to highlight continuity above discontinuity in historical comparisons throughout the Pacific.[4] And as noted earlier, Michel Foucault (1966) demonstrated in his early work how since the Middle Ages a focus on comparability has made it possible to emphasise similarities between past and present in order to neglect the incomparability of historical differences. In the footsteps of medieval monks he subsequently used the concept of analogy successfully in the development of his genealogical method of conducting historical research (Gross 2001). Still, the concept of analogy provides only a new point of departure for research into cultural change since the suggestion of analogies with the past by the gang member cited above also evokes new questions. For example, how do young people growing up during the Māori renaissance relate to the revitalisation of cultural practices that are alien to their own experiences and life worlds so that questions about authenticity come up once they become involved?

THE FUTURE OF MĀORI YOUNGSTERS

Over the past two decades, I published a series of articles about my research into the cultural identification of Māori youngsters who feel left out by the Māori renaissance (Van Meijl 1999, 2001, 2005, 2006b, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013a). My interest in the subject was raised when I worked as a volunteer at a Māori training centre for school dropouts, who qualified for an allowance on top of their unemployment benefit when they enrolled for training in vocational skills. This training centre was located on a marae, and for that reason training in cultural skills was an obligatory part of the curriculum, including training in the Māori language that was focused in particular on the making of speeches and the performance of traditional chants as part of Māori ceremonies. Most young people had little or no experience with marae ceremonies, and so the lessons they received at the training centre involved a first introduction to classic forms of Māori culture.

Initially, all Māori youngsters were interested in learning "their own language and culture" since they were embarrassed that they were unable to express their Māori identity in a so-called "traditional" manner. Soon, however, it became apparent how difficult it is to acquire competencies in a "new" language and in highly cultivated ceremonies. After several weeks, most realised that they would never achieve the proficiency in cultural skills that is required to fully participate in the ceremonies, let alone to pass them on to their children and thus carry marae protocol forward into the future. The awareness never to succeed in "Māori culture" and become a so-called "certified Māori" was a real burden for most youngsters. They were stigmatised as Māori who were not "good" Māori, and as such they were also made responsible for their failure in society since a strong cultural identity was deemed necessary for societal success (see also Poata-Smith 1996).

I interviewed dozens of youngsters about their lives, what they find important, and how they view their future and the role of Māori cultural traditions therein. The most striking summary of the dilemma they are facing I received from a young mother of four with an unemployed husband. Eventually she confided that at the training centre she had realised for the first time in her life that she was Māori only because she had a dark skin. When she realised that she would never be able to catch up with her lack of skills in Māori cultural traditions, she shared that "being Māori doesn't come from my heart … I think that in Māoritanga everything is going backwards instead of going forwards, but I just want to go forward."[5]

This moving confession formulated the cultural dilemma of many Māori youngsters not surprisingly also in terms of a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Indeed, an analysis of the mediation of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity in the frequent analogies between past and present should address the question of how young people who are growing up in culturally diverse circumstances deal with cultural differences and cultural change. It is beyond the scope of this article to address this question in detail (see Van Meijl 2013b), but one example may illustrate that youngsters also use analogies to cope with change.

In the movie *Once Were Warriors* (1994, dir. Lee Tamahori), after the controversial novel by Alan Duff (1990), we see both the best and the worst of two clashing cultural environments. Jake "The Muss" Heke, the unemployed father of the family that features in the movie, drinks too often too much, and when he is drunk he becomes aggressive. The film portrays the tragic decline of the family in a gripping way. The oldest son, Nig, joins a gang and adopts a facial tattoo to express his loyalty to the club. The second son, Boogie, is removed from home after a few minor offences and put in a residential youth care institution, where he is also trained in cultural traditions in order to enhance his self-esteem as a Māori boy. Nic and Boogie meet again at the funeral for their sister, Grace, who committed

suicide after having been raped by a drinking mate of her father's. Boogie admires the tattoo of his brother, who asks him whether he would also like one. His answer is telling; pointing to his heart, he says: "No, I am wearing mine on the inside."

This analogy between a traditional tattoo and the inner conviction that traditions occupy a central position in Māori culture may offer a key to understanding the enormous revival of so-called tribal tattoos among Māori youngsters in recent years. Twenty-five years ago, Māori with a traditional tattoo were few and far between. Only men with a history of imprisonment were sometimes tattooed, but then usually rather unprofessionally, whereas their symbols were far removed from cultural traditions. The recent revival of tattoos, applying traditional tribal symbols in a professional way, may not necessarily be remarkable in view of the global revival of tattoos (DeMello 2000). The revival in New Zealand, however, is obviously connected to local history and must be understood in the context of the cultural renaissance, which raises the question regarding the contemporary meaning of tribal tattoos for Māori youngsters.

The hypothesis that I would like to launch here is that many Māori youngsters may have adopted traditional tattoos to express their Māori identity in order to seek connections with the Māori renaissance, which after all has cast Māori culture in a different light in recent decades. This idea is based on the observation that tattoos are especially popular among Māori who face difficulties in expressing their cultural identity in a traditional manner, e.g., by making a ceremonial speech or playing a leading role in the performance of chants on the marae. Tattoos offer them a kind of "time out" from the moral pressure to conform to the classic model of Māori culture and traditions, while at the same time they function as a visible symbol of a Māori identity. And, as Boogie indicated in *Once Were Warriors*, tattoos may be considered in analogy with the power of Māori culture in the past. By means of tattoos, analogies are, in other words, created with the vitality of Māori culture, albeit without necessarily living up to the moral pressure to be fully conversant in the Māori language and traditions that has emerged in the course of the Māori renaissance.

The conception of tattoos as strategies to cope with cultural change is also apparent from the ambiguity with which young people legitimise the tattooing of indelible Māori motifs on their bodies. They are usually proud of their tattoos, but at the same time they are reticent to talk about them, which also appears from the paucity of anthropological studies of the cultural meaning of tattoos (but see Higgins 2004: 233–319; Robinson 2012; Te Awekotuku *et al*. 2007). Some associate their tattoos with pain and suffering in their lives, whereas others express pride and point to cultural continuity (e.g., Neleman 1999). These contradictory emotions converge in tattoos,

which also indicates that tattoos function as analogies between past and present. Tattoos enable all Māori to focus on the similarities between past and present so that young people who previously were unable to connect to the orthodox renaissance of cultural traditions may also appeal to the strength of Māori culture, which nowadays does offer the necessary inspiration and bravery in their search for cultural innovation.

* * *

Research into cultural change has been central in the history of anthropology ever since it emerged in the nineteenth century. The introduction of ethnographic field research in the twentieth century, however, has pushed theoretical debates about change to the background. Chris Hann (2009) has described this process as the "theft of anthropology", in analogy with the renowned book *The Theft of History* by Jack Goody (2006). Indeed, it seems time to advocate for a reintroduction of the comparative study of cultural change in anthropology, which is above all important to leave behind permanently the unfruitful debate about a lack of authenticity in cultural innovation, especially in the lives of young people. For that reason, too, it may be clear that the scope of my argument reaches far beyond the Pacific. Around the globe, many youngsters, especially those with a migration background, are growing up in multicultural circumstances often entailing a search for a balance between "two shores" (Lee 2003), which is frequently framed in terms of a dichotomy between the present and the past. I would argue that the concept of analogy offers better insight in their struggle to bridge cultural differences and to deal with cultural changes. On the one hand, migrants draw analogies between cultural habits in their home country and cultural customs in their new country in order to bridge cultural differences in the comparison. On the other hand, analogies are frequently drawn between contemporary events and comparable phenomena in the past, in which differences are neglected by highlighting similarities. Thus, the concept of analogy offers insight into the way in which past and present converge in a range of different cultural experiences among people living in societies that are characterised by cultural diversity and change.

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NOTES

1. Although it has been suggested that the law in some settler colonies might influence the production of the past in the courtroom (e.g., Hamilton 2009), there is no evidence that the construction of indigenous difference and discontinuity in New Zealand was triggered by the legal setting of tribunal hearings. Instead, I would argue that the hearings of the Waitangi Tribunal offered a platform for the expression of long-standing grievances (see also Williams 2013).
2. In 2011, Daniel Rosenblatt published an analysis of the "indigenization of modernity" (cf. Sahlins 1993) in contemporary Māori society.
3. What complicates my argument here is that the Waitangi Tribunal (1998) offered Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust, which was one of the main claimant urban groups in the country, negotiating status with the government as "iwi". In their claim to the Tribunal, the "whānau" from West Auckland had argued: "Waipareira is not an iwi but is iwi" (p. 6), and the Tribunal accepted that "[t]oday, 'iwi' can mean either the people of a place or a large tribe composed of several dispersed groups" (p. 18).
4. See, for example, Friedman (1993) on the continuity of kinship relations and social organisation in Hawai'i. The revitalisation of language and tattooing also feature very strongly among the Kanaka Maoli or the indigenous people of the Hawaiian archipelago.
5. I should like to emphasise that this statement cannot be considered as representative of all underprivileged Māori youngsters in New Zealand. Over the past few decades, New Zealand has changed considerably, especially with respect to the place of Māori culture in wider society and the question of whether it has a future. As a consequence, cultural experiences and practices, too, have diversified enormously (see, e.g., George 2012).

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Toon van Meijl, Department of Anthropology and Development Studies, Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies, Radboud University, PO Box 9104, 6500 HE Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Email: T.vanMeijl@ru.nl | http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0547-2627

COCONUTS AND ROSARIES: MATERIALITY IN THE CATHOLIC CHRISTIANISATION OF THE TUAMOTU ARCHIPELAGO (FRENCH POLYNESIA)

ÉMILIE NOLET
Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

ABSTRACT: The Christianisation of the Tuamotu Archipelago, a large group of atolls lying between the Society and Marquesas archipelagos, was the subject of intense rivalry between several Christian denominations. This article focuses on the evangelistic practices of the Catholic missionaries of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, who settled there in 1849 after achieving great success in the Gambier Islands. In the Tuamotus, Catholic evangelisation relied on material practices (rituals, exchanges, construction of churches and secular buildings, etc.) and imported objects (rosaries, calico, medals, etc.), which were often shipped there with great difficulty. The Fathers' accounts provide valuable insights into both the changes in material culture and social organisation that occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century and the processes of reconstruction, distortion or denial of imported practices or values—to which the missionaries also had to adapt.

Keywords: Catholic missionaries, material practices, post-conversion strategies, missionary enterprises, Picpus Fathers, Tuamotu Archipelago, French Polynesia

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> I forgot to ask your Excellency to request a few thuribles. Ceremonies are more effective than grand speeches with the Indians.
>
> —Clair Fouqué, letter to Ferréol Loubat, Temarie, 24 March 1851

The Tuamotu or Pa'umotu Archipelago is one of the five that constitute French Polynesia. Comprising 77 atolls scattered over more than 600,000 km^2, it differs from the other groups by the total absence of high volcanic islands. European navigators sailed through the Tuamotus as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but most of the islands remained rarely visited even after the establishment in Tahiti of the French Protectorate in 1842. This can be explained by a very disparate distribution of market-worthy resources,[1] the dangers of navigation in these islands and the hostility displayed by some communities. As a consequence, historical sources providing information on these societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are also much less abundant than for other areas of the cultural historical region of Eastern Polynesia, such as the Society Islands. The first

converted Christians were Pa‘umotu (the native inhabitants of the Tuamotu islands) who had settled in the Society Islands in the early nineteenth century, following the wars between Anaa (or, in Pa‘umotuan, Ganā) and other western and central Tuamotu atolls (Moerenhout 1837). Polynesians trained by Protestant missionaries (Davies 1961: 94; Ellis 1831, III: 305–6) started to propagate Christianity in the Tuamotus from 1817 (Gunson 1969: 74). On the Catholic side, the missionaries of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (CSH)[2]—also named Picpus Fathers because their first house was on Picpus Street in Paris—founded a first mission in Faaite (or Fāite) in 1849, encouraged by their success in the Gambier Islands since 1834.[3] According to Cyrille Mérian (1928–1933: 8), “word of the successes won by the Mormon and Protestant ministers provoked a burning desire in Catholic missionaries to devote themselves as well”. However, the task was not easy in the atolls of Faaite, Fakarava and Anaa, which they targeted first, as they faced competition from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, or Mormons)[4] and encountered fierce hostility toward the French administration. In the Tuamotus, the Fathers also had to face material conditions that were more precarious and constraining than anywhere else in French Polynesia: food resources were not as abundant and varied as in Tahiti or the Marquesas, and the remoteness of the Tuamotus meant long, constant and hazardous sea travel. The Pa‘umotu themselves were seen as victims on multiple levels: of pagan misdirection, Mormon “heresy”, the pearl-shell sellers’ cupidity, the indifference of the French colonial rule, and the “extreme misery” of the environment, “without mountains, without vegetation, without green”, offering “nothing but sand and gravel” (Fierens 1877a, 1884). In the 1860s, missionaries based in the Gambier Islands and Anaa endeavoured to evangelise, with their catechists, the last “wild” islands of the remote north and east and to reconvert populations “lost” to the LDS, for instance in Hao and Amanu (Fierens 1866c; Montiton 1869: 2, 21–22). The conversion phase was completed in the early 1880s when Tematangi (or Tematagi) was reputedly the last pagan atoll to be converted by the Picpus Fathers (*Les Missions Catholiques* 1890); it was followed by an equally difficult time in stabilising and maintaining what had been achieved.

This paper will focus on the role given to objects and material actions over five decades of Catholic missionisation (1849–1900) in a region considered, from the start, as particularly destitute, abandoned and primitive. Christian missionaries in Oceania were active collectors of artefacts, which could be famously destroyed when they were representative of paganism but also kept as trophies demonstrating victory of the Christian God, or for scientific purposes (Delbos 2011: 33–34, 39–40; Gardner 2000; Hooper 2006: 27). Numerous studies have looked at the historical dynamics of collecting and exchange and at the objects brought back from the mission

lands, sometimes to be displayed in exhibitions or museums showcasing the success of missionary organisations.[5] The Picpus Fathers contributed to knowledge about Oceanic material worlds by bringing back to Europe descriptions, images and objects, some extremely rare—as in the case of the carved *rongorongo* tablets of Rapa Nui, collected and studied by Étienne Jaussen (Ropiteau 1935). However, this paper will not focus on the activity and objectives of such collections; rather, it will examine the introduction into the Tuamotus of artefacts, materials and architectural concepts that were instrumental in the Catholic missionary enterprise. The missionaries to the Tuamotus imported from Tahiti and Europe numerous food items, tools and religious objects for a range of aims, in particular to develop relationships with the islanders and obtain services in exchange, attract converts and resist the influence of rival religious groups, especially the LDS and the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (RLDS, or Sanito Church). They relied heavily on rituals and material symbols, while seeking to transform the existing material world; for instance, they tried to put in place permanent modes of settlement and encourage new economic practices. While these strategies proved successful in some places and in certain periods, the missionaries also had to face setbacks and unexpected consequences; thus their accounts record how the new modes of life and of thought imported into the Tuamotus were diversely appropriated, rejected or denied.[6]

DAILY SURVIVAL AND COMPETITION

When they arrived in 1851 at the Mormon "fortress" that was Anaa (Terlyn 1900), the Catholic missionaries were confronted by virulent opposition from a part of the population that was hostile to "papism". Evangelisation began within a tense and defiant atmosphere that reached a head in November 1852, when the sergeant Charles Viry was assassinated while two missionaries from Anaa were violently beaten, with one, Clair Fouqué, left for dead (Loubat 1852; also Newbury 1980: 139–40). Competition from other religious groups thus became, from the start, one of the central themes evoked in the letters and reports sent to "His Excellency", the Bishop of Tahiti, and to the Congregation's headquarters. The missionaries quickly faced another persistent problem: that of managing the importation of resources, tools and building materials, despite distance, high costs and the unreliability of the maritime links. First of all, the Fathers imported a significant portion of their food supplies. Salted pork, hardtack, flour, lentils and beans supplemented or replaced local foods, which were considered scarce, unsavoury or even dangerous for unaccustomed visitors (Fouqué 1849a). Fresh foods like coconuts and fish were still offered or traded by inhabitants (Fouqué 1849b; Mérian 1928–1933: 25). It is probable that the political tensions of the early

1850s only reinforced the Fathers' determination to become as independent as possible from the food supplies produced or controlled by the Pa'umotu. However, those who were posted for several months on atolls that were rarely or never provisioned by commercial ships were forced to depend on the islanders' resources and skills far more than they wished; they survived on tridacna clams, coconuts, pandanus and, in the best of times, turtle (Fierens 1884: 386; Montiton 1873: 280, 371).

Interisland transport was crucial as the Fathers were unwilling to be dependent on merchant schooners and wanted to follow the inhabitants in their continuous travels. For this reason, they also sought to obtain watercrafts and materials to conduct maintenance and repairs on the islands (Fouqué 1850c). Their letters also mentioned shipments of clothing and other everyday items for their own use (soutanes, shoes, stockings, hats, European china, newspapers, matches, calendars, soap, etc.), or contained pressing requests for such things. For the Fathers, it was as much about securing the minimum needed to lead a "decent" life, by the standards of the time, as about successfully abiding by their congregation's rules and reconstituting a familiar environment within the "painful apostolate" of the Tuamotus. Despite their devotion, many amongst the Fathers went through episodes of intense discouragement because of the lack of personnel, apostasies, hardships and physical weariness. Although surrounded by Polynesians, they considered themselves alone, longing for confession and the companionship of their peers. Familiar objects could hence have been a source of solace and of protection against despair and insanity. Such were the letters received from the hierarchy, or from fellow missionaries on other postings, whose news, encouragements and instructions were eagerly awaited all year round. But the most awaited items were undoubtedly the religious ones, which were necessary to administer sacraments, catechise proselytes and conduct the many devotions of the Catholic religion. These had to be replaced regularly, being used, stolen or even lost at sea, e.g., while landing on one of the many closed atolls. During their trips from one island to another, the Fathers transported religious candles, altar stones, host moulds, crucifixes, rosaries and other devices often seen as indispensable and without substitute—according to the LDS missionary James S. Brown (1900: 210), the priests in Anaa had as many "things" as "two or three men could carry" for a "meeting". For Germain Fierens, for instance, it was inconceivable to celebrate mass without Eucharistic wine (1866a). A similar attitude seems to have existed amongst the Marist Fathers in Sāmoa who, according to Andrew Hamilton (1998: 173), were "not prepared to go as far as their Protestant rivals in adapting the eucharist to *fa'a Samoa* ['the Sāmoan way']".

Vital, comforting and indispensable to their ecclesiastic ministry, the objects surrounding the Fathers also helped to express their identity and establish their influence. In fact, they needed both to be recognised as men of God and spiritual guides and to distinguish themselves from the white traders, beachcombers and castaways who passed through these islands and whom they usually secretly despised. To position the priest on "a rank that obliged respect for his character" (Fouqué 1851a), one had to keep the soutane, even for physical work under a blazing sun (Fierens 1877a) or during sea voyages, and to maintain body and clothing in a clean state (Fouqué 1851b). Besides, the missionaries' status and mission were expressed, to some extent, through physical distancing. In Napuka, Albert Montiton greeted the natives "with his voice and hand" instead of rubbing noses like his catechist (1869). Fierens (1871), whom the same islanders were eager to see and touch, tried to keep his distance as a *tagata raka* 'sacred man'. It is also apparent that the Fathers avoided as much as possible living in the natives' homes, and one of their first concerns when evangelising a community was to find "adequate housing" for themselves and for God (i.e., by building a chapel or church; Fierens 1878). The regulations which were in use in the Vicariate of Tahiti in 1874 ("Ensemble des règlements" 1874) provided "as a precaution" that a missionary should always stay or travel with "a catechist or a child who will be his guardian angel"—but accounts suggest that at least some stayed on their own while in the Tuamotus. Importantly, such *modus operandi* did not preclude compassion or interest for those who, for Fierens, were above all "poor" people that the "Devil kept chained". According to Mérian, Montiton, who had quickly mastered both Tahitian and Pa'umotuan, was "very loved by all" (1928–1933: 137) and became the confidant of his followers, from whom he also gathered oral traditions. In fact, missionisation involved having to strike a delicate equilibrium: the Fathers had to live amongst the natives in order to be listened to and appreciated, all the while fostering a distinction between themselves and those that they had come to turn into "enlightened Catholics" (Montiton 1856a).

Without necessarily showing more empathy towards indigenous beliefs and practices, the first LDS missionaries were presumably more willing to live in close physical proximity with the natives, on whom they depended for their food and shelter, and to adapt their practices to what existed locally (see Ellsworth 1959: 20; Hendrix-Komoto 2015: 90; on LDS missionaries and how they related to Polynesian cultures, see also Barber 2015). Benjamin Grouard had breakfast on the ground and ate with his fingers shortly after first arriving in Anaa in 1845, used coconut milk and sprouts for the celebration of the Eucharist, travelled in a local double-hulled canoe (1843–1846: 84–86, 103, 139) and married the "prettiest and best girl in the island",

which made a "commotion" (Pratt 1843–1852, April 1846). Such facts could contribute to the LDS's success, even if certain much-cherished local habits, like dancing and smoking, were still condemned (Pratt 1843–1852, 19 July 1846). The LDS missionaries were also able to address central desires and preoccupations of the islanders by practising rituals of healing and exorcism (Brown 1900: 215; Grouard 1843–1846: 110) and by distributing titles and distinctions (Pratt 1843–1852, 1 November 1846). The Catholics accused them of deceiving the Pa'umotu by exploiting existing superstitions and fears (see Montiton 1856a: 7–8) but also of shamelessly taking advantage of their resources.[7] This opinion possibly reinforced the Picpus Fathers' desire to prove their philanthropic engagement by minimising their material reliance on their followers (see Hodée 1983: 346). Thus, preserving some material autonomy thanks to shipments of equipment and food supplies was not only a measure of security and a form of comfort but also a political necessity: "Because they [LDS rivals] pretend to be apostles without purse and without money, they are starting to be viewed as *teimaha* ['ponderous'], a burden for the disciples. Our people who start to calculate will see that they have nothing to lose with our missionaries" (Fouqué 1850b: 2).

Other types of items became useful in the fight against the LDS's influence. Some Picpus Fathers requested Bibles to help them debate theological points with the ministers; others asked for medications, for charity reasons but also to keep up with the competition on healing work. In 1862, for instance, Fierens (1862) asked for a shipment of homeopathic remedies, explaining: "My reputation here is complete, so much so that the Mormons do not talk about performing miracles anymore, they all come to me themselves to be cured." Even if the Catholics relied on the importing of objects and commodities to survive and succeed, their hopes were frequently dashed, either because the letters never reached their destination or because excessively specific or costly requests were impossible to satisfy, or again because the much-awaited items arrived unusable after a journey at sea. Thus, their adaptability should not be underestimated, in particular with regard to their own comfort. While Grouard (1843–1846: 154) accepted to have the ground as "[his] table, the leaves of a tree [as his] dishes, and [his] fingers … as knife and fork" since "all these things … are for the gospel's sake", some Catholic missionaries even felt a sense of moral satisfaction in the fact that they lived "in the poverty of Christ". Among many instances, Montiton had to sleep in an old abandoned hut open to the wind and rain, while in Napuka Fierens had to ration his food and consume rotten flour. The missionaries of the eastern atolls, faced with the most remote conditions, more than any others had to learn to make do with what was there and, eventually, express their specific status and purpose in ways other than through material culture—for instance by avoiding taking part in non-Catholic daily activities.

EDIFY AND DAZZLE THROUGH "EXPRESSIVE BEAUTIES"

If the CSH missionaries could rely on Christian reinterpretations of local myths (see Montiton 1874 for examples) or on the Christianisation of existing rituals to promote Catholicism in the Tuamotus, there is little information as to how such means were implemented (or not) in daily life. On the other hand, there is abundant firsthand data on the functions that they gave to their religious buildings and the ceremonies that took place there. Although the Picpus Fathers sometimes had to celebrate mass in simple private homes (Loubat 1857), they rapidly endeavoured to build their own churches, using perishable materials to start with if necessary, and then using durable materials as soon as feasible[8] (Fig. 1). These constructions tended to reproduce forms and organising principles imported from Europe, but the Fathers learned to experiment and adapt to resources available *in situ*—such as coral, from which they extracted lime, following a technique developed in Mangareva. For these structures, the Fathers imported building materials, design plans, architecture handbooks and tools; they requested the help of craftsmen trained in the Gambiers or of lay brothers known for their building skills (Fouqué 1852d; Loubat 1857). Moreover, they were determined to endow the churches with all the liturgical utensils, furniture

Figure 1. Church with priest in doorway, Kaukura, 1874. Museum of Tahiti and the Islands (D2008 2-48).

elements and adornments they saw as crucial to the dignity of rituals. A letter from 1853, for instance, requested the shipment of crucifixes, sacred stones, adornments in colourful silk, chalices, albs for the holy days, vials of holy oil, a harmonium and other items (Fouqué 1853). Some priests hesitated to organise certain rites if they did not possess what was needed to "brighten them up". The difficulty in obtaining specific items could lead to the utilisation of substitutes, for instance flowers to replace candles and pandanus mats to adorn the church's steps and floor (Pépin 1851), but those were generally perceived as makeshift measures.

The Picpus Fathers' determination to erect places of worship may find its roots in a characteristic of the Congregation and its spiritual tradition: namely, according to Paul Hodée, the importance given to Eucharistic adoration (1983: 248–50, 329). Still, the multiplicity and beauty of the churches were also a necessity for evangelisation: the religious buildings had to celebrate the glory of God all the while moving the hearts and imagination of the indigenous people. In this civilisation of ephemeral materiality, where indigenous coral *marae* 'temples' did not always stand up to the assaults of waves and time, the Fathers endeavoured to create stable material landmarks, also attracting the populations via the beauty of the decorations and the pomp of the ceremonies. Montiton (1856: 391) evoked the care given "in decorating our chapel, so as to excite the curiosity of the infidels and the enthusiasm of our neophytes". For his part, Fouqué (1852c) insisted on the importance of maintaining "the external pomp of the cult": "fake flowers, ornaments, chandelier, small organs, etc.: the superficial and dull character of our Indians needs to be overexcited by a few objects that strike the senses." According to common opinion, nothing was more beneficial to the mission than a rite conducted with grandeur, following the tradition, and if possible in the presence of a religious authority of a higher rank, such as the Bishop of Tahiti. "The ceremonies are conducted with dignity", indicated Ferréol Loubat (1857) to a brother in 1857; "If, on this Easter Day, you would have been amongst us, you would have believed yourself in Paris and not in a dreadful Paumotu island" (see also Montiton 1856b). For Montiton, the issue at hand was to successfully enable the Pa'umotu to access the mystery of faith through objects and rites. The churches, their decorations and the objects exhibited or manipulated during ceremonies constituted a path towards the "hidden God": they had to dazzle, give the experience of the divine presence, bring the population to Catholicism through emotion and the senses. He wrote (1856: 392):

> Now, this powerful lever, or better, these dove's wings that the royal prophet asked for so as to rise up to God, the Indian will find them, of this we are utterly convinced, in the pomp and expressive beauties of the Catholic cult, which, by striking the senses first, will imperceptibly affect his soul, lifting

> it up, freeing it from the materiality in which it is somehow buried,[9] and revealing to it another world hitherto unknown.

The success of such a strategy remains difficult to evaluate. Testimonies suggest that the newly erected churches could prompt admiration and pride in the districts, and that inaugural ceremonies associating feasts with Christian spirituality could attract a large attendance, including "heretics" (Montiton 1856b; Pépin 1851: 49). Yet, the Fathers often despaired that the solemnities they so cherished only generated indifference or mockery despite the material means deployed, especially in those islands with strong Mormon influence (Montiton 1856a). In addition to a deep-seated belief in the efficacy of objects, images and rituals, it needs to be remembered that the Fathers' efforts were carried out within the context of a continuous fight against this religious group. Hence, the stone-made churches, as stable and durable as the Fathers' progresses were fragile and challenged, the calvaries, the monumental crosses, all represented concrete testimonies of the Catholic presence, visual reminders of the victories achieved. Their whiteness, contrasting with the grey stone of the marae coral masses, and their proportions made them immediately noticeable to passing vessels. The multiplication of churches was also a practical necessity. According to Marie-Joseph Verdier (1885b), in the 1880s, it was illusory to expect a population "naturally indolent and deprived of watercrafts capable of offshore voyaging" to travel every week to another island for prayer and religious education. The churches and the objects kept within them also constituted a form of substitute during the long and unavoidable absences of the priest, reminding the Catholics of the Church's force and bringing them back to their religious duties. Such a *modus operandi*, placing strong emphasis on "materialising" the mission, was by no means peculiar to the CSH or to Catholic missionaries in Oceania (on the Anglican missions in Papua New Guinea see Hermkens 2014: 418). However, it arguably took one of its most intense and desperate forms in the Tuamotus in the second half of the nineteenth century because of the specific environmental, geographic and socioreligious conditions. The need to build was particularly acute where the Mormons had already erected their temples (on Fakarava see Fouqué 1852a). In their letters, some Fathers contrasted the "vast empty rooms … bare of any religious symbolism" (Montiton 1856: 391) of the Mormon temples with the Catholic churches, and Mormon ceremonies using readily available local resources with Catholic rituals involving numerous foreign objects. Such differences were supposedly advantageous to the CSH. Yet one of the challenges they faced was maintaining the sacred character of their churches designed for celebrations, silence and prayer, as well as the "dignity" of the presbytery, which, for Verdier (1885c), was not supposed to be considered as a "common house where everyone can go sit and converse at will".

In addition to erecting churches, the Fathers engaged in building schools, wells and water tanks, all of which had a role to play in the grand missionary project. For these constructions as well, materials had to be imported (construction timber, paint, iron parts, etc.), in addition to the supplies necessary for running a school—the latter being considered as a tool of moral conquest. It was understood that these architectural performances inspired pride and gratitude, strengthening the hold of Catholicism. On the other hand, some priests also attempted to erase or desacralise material traces of non-Christian religion. In 1863, Bruno Schouten (1863) was leading the inhabitants of Fakahina "to some altars of their gods" and invited them to overthrow the "enormous stones", because the population seemed to "fear these divinities and respect these places". He also hoped to annihilate any impulse to go back to paganism. In other contexts, material symbols relating to the ancient and new religions were juxtaposed—so as to demonstrate the preeminence of Catholicism, and perhaps also to encourage a form of identification. In Napuka, Montiton (1869: 5) had a large wooden cross erected near a marae close to which a pile of turtle bones had been discovered, in order to "devote to the saviour … this part of the island desecrated for so long by the idolatrous cult of the Devil". In Raroia, the population continued going to traditional marae even after the Catholic church was completed in 1875. The priest then took the initiative of detaching the largest stone from the marae and using it as the stepping stone at the entrance of the church. After this operation, wrote Bengt Danielsson (1953: 130), "the church was always full".

GIVING AND EXCHANGING

While the Fathers believed they had encountered a certain taste for pomp and ceremony amongst the Pa'umotu people, they also quickly understood the importance of exchange and generosity in this Polynesian society, hence not hesitating to conclude Catholic celebrations with meals or gifts distributed to children and adults. Thus, firsthand accounts of the inauguration of a new church in Putuahara (Anaa) in February 1856 show that large quantities of western, Tahitian and local food products were gathered and ceremoniously displayed. The Catholic priests followed the local custom of formally accepting the food before giving it back to the chief for distribution (Loubat 1857). Their own contribution included 100 bottles of wine (Montiton 1856b: 4). For the blessing of another church in Tatakoto, Montiton (1873: 374) contributed "as much flour, rice and beans" as he could, and two pigs, while the population provided "seven huge turtles", tridacna clams and coconuts. A part of the items requested from the mission's authorities was thus intended for gifts or exchanges. These goods belonged to four categories: objects to cover and adorn the body; utilitarian objects (tools, fishing gear);

objects demonstrating religious obedience or intended to support devotion (scapular medals, rosaries); and food supplies and tobacco. They were selected by the Fathers based on previous experiences of exchange and the availability of goods and food supplies, and of course according to their own perception of the needs and tastes of the people. Some missionaries obviously tried to please the islanders, particularly to ease tensions due to the competition between religious groups. However, the Fathers pursued other clearly identified aims and expected tangible results from the transfer of objects, including to (i) arouse sympathy towards the mission and incite conversions, (ii) obtain the support of local dignitaries, (iii) improve the living conditions of a population seen as poor and backward, (iv) gain other goods and services in return and/or (v) implement a societal project. Some objects were intended to respond to basic physiological needs, others were supposed to create new habits—thus, pants or dresses were supposed to literally contribute to civilising their owners. Equally importantly, such items could become signs of identification for the new community of Catholic Christians, ones which symbolically placed them under the benevolent authority of the missionary Father or catechist and indicated they were not "pagans" or "heretics" (see Fig. 2).

Gifts were first a means of establishing contact with populations and their chiefs in the early days of evangelisation (on the use of gifts and exchanges by missionaries to establish relationships see also Bell 2013: 59; Hermkens 2014: 402). Schouten (1863) mentioned the "fabrics, ironware, wire" brought to Tatakoto and the population's eagerness to acquire foreign objects, while Hippolyte Roussel (1865) offered one of his shirts to the "king" of Reao, and Montiton (1869) gifted a naval officer's golden button to the chief of Napuka. While the presents were not reciprocated in the Tatakoto case, in Pukarua, where Roussel had himself introduced as a "priest of god" (*taura o te etua*) and offered fruits from Mangareva, the missionary was presented with several turtles—a most generous gift that may indicate that he was indeed perceived at that time as a high-ranking individual. In some atolls, it might be that the Fathers were invited or tolerated because they were seen as a potential source of access to foreign material goods. In 1849, the two main chiefs of Anaa asked the Catholic mission for two priests and requested at the same time clothes for their own usage (Jaussen 1849). In 1850, Faaite resident Fouqué (1850a) also considered that fabric was the most appropriate gift for the chief Teina, who was "expecting presents". Exchange also soon became a means of obtaining fresh food supplies, with tobacco used to access chickens, coconuts and pigs (Fierens 1866b; Fouqué 1851a), or paper and quills to receive coconuts and fish (Fouqué 1855). Goods imported into the islands were also used to pay for services. In February 1857,

Fouqué (1857) explained he had given more than two "armfuls" (French *brasse*) of calico and more than one of *faraoti* 'raw canvas' to an Anaa islander that was employed as a cook and domestic worker, and who also requested a cardigan. Clothes were also counted as expenditures allocated to the construction of churches (Jaussen 1873).[10] There was a dual interest in giving clothes to the Pa'umotu since it also allowed them to celebrate religious ceremonies "with dignity". The construction of churches hence became a way for the communities to gain foreign objects and equipment, sailboats being the most prized items. In 1852, the population of Fakarava asked to build a stone church in exchange for a large cutter boat (Fouqué 1852b). Compensation was sometimes fiercely negotiated, and some Fathers understood that generosity in exchanges would become an important factor in their success: "[W]e could … gain support and arouse people's interest, if we were a little less parsimonious with those who are giving us their services" (Fouqué 1851a). In Anaa in 1851, religious conversions themselves could generate expectations of compensation or be negotiated by the islanders against material or immaterial benefits (food offers, tobacco, healing; Laval 1851). In addition, gifts of food and artefacts were used as an "incentive to come and learn" or to reward those islanders who were the most dedicated at church, the most hardworking. For the blessing of the first stone of the church at Tatakoto, Montiton (1873: 289) handed out various objects to the inhabitants, such as harpoons and iron coconut scrapers, "as much to reward them for the work already done as to encourage them to participate in the remaining effort". Christian rites of passage also came with gifts: for instance, Vincent de Paul Terlyn gave clothes, axes, fishhooks, fishing lines, etc. at the conclusion of baptisms and weddings celebrated in 1884 at Tematangi (*Les Missions Catholiques* 1890: 608).

According to the Picpus Fathers, the islanders were intrigued by their personal belongings (shoes, books, etc.) and received their presents with joy and gratitude (Fierens 1877a; *Les Missions Catholiques* 1890: 609), though also demonstrating preferences for certain categories of items, for example, biblical images, "especially where there is fire" (Fierens 1871); rosaries, worn as necklaces; red handkerchiefs; and metallic tools. A non-missionary source indicated that Tahitian newspapers, tobacco and imported foods (bacon, sardines) were also eagerly sought after in the 1880s (Ingouf 1883). The interest shown in items already worn out ("pieces of soutane, any kind of old thing"; Janeau 1890) was generally attributed to the poverty of the inhabitants. However, some Fathers did show how such objects were reappropriated by the islanders to gave them back life and meaning. In Tureia, islanders were "extremely skilful in using for fishing" barrel hoops already nearly entirely consumed by rust (Janeau 1890). The fact that a western fabric, blue calico, could be used to wrap precious relics within a

sacred wooden receptacle, or white cotton to lash the blade of a ceremonial adze (Emory 1975: 115; Kaeppler 2007: 112), is an indication of their value, but also of the natives' agency in linking their own cultural practices with imported goods.

The missionaries' writings hence suggest a strong appetite for foreign goods, of which the aesthetic qualities and functional properties were acknowledged and used in ways that were more or less predictable. But such goods may also have acted as "trophies of politically powerful allegiances, symbols of material wealth, and high-status adornment", as Jennifer Newell (2010: 41) phrased it, or even been seen as infused with the spiritual power of the newcomers and their god, at least in the first stages of conversion—a god whose efficiency was perhaps demonstrated by the fact that the missionaries did not die after desecrating marae (on marae power, see Grouard 1843–1846: 156). In any case, it is unlikely that the conversions were solely motivated by economic factors, even on these atolls (see Thomas 1992: 21–23). Historical accounts suggest that various factors could be at play in a person choosing to become or remain a Catholic, such as healings attributed to the priests or to the power of holy water (Laval 1849 and Fierens 1877a), or the hope of obtaining favours from the French administration. The charisma and efficiency of particular missionaries, or other abilities that could be understood as clear signs of *mana* 'power', also certainly played a role. While Grouard helped to expel *tūpāpa'u* 'spirits' and was heralded by meteorological signs (Laval 1851), Fierens was credited with an authority "that no one ever … could … have" and which was not always "held within the bounds of sound reason": according to fellow priest Adrien Perray (1901), at least some of Fierens's followers believed he was clairvoyant. Terlyn (1883) also reported that a Mormon minister who had insulted Montiton and blasphemed became a catechist, presumably because he lost his eldest son and thought he had been cursed. On the other hand, if a desire for imported goods could encourage some to convert, it was clearly not enough to keep them in Catholicism since the Fathers had to deal with frequent apostasies, for example when a man hoped to be cured by a Mormon ritualistic healing, or when another fell in love with a Mormon woman and wanted to marry her (Verdier 1885c).

In the end, the objects and equipment brought by the Picpus Fathers appear to have responded to preexisting needs (marking distinction, controlling the local environment, etc.), but also to new tastes and necessities, born out of socioeconomic changes operating in French Polynesia (attraction for tobacco, changes to subsistence practices, etc.). The Fathers, while accusing the Pa'umotu of "excessive soliciting" (Fierens 1878; Laval 1851), learned to encourage and exploit the considerable attraction of foreign goods. As suggested by Danielsson (1956: 95), the objects imported by the missionaries

Figure 2. Catholics in Rangiroa (or Ragiroa) in western clothing, surrounding Father Germain (ca. 1874). Museum of Tahiti and the Islands (D2008 2-69).

certainly stirred up the desire to acquire always more and encouraged the islanders to become indebted towards the merchants and to enrol in paid activities, such as pearling and copra. They also favoured the abandonment or transformation of existing cultural practices by demonstrating the superiority of imported techniques and materials, such as metal.

BUILDING MODEL CHRISTENDOMS

Missionaries' actions were not limited to the conversion and religious edification of their followers. They also aimed to help the Pa'umotu build a more "civilised", fair and peaceful society that would offer an auspicious environment for the establishment of Catholicism. This transformation was to be realised through the existing material world: in addition to promoting the use of imported objects, the Fathers encouraged new economic practices and production modes, new ways of living and travelling in the islands. It was important to first provide the islanders with the means to "decently" and durably meet their most basic needs. In doing so, the Picpus Fathers compensated for the deficiencies of the French colonial administration, which they accused of neglecting the Tuamotu atolls (see Verdier 1885a). Despite some Fathers observing the "incredible dexterity" of the Pa'umotu fishermen (Fouqué 1850d), the dominant opinion remained that local resources (fish, aroid tubers from *maite* 'cultivation pits', tridacna clams, pandanus drupes, etc.) did not offer enough food security. The Fathers appear to have been

particularly uncomfortable with the unpredictability of fishing and with the alternating periods of food scarcity and abundance. Some were also shocked to realise that coconut trees, plants they considered by far as the most useful but that were rare on some atolls even in the late 1870s (Danielsson 1956: 64–65; Fierens 1878), could be intentionally chopped down and destroyed during conflicts (Roussel 1874) or after a death—see Fierens (1871): "[H]is plantation was destroyed, everything was offered to the deceased person's gods". As early as 1856, Montiton (1856a) observed enthusiastically that this "unique" tree was "obviously destined to become the second Providence of the Paumotous, so poor, so destitute". For him, Anaa's coconut groves represented a source of wealth "more secure, profitable and far easier to exploit" than pearl-shell, which was already considered as exhausted in this atoll in the mid-1850s. In addition to such risk of depletion, pearling had other disadvantages: as the diving spots were unevenly spread, the start of a new diving season prompted population movements that disrupted parish life and the work of evangelisation. Moreover, the seasonal profits led to outbreaks of parties. There was also high physical risk associated with the gruelling work of pearling. In this context, the Fathers began to encourage coconut cultivation, even transporting on their boat, *Vatikana*, in the 1870s, gardening soil and nuts for planting.[11] Transforming the atolls via coconut plantations was expected to trigger a series of positive changes. The people would be better nourished all year long, could access imported and "civilising" items thanks to the trading of coconut products, would secure their economic independence and would be freed of their isolation due to an increase in merchant ships' visits. In the 1880s, Verdier (1885b) considered that plantation work had helped to end the "distant wanderings" in which the islanders "died in bloody battles, or in terrible storms". The Pa'umotu, when better nourished, were also supposed to become more open to the missionaries' teachings and to help more readily in construction work. Thus, the Fathers gambled on using an existing but unequally distributed resource and on helping the Pa'umotu to make the most of it.

In the meantime, they attempted to gather the islanders in permanent villages around the church and church activities and to limit or control their movements. Their writings speak of the high mobility of the Pa'umotu within each atoll and also to islands further away. This mobility was sometimes attributed to the necessity of looking for food and other times to "adventurous tastes" (Fouqué 1850d), the desire to visit diving spots or the social organisation itself: adoption, for instance, would push a child to "run between one home and the other, just as a butterfly" (Montiton 1856a). The inhabitants' voyages, sometimes leaving an island deserted from one day to the other (Fouqué 1861), were considered as an additional obstacle by the Fathers. However, the construction of churches and schools did not

succeed in halting these movements. Indeed, Fouqué (1856) deplored that the schoolchildren, accompanying the adults in their wanderings, had soon forgotten what they had learned. In 1890, Vincent-Ferrier Janeau estimated as well that the poor results achieved on Hao were due to the inhabitants "continually voyaging, and spending entire seasons scattered in various places, far from their village". Furthermore, travel exposed converts to dreaded foreign influences: merchants who could push them to become indebted and to purchase alcohol, Polynesians from other religious groups who might "corrupt" the neophytes, etc. The Catholic missionaries tried to draw the islanders in by making their religious celebrations as attractive as possible, but also followed them in their circulation, constructing churches wherever diving and copra work occurred, even if remote.

Meanwhile, the missionaries also contributed to the transformation of modes of habitation. In Faaite the population was reduced to "huts, scattered here and there … very miserable" (Fouqué 1850d), while "most" of Napuka's inhabitants had not even "the smallest hut to be protected from the rain", according to Fierens (1878). Montiton (1873: 281), visiting Fangatau (or Fagatau) in 1870, initiated displacement of the principal settlement and endeavoured to provide the islanders with "habitations more adequate for good hygiene and morale", that is to say, "closed bungalows, separated and properly set apart from one another". Not only were such models of habitation expected to be more secure and durable, they also represented the social project of the Fathers and were to help reform traditions, for instance, by fighting against promiscuity between sexes and generations. In addition, the missionaries set upon creating paths and roads permitting the organisation of processions, events that Montiton acknowledged as having "always enjoyed" (1873: 291; see Fierens 1878 on Napuka). Water tanks constructed out of lime and coral stone, masonry-made wells and Catholic cemeteries to properly "house the dead" were attached to the villages. These had to be constructed but also maintained, under the direction of the Fathers and Polynesian catechists. Indeed, not only did the villages have to be equipped with everything indispensable for an honest Christian life, they also, ideally, were expected to be clean and beautiful. Aspects of this missionary aesthetic appeared in a 1909 letter by Hervé Audran, where he deplored the damage inflicted by two cyclones upon the "pretty villages, formerly so charming to see with their long sandy streets fringed with gigantic coconut trees offering their auspicious shade and beautiful houses in perfect lines with their lovely verandas". The Fathers themselves made every effort to build, rebuild, decorate or lime-bleach constructions, whose quality and durability were also, without doubt, a measure of their personal success in the Tuamotu mission. In addition to participating in the transformation of the natural environment, the missionaries and catechists hence contributed

Figure 3. Early historic house and well, both made of coral blocks, in Hōkikakika. Author's photo, 2019.

to the dissemination of new types of housing and building techniques (see Fierens 1871) and implemented new forms of spatial organisation. In many atolls, monumental crosses, calvaries, religious buildings and wells became new spatial references and memorial landmarks. The early historic village of Hōkikakika in Fakahina (Fig. 3) is a perfect illustration of the new usages and architectural concepts emerging during the second half of the nineteenth century, partly (but not only) under the influence of the CSH.[12]

Furthermore, the Fathers encouraged the adoption of new types of objects and food products, which slowly found their place in the local ways of life. For instance, the Fathers contributed to the promotion of imported flour, as it was given out together with other foreign goods to the newly converted Christians—who progressively started to exchange it with merchants for mats, coconut-fibre cord (*nape*), turtle shell and copra (Ingouf 1883). The Fathers also rejoiced in seeing western garments being worn more regularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, even when their uses were judged inappropriate or were ridiculed (Fierens 1884: 386); they even tried to import weaving techniques on some atolls (Laval 1849). Photographs taken in the early 1870s (see Figs 1 and 2) and in 1884 by members of the

Vanadis expedition[13] show that western clothing was by then well diffused in the western atolls. In 1883, inhabitants of the remote eastern atoll of Tatakoto were also all "more or less" dressed in western clothes (Ingouf 1883) and obtained fabric and sewing machines in exchange for copra, turtle shell and handicrafts. Additionally, a process of hybridisation in material culture gradually took place with, for example, the manufacture of adzes from iron blades and of hooks from old bolts and nails (Alexander 1902: 749). The Fathers themselves built chapels out of perishable materials and stone churches with thatched roofs (see Fig. 1), but their letters suggest that such hybridity was more the result of resource constraints than the effect of a well-considered strategy of inculturation. Texts from the 1850s relating to the decoration of churches show the incorporation of local elements (such as plants, or coconut oil to produce light), but above all the desire was to obtain foreign items, which could be imported from Europe or from Chile, where the CSH had been present since the 1830s: "Send us everything you will be able to find, fake flowers, a holy ciborium, thuribles, curtains for the windows …" (Montiton 1856b).

It would be wrong to think that the Catholics rejected the existing society and culture wholesale. As noted above, they understood and adapted to aspects of local etiquette, such as the importance of feasts and donations. Additionally, we know that a priest who tried to restrict adoption, by preventing Catholic children from being given to "unworthy" families, was punished by his superiors (Butaye 1898).[14] On the other hand, nineteenth-century missionaries seem to have shown little interest in Pa'umotu material production, which is most often mentioned in very vague and general terms, including in the writings of some priests, like Montiton, whose stays were extended and who described some local customs. For instance, barely a mention is made regarding the ability of women and girls in weaving mats and baskets, including in the western part of the group where, according to William Ellis (1831, I: 187), inhabitants "exceed[ed] the Society islanders in the quality of their mats". Disparaging comments can also be found about the tiny dwellings where one had "to enter on all fours" (Fierens 1871), local weapons which were compared to "sticks", or even the marae, which for Fierens (1871, n.d.) were merely "heaps of stones" and did not offer "these imposing and majestic masses of stone-made constructions one can still see in Tahiti". According to Kenneth P. Emory (1975: 5), the Pa'umotu were "poor in material possessions" as compared to Tahitians, who had access to a wider range of raw materials. Even if they showed great ingenuity in replacing basalt with marine shells, manufacturing canoes using stitched planks and making small and easily rebuilt dwellings to fit their seminomadic lifestyle, such cultural features were mostly interpreted by early missionaries as signs of structural poverty and backwardness. We know that some of the

missionaries did acquire items which could have been "found" and "kept" as "objects of curiosity", as Schouten (1863) noted for sacred reliquaries from Fakahina, or received as gifts.[15] However, no information was found to indicate that they actually *exchanged* their own European goods for Pa'umotu artefacts, such as the necklace of five pearl-shells or the shark-tooth knife that are now preserved in the museum of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts in Rome (see Bell 2013 and Gardner 2000 about missionary collecting and trading in other regions of Oceania). This again might reflect a certain lack of interest in or esteem for Pa'umotu objects, but also that various items were considered too rare, too sacred or too precious to part with, at least on a regular basis—refusals to exchange precious objects such as paddles, clubs and spears are indeed mentioned in Wilkes (1845, I: 331–32).

* * *

There is no doubt that the Picpus Fathers contributed to the constitution of new material traditions and economic forms, yet it appears that the strategies implemented did not always produce the expected results. It needs to be remembered first that the Fathers' presence could provoke opposition, especially where it was considered as emanating from and supporting French colonisation, and that conflicts did arise. Autochthonous resistance could be expressed by behaviours of avoidance, apathy, or the theft or destruction of material goods owned by the Fathers or that symbolised their actions. In Anaa, where "the Protectorate was hated" in the early 1850s, the Fathers only managed with great difficulty to obtain precious presbyteries and chapels, as their construction was being "slackened by laziness, cupidity, unwillingness" (Jaussen n.d.). In November 1852, the anti-French rebellion that brought about the assassination of Charles Viry also saw the devastation of the presbytery and of a chapel in Tekotika on Anaa (see Loubat 1852). Similarly, coconut plantations were established with varying success and rapidity depending on the islands. In Tureia and Tematangi, the inhabitants at first ate the coconuts that had been brought to help them develop plantations (Mazé 1930). Likewise, while some atolls, like Fakahina, gained profitable coconut plantations relatively quickly, that of Napuka, for example, did not export copra until the 1920s. In fact, it may be assumed that the infrequency of merchant ship visits in the most remote islands was a real hindrance and discouraged the inhabitants from actively initiating coconut plantations, among other reasons. Furthermore, the high mobility of the islanders continued, despite changes in residence patterns—this mobility even being, paradoxically, further stimulated by the coconut economy, since the atolls were divided into sectors from which copra was harvested in succession and not all at once (Barrau 1961: 12). The Pa'umotu

also continued to travel to distant atolls where they had family connections and land rights in order to collect copra.

While the Fathers were willing to see commercial activities developed and to promote the use of some imported goods, they were not always able to arouse desire for profit maximisation, control the emergence of "inappropriate" consumption practices or prevent the flow of undesirable items. Islanders were considered to be frivolous and naive by nature, incapable of saving their hard-won gains and of avoiding the traps and tricks of interisland business. In 1851, Honoré Laval (1851) deplored the fact that Anaa islanders "consume … most of their coconuts at pagan dance feasts … and as gifts" rather than produce coconut oil and pay off their debts (see also Pépin 1851). At the turn of the century, Janeau (1900) still pointed to the "futility" of islanders who sought to acquire "fragrances" first, and not clothing to cover their bodies. Moreover, attempts to introduce objects or transmit new tastes and skills did not always produce the intended results. Some products or items did not find their place in the Pa'umotu material world; others were diverted from their original purpose. Thus, the consumption of flour as a ball of unleavened dough (*ipo*) instead of as baked bread was mocked by Janeau, who also lamented that soap was used to seal letters. According to Paul Mazé (n.d.), in 1919 one still "only slightly" felt the need to wear clothes in Napuka, and inhabitants then wore "just the minimum necessary". The Fathers furthermore noted with bitterness that their enthusiasm to build and preserve architectural monuments was not always shared by the Pa'umotu, even among those who had been converted for some time. Some of them noted how slow the workers were on church construction sites (Fierens 1877a), their fierce negotiation of payment terms and the difficulty in mobilising their energies. Even though the Fathers often overcame resistance through persuasion and rewards, many complained that the churches, and their liturgical furniture and ornaments, were not properly treated and maintained during their absences. Nature itself sometimes seemed intent on destroying their work. The Fathers might have rejoiced at seeing the pagan temples damaged or obliterated by cyclones and storms, yet their churches, presbyteries and schools also suffered. The cyclone of 6 February 1878 had appalling consequences in the western part of the archipelago, in particular devastating Anaa and Kaukura, where 117 people perished, as well as Rangiroa (Teissier [1969] 1977). Tuuhora, the main village in Anaa, was devastated, houses and water tanks were destroyed, the dead unearthed by storm surges and thousands of coconut trees uprooted or damaged. Reconstructing destroyed buildings and restoring their former splendour posed considerable difficulty due to distance and cost. Cyclones also profoundly disorganised village life and tended to reactivate the islanders' nomadic habits, while the Fathers aspired to the stability of the European parish structure. The ruin of the material world that had been

so patiently erected, whether seen as a test from God or an obstacle raised by the Devil, came as an additional difficulty to the Fathers in maintaining their progress. More generally, the low frequency of the missionaries' visits, due to the distance between the atolls and to the lack of personnel, seemed to render their victories eternally precarious and work to the benefit of their LDS and RLDS rivals (see Janeau 1890 about the Sanitos in Hao; Saura 1997). Such a feeling constituted a potion more bitter than the material privations, and the missionaries lamented, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the lack of fervour and faith among the Pa'umotu. The islanders were inclined to believe "much more … in ghost stories than in the mysteries of our holy religion" (Montiton 1856a: 9) and were accused of being inconsistent (Fierens 1866c). Ultimately, the Fathers could only hope to achieve substantial progress by being more present on the ground. Even though objects and edifices were important to the work of evangelisation, the mission above all needed people: missionaries to open the way, catechists to maintain the faith. Fierens (1877b) became convinced that opening a school for catechists was worth "ten times more than 4 or 5 large stone churches" and regretted not being able to be everywhere at once: indeed, the people of Napuka had told him that they would abandon polygamy if he agreed to stay by their side—which the missionary was unable to do.

As a final word, one may say that the Picpus Fathers' material practices were both part of an existing missionary tradition and influenced by the local context. Among the important factors was the intense rivalry with other religious groups—this increased the need to provide proof of the presence of Catholicism and organise dramatic ceremonies. The great distances between the islands were also a factor, along with the view that the Pa'umotu were more wretched than any other people in French Polynesia and greatly needed improvement in their material conditions. Even if the Fathers did not express a strong interest in or appetite for Pa'umotu material culture, they nevertheless occasionally collected artefacts: these were sent or brought to Tahiti or Europe as reciprocal gifts to the Church's benefactors, to satisfy the curiosity of colleagues or to be displayed as trophies and pedagogical tools. Some, such as a "superstitious box" from Tematangi, collected in 1884 by Terlyn and offered to the Vicar Apostolic of Tahiti (*Les Missions Catholiques* 1890: 609), or idols collected by Montiton and offered to the Pope Pius IX (1874: 499, 504), represented the ancient Polynesian world with, in the eyes of the Fathers, all its delusions and excesses. Others were examples of local crafts and were expected both to raise support for the Tuamotu mission and to produce records of cultural worlds that were considered nearly lost. While contributing to the ongoing mediation of relationships between various actors in the European missionary movement, such objects helped to preserve fragments of the materiality and memories of the Tuamotuan past.

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NOTES

1. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, ships sailed through the Tuamotus looking for *Pinctada margaritifera* (pearl-shell) oysters, from which the natural pearls and nacreous shell were eagerly sought (see Moerenhout 1837; Newbury 1980). Numerous atolls did not possess large natural populations or were located in remote and reputedly dangerous zones, hence remaining outside of the commercial networks. The business of coconut oil first, and then copra (from the 1870s), similarly developed during the nineteenth century, with some islands, planted at a later stage, remaining very isolated until the 1920s–1930s (see Danielsson 1956: 96–97).
2. This congregation was founded in 1800 by Pierre-Marie-Joseph Coudrin and approved by the Pope in 1817. In 1825, Pope Leo XII charged the Picpus Fathers with the evangelisation of the Sandwich Islands, and, in 1833, Pope Gregory XVI gave them responsibility for the Vicariate of Eastern Oceania (Wiltgen 1979: 10, 83–85). A detailed analysis of the missionaries' background has been provided by Pierre-Yves Toullelan (1995). Many of those who served in the Tuamotus during the nineteenth century were of humble origin and came from pious, rural settings, especially in Brittany and Normandy. Very long careers were not uncommon: for instance, Vincent de Paul Terlyn (from Belgium) died in Faaite during the 1906 cyclone after serving for 35 years.
3. Regarding the Catholic mission in the Tuamotus, there are a few historical syntheses, produced by members of the Congregation and which are often difficult to access (e.g., Desmedt 1932; Mérian 1928–1933). Data was also integrated from more general studies on the history of Catholicism in Oceania and the works of the Picpus Fathers (Hodée 1983; Toullelan 1995; Wiltgen 1979), from volumes examining important figures in the Catholic Church (Prat and Hermel 2015–2016) and from anthropological studies (Danielsson 1956).
4. Benjamin Franklin Grouard, a member of a group of missionaries in charge of carrying out the teachings of Joseph Smith in the South Seas, arrived in Anaa in 1845 and found rapid success. However, the LDS missionaries encountered a series of severe difficulties—especially conflicts with the Catholic Church and the French colonial government, which arrested and deported one of them, James Brown—and all had left Tahiti by the end of 1852. Converts carried on the work of evangelisation for a considerable time. When LDS missionaries

returned to Tahiti in 1892, they discovered that many converts had become members of the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (known as Sanito or Kanito Church in French Polynesia), which arose in 1860 from a scission within the Mormon Church. See Douglas (2005: 247–49, 260); Ellsworth (1959); Saura (1997).

5. There is considerable academic literature on these issues (see Essertel 2011; Gardner 2000; Hooper 2006; King 2011; Newell 2010; Thomas 1992; Wingfield 2017, among others).
6. This article is based on manuscript sources that are kept in the CSH's archives in Rome. All quotations were translated from French. The missionaries' first names mentioned here are not their real birth names but the names they took within the CSH.
7. In April 1846, Addison Pratt (1843–1852) observed in his journal that he and Grouard had no "society at home to provide for [their] necessities" and contrasted their situation to that of the "English missionaries" who had "a salary that supports them and their families like gentlemen". Although they may have lived "on cocoanuts and raw fish … most of the time", Pratt and Grouard were also treated with feasts and valuable gifts (which could include fine pandanus mats, pearls, live pigs and hens; see Pratt 1843–1852, 25 September 1846) by members of their church. On 1 July 1846, Pratt wrote that he "gave them a bit of stirring up for being slack in feeding their orometuas [ministers]" and received sixteen baskets of coconuts the next day. See also Brown (1900: 208, 212).
8. Regarding the architectural achievements of the Picpus Fathers in Polynesia, see in particular Hodée (1983); Laval (1968); Toullelan (1995); Delbos (2011).
9. The reference to the "materiality in which it is somehow buried" refers to the supposed down-to-earth concerns of a population described as "sensual" (Mérian 1928–1933: 91) and primarily driven by material profit and immediate pleasure. This is a frequent accusation in the nineteenth-century Catholic literature.
10. On the interest in western clothing and other western goods see Hooper (2006) and Jolly (2014).
11. The French government supported the planting of coconut trees (*Messager de Tahiti* 1854) but also became aware of the danger of relying on the monoculture of coconut because of cyclones and pests (Violle 1905). Regarding the plantation activities of the Picpus Fathers, see Fierens (1873) and Toullelan (1995: 205–11). For comparative data on the planting of coconuts by Catholic (Marist) missionaries in Wallis and Futuna and how it could serve the mission's interests, see Stevens (2018).
12. In April 2019, this village in ruins, initially designed by Montiton, was the subject of an interdisciplinary research project by CIRAP (Tahiti), undertaken by Louis Lagarde (UNC), Guillaume Molle (ANU) and the author (Lagarde *et al.*, forthcoming). For comparative data on the emergence of new architectural traditions in nineteenth-century Hawai'i, see Spencer Forsythe (1997).
13. The photographs in Figures 1 and 2 are attributed to Charles Burton Hoare (Museum of Tahiti and the Islands). For details on the Vanadis expedition (1883–1885) photographs see the Ethnographic Museum of Stockholm database: http://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web (accessed 16 June 2020)

14. On the attitude of Catholic missionaries towards tradition, see Hamilton (1998), Lātūkefu (1974) and Wiltgen (1979), among others.
15. In Anaa, Addison Pratt (1843–1852) received "very smooth and cool" mats, a "wooden shark hook", pearls and nape as presents. Others reported having received artefacts in various circumstances. For instance, during Captain Ingouf's governmental visit (1883), Reao's inhabitants received various gifts and later offered coconuts, mats, nape and chicken. Similar gifts of artefacts were probably made to the Catholic missionaries, although very little is known on this subject.

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——1852d. Letter to Étienne Jaussen, Temarie, 23 August.

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Émilie Nolet, Institut d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archéologie, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 3 rue Michelet, 75006, Paris, France. Email: Emilie.Nolet@univ-paris1.fr

TRANSFORMING MORTUARY RITUALS IN "CHRISTIAN" OCEANIA: POST-MISSION CEMETERIES FROM ANIWA, VANUATU

JAMES L. FLEXNER
University of Sydney

BRIANNA MUIR
The Australian National University

STUART BEDFORD
The Australian National University
Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History

FRÉDÉRIQUE VALENTIN
Centre national de la recherche scientifique

DENISE ELENA
Vanuatu Cultural Centre

DAVID SAMORIA
Vanuatu Cultural Centre

ABSTRACT: Extensive cemeteries from Aniwa Island, Vanuatu, provide evidence for historical transformations in ritual practice among Christian islanders that continue through the present day. These cemeteries contain novel grave forms, including many lined with coral and mortar upright slabs that were not present on the island traditionally. The graves largely post-date European missionary presence on the island. They represent an indigenous adaptation of introduced forms and materials that occurred decades after the conversion of Aniwans to Christianity in the 1860s. Local evidence indicates that the graves are primarily a marker of attachment to kinship and place beginning in the period when the population stabilised and began to rebound after the major nineteenth-century population collapse.

Keywords: Christian missions, mortuary ritual, archaeological graves, cemeteries, Aniwa Island, Vanuatu

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As part of an archaeological survey of south Vanuatu's Polynesian Outliers and neighbouring islands (Flexner *et al*. 2018), we documented an extensive series of cemetery features from Aniwa Island. Common grave forms in the cemeteries included burials surrounded by upright coral slabs and more recent cement graves. These graves represent the changing mortuary practices of Pacific Islanders during the last 120 years. They reflect entanglements between

local social dynamics and global forces including conversion to Christianity and capitalist trade networks (see also Schoeffel and Meleisea 2016).

These features represent local innovations in mortuary practice post-dating the presence of Christian missionaries on the island. However, they are also connected to a longer-term history of changing burial practice in Aniwa that was influenced by the missionaries as well as the demographic upheavals of the colonial period in the New Hebrides (as Vanuatu was called before independence in 1980; see Flexner 2016; McArthur 1981; Spriggs 2007). The ongoing practice of memorialising the spirits (*atua*) of dead ancestors through physical monuments remains an important expression of connections to continuing lineages, religious beliefs and assertions of belonging to place for the Aniwan community today.

Cemeteries dating from the nineteenth century onwards are an important aspect of colonial-period heritage in Oceania and elsewhere. Most commonly archaeological studies of historical cemeteries that focus on material culture, including grave architecture, such as headstones or above-ground mausolea, are based in British or British settler contexts (e.g., Deetz 1996: 89–124; Mytum 2015; Prangnell and McGowan 2013). In contrast, archaeological studies of indigenous cemeteries in the Pacific tend to focus on documenting inhumation practices and skeletal remains dating to precolonial eras (e.g., Clark *et al*. 2016; Leach and Davidson 2008: 133–254; Valentin *et al*. 2011). A recent issue of *Journal of the Polynesian Society* covered the theme of "grave matters in Oceania" from a contemporary perspective, featuring examples from Rotuma (Rensel and Howard 2016), New Guinea highlands (Gibbs 2016; Jacka 2016) and Sāmoa (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2016; Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016). This paper presents findings of indigenous grave markers dating to the last 120 years on Aniwa, Vanuatu, adding a historical and indigenous perspective to these discussions that is couched within a longer-term understanding of changes in mortuary rituals from the island.

Family lineages and ancestral territorial rights were and are an active site of political contestation, disrupted first by demographic upheaval in the 1800s, and currently by increasing mobility within the economic context of post-independence Vanuatu where young people, especially men, increasingly seek opportunities in the capital, Port Vila, or overseas. We of course take a neutral stance on any specific claims (hence we do not specify the claimed familial associations with different cemeteries here), but it is important to note that the political dynamic is and has been an element of the construction of the features we describe below. Ethically, as researchers we distance ourselves, leaving the interpretation and judgment of any actual ancestral claims to Aniwan people and to the atua. Constructed graves do not necessarily reflect ownership or a direct relationship to a particular piece of land. Rather, they can be a broader expression of belonging, to kinship groups and to affiliated territories.

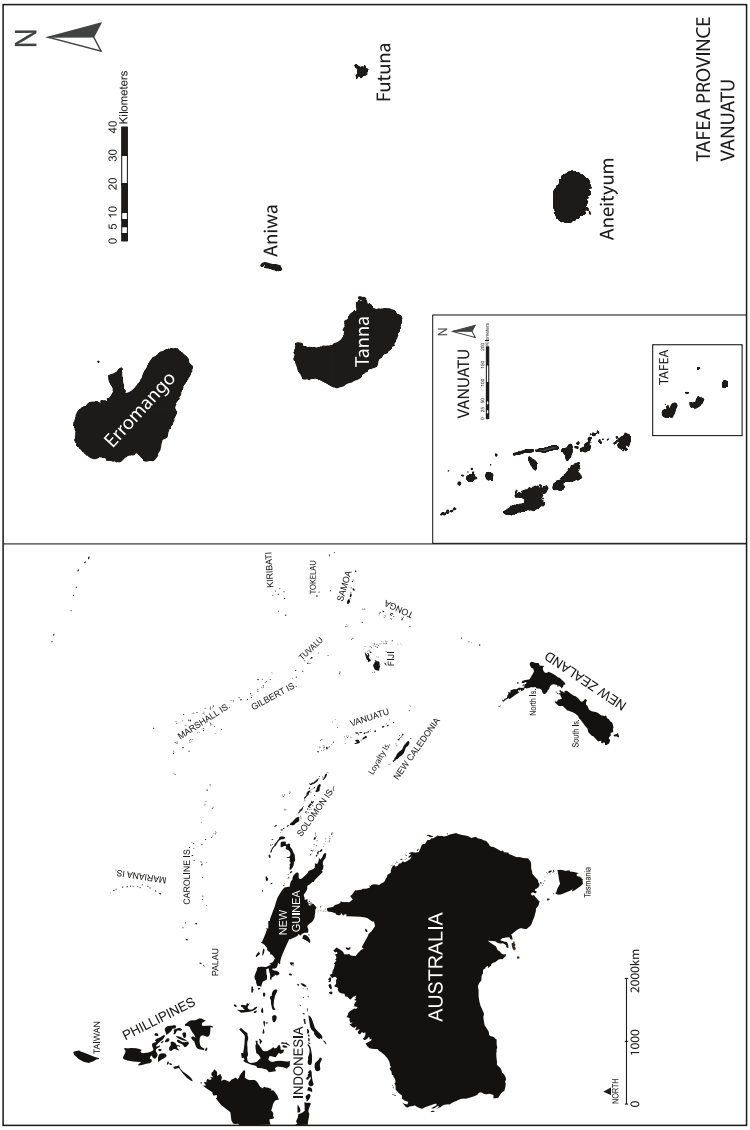

Figure 1. Map of the western Pacific, and the location of Aniwa in southern Vanuatu.

ANIWA: CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Aniwa is a small coral atoll about 8 km in surface area and with a maximum height 42 m above sea level (Fig. 1). The island is classed as a Polynesian Outlier, as it is geographically within the Melanesian region but its people speak a Polynesian language and have some Polynesian cultural traditions as well as commonalities with the neighbouring islands (Capell 1958; Flexner *et al*. 2019). Aniwa is geographically quite close to neighbouring Tanna, and there is archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence for close links between the two islands as well as the neighbouring islands of Aneityum, Erromango and Futuna (Flexner *et al*. 2018).

Formal archaeological research in southern Vanuatu began in the 1960s with the Shutlers (Shutler *et al*. 2002), who had planned to excavate on Aniwa but were prevented from landing on the island by bad weather. There was earlier ethnographic research describing Aniwan culture. The earliest works were either by Christian missionaries (Gray 1894) or heavily coloured by a missionary lens (Humphreys 1926: 120–22). These resources nonetheless offer a useful account of traditional Aniwan society when used critically (see Douglas 2001). Subsequent work expanded ethnographic and linguistic knowledge about Aniwa (Capell 1958; Guiart 1961), but there has been little recent anthropological or archaeological work on the island.

A collaborative archaeological project involving overseas researchers and Aniwan *filwokas* 'fieldworkers' from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre between 2016 and 2019 resulted in the first excavations to recover stratified archaeological evidence as well as additional information about the cultural landscape of the island. While not the focus of this paper, a few details about Aniwa's longer-term history should be noted. Aniwa was initially settled during the Lapita colonisation phase at least 2,800 years ago. Roughly 1,000 years ago there is evidence for intensification of both terrestrial and marine resource use and settlement. We estimate that the incursion of Polynesians into what is now southern Vanuatu began within a few centuries of this time. Significantly for this paper, we have uncovered several inhumations in an ancient beach sand dating to this era, including two in an area also occupied by one of the historical cemeteries we documented.

When the first European observers began recording information about Aniwa as well as the neighbouring Polynesian Outlier of Futuna, the primary means of disposing of the dead was via burial at sea, where the deceased individual was wrapped in a mat or basket and deposited on the reef (Humphreys 1926: 118; Steel 1880: 379). The practice may have marked a transition from the world of the living to *i 'o atua* 'the land of the spirits' (Capell 1958: 9–10). There is ethnohistoric evidence for sea burial at the neighbouring island of Tanna, and on Erromango, where a tradition of disposing "ghosts" of the dead at sea might have been an echo of earlier

practices involving actually disposing of bodies in such a way (Humphreys 1926: 89–90, 163–64). Burial of the dead via terrestrial inhumation and in caves and rockshelters was also practised over the last 1,000 years or so throughout southern Vanuatu. Individuals were usually buried in an extended position, though flexed burial was also common (Flexner and Willie 2015; Humphreys 1926: 89–92, 182–83; Valentin *et al*. 2011: 57–60). It is interesting to note that terrestrial inhumation on the larger islands was thought to be more common, while on the small Polynesian Outliers, with limited landmass and possibly a more maritime-oriented identity (see Keller and Kuautonga 2007), the tendency was to bury the dead at sea.

Aniwa was traditionally divided into two main districts, Iafatu/Iefotuma to the south and Sura/Surama to the north (see Capell 1958: 1 for alternate names). A primary occupation of Aniwan people was and remains agriculture, with gardens containing the typical Oceanic crops including yams, taro, sugarcane, bananas and breadfruit. Kava would have been grown traditionally but was discouraged by the missionaries and is no longer grown today. Agriculture takes place on a rotational basis, and different families maintain rights to plant across a number of garden plots around the island where they have kinship ties. The main protein sources come from the sea, particularly the extremely rich lagoon in the north of the island, which is used seasonally and intensively during certain times of year and placed under a resource *tabu* 'restriction' during others. Pigs were and are important but primarily for chiefly exchanges and ritual occasions rather than as a staple.

Villages consist of groups of houses primarily of wood, bamboo and thatch, though increasingly also incorporating introduced building materials, including demolition materials from former mission structures (Flexner *et al*. 2019: 411). Houses are arranged around a central open space and traditionally would have represented the dual Sura/Iafatu divisions. Other open spaces, called *marae*, were used for ritual performances and for the convivial daily men's activity of drinking kava, probably similar to the practice on Tanna (Brunton 1979). There are hereditary chiefly titles on Aniwa that traditionally would have included rights to land, resources and supernatural powers, though titles could be challenged and disputed. Competitive feasting is an endemic element of southern Vanuatu's political economy (Spriggs 1986) and would have been practised traditionally on Aniwa as well. The political, exchange and kinship networks of Aniwa were and are closely aligned and entangled with those of neighbouring islands, especially the much larger nearby volcanic island of Tanna (Flexner *et al*. 2018: 249–53).

The first mission representatives on Aniwa were Polynesian teachers landed on the island in April 1840 by the London Missionary Society (LMS). Others were sent to join them soon afterward, and they all laboured for several years with limited success (Miller 1985: 143; Murray 1863:

213́–14). The next effort was the arrival of the Aneityumese teachers Navalak and Nemeyan, sent by the Presbyterian Church to Aniwa to evangelise in the 1850s (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 148–50). They came from an island where significant changes in burial ritual were already underway. A formal cemetery had been established by the missionary John Geddie on Aneityum, where converts were strongly discouraged from continuing to bury bodies at sea (Miller 1978). An as-yet-unpublished archaeological survey involving several of the authors of this paper has documented stone-lined graves on Aneityum, similar to one of the main forms in Aniwa.

These types of cemeteries are currently unknown from neighbouring Tanna and Erromango, despite extensive surveys of the mission landscapes of those islands (Flexner 2016), with the exception of a single stone-lined grave lying in the bush at Dillon's Bay, Erromango. It is possible that the customary methods of burial in those islands persisted through the missionary period, even as people's religious beliefs changed. Physical burial markers of imported cement only occur on Tanna and Erromango in the larger villages close to major mission stations beginning in the twentieth century, remaining rare in more remote areas.

It seems likely that even before the arrival of European missionaries in the New Hebrides stone-lined graves may have been introduced by Polynesian teachers associated with the work of the LMS in the 1840s (Liua'ana 1996). Ethnoarchaeological research in East Futuna (namesake to the previously mentioned Outlier in Vanuatu) as well as neighbouring Alofi identified five coral slab-lined graves, while cobble-outlined graves were considered "abundant" for Futuna (Kirch and Dickinson 1976: 37; see also Sand *et al*. 2020: 92–94). In Sāmoa, Meleisea and Schoeffel (2016: 150) note that "the graves of those of lesser status were marked with a low rectangle of stones". Communal burial grounds in Tonga often use stone cobbles, as well as bottles and cans in more recent examples, to retain the white sand fill of the graves (see Burley 1995: 77–78). Considering how common lined graves were in pre- and post-missionary Polynesia and the lack of similar practices in pre-mission southern Vanuatu, it is reasonable to infer that the form was introduced by islander catechists from east to west.

The Aniwan graves we recorded generally post-date Pacific Islander evangelists by several decades (see below). We would suggest the Aniwan grave form was most likely adapted from practices introduced by the later Aneityumese teachers. One possibility is that an example of a stone-lined grave was provided for Nemeyan after he was killed on Aniwa (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 149), and the form was subsequently copied and expanded upon. Later Aniwan converts visiting Aneityum would certainly have seen this grave form in the cemetery established under Geddie. Regardless of the original source, the Aniwan cemeteries described below can be attributed to a large degree to indigenous exchanges of material form rather than European missionary introduction.

The first European missionary settled on Aniwa was John G. Paton, who followed in the footsteps of the Aneityumese teachers. Paton, having fled a previous failed mission in Tanna (see Adams 1984), arrived in Aniwa along with his wife, Margaret Whitecross Paton, in November 1866 with a significant contingent of Aneityumese teachers (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 126). They set about creating a mission station consisting of a massive lime mortar house, a mission church, a printing house and an orphanage to house children, who increasingly were left without parents or even close relatives because of outbreaks of introduced diseases (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 130–34). General demographic statistics for Aniwa do exist, and they parallel the drastic depopulation as recorded for neighbouring islands, notably Aneityum (Spriggs 2007). The periodic records indicate an overall pattern of decline, from a population of roughly 600 in the 1840s to 250 people in 1871 when infant mortality is noted to be particularly high, 222 in 1873, 167 in 1884 and down to a low of 150 in the 1890s (Miller 1981: 46, 49; 1986: 186–211). Considering the high mortality rates, it is probable that burial at sea continued from the 1860s to the 1880s or that "cemeteries" dating to the mission period of Aniwa are in fact mass graves whose locations have long been forgotten.

Paton's mission was located on spiritually charged ground at a place called Imarae ("marae" locations having the same connotation of sacred space in Aniwan as elsewhere in Polynesia, though it can also be used more generically to refer to open space in villages; Capell 1958: 2–3). Paton (1907, vol. 2: 130–31) even recognised that he was intentionally given land that was thought to be dangerous, housing the bones of dead people whose atua could cause harm (Capell 1958: 19, 35–37). The belief that men with spiritual power both cured and caused sickness was present on Aniwa as it had been on Tanna, something Paton (1907, vol. 2: 135) notes with frustration. Missionaries were often called upon to treat the sick, but to do so ran the risk of also being blamed for the death of the patient. Despite this and many other pitfalls and barriers based on mutual misunderstanding, Paton was eventually able to convert the entire population of Aniwa to Christianity. One key event was the digging of a freshwater well on the tabu ground of Imarae, which produced fresh, potable water despite local belief that this was not possible in the area. The chief, Namakei, when confronted with the apparently miraculous well, decided that he would convince his people to convert to Christianity (Paton 1907, vol. 2: 153–93).

As the population declined and with missionary encouragement, the Aniwans abandoned most coastal settlements within a few decades of Paton's arrival, aggregating into a smaller number of villages in the "healthier" uppermost terrace of the raised coral island. At the same time, apparently concerned about the negative effects of European traders and plantations on neighbouring islands, the population of Aniwa "sold" first a portion in 1866, and then the entire island in 1871, to the mission to be kept as a "native reserve" (NHBS 13/III/18, Western Pacific Archives, Auckland).

After 1881 Aniwa was largely administered by the missionaries Watt and Gray, stationed on nearby Tanna (Miller 1986: 187–90), with local elders actually running the church on the island.

The Patons continued mission work on Aniwa for several decades, punctuated with speaking and fundraising tours to Australia, North America and Europe. They left the island for Melbourne in 1881 but retained a continuing capacity as missionaries of the island, continuing to travel to Aniwa on a regular basis until a final visit in 1903 (Paton 1907, vol. 3: 104–5). While the overall island was "owned" by the Presbyterian Church, the notion of ownership was often interpreted differently by indigenous people in Vanuatu (Flexner 2019; Van Trease 1987). Practical rights to use the land, clear and plant garden plots, harvest fruit from the forest or build houses, among other activities, would have been managed by the Aniwan chiefs and were likely more important for Aniwans than legal title.

THE CEMETERIES OF ANIWA

Archaeological surveys documented a series of cemeteries on Aniwa Island adjacent to the founding mission station and a former settlement nearby. Collaborative survey with local researchers revealed that most of the graves we recorded on Aniwa date to the decades after Presbyterian missionaries were no longer permanently living on the island. The cemeteries represent complex transformations in mortuary behaviour during the last two centuries in south Vanuatu, which we argue are tied to changing relationships between people, land and ancestors. We interpret the visible grave markers constructed around Aniwa since the early 1900s as physical manifestations of continuing assertions of kinship and connection to territory. The graves located closest to Paton's mission also represent close ties to the Presbyterian Church. In other cases, more or less explicit ties to ancestral places are being expressed by the families who maintain connections to the cemeteries and the marae on and around which they are located.

The cemeteries we recorded largely cluster around the mission sites at Imarae, Aniwa (Fig. 2). We describe the four main cemeteries, from south to north: Irangai, which consists of four discrete clusters of graves; the graves surrounding the remains of Paton's mission house and subsequent churches; Nakmararoro, which was one of the largest and most variable; and Ikeri further north (not pictured in Fig. 2). A total of 92 graves are located in the four cemeteries, with a variety of forms (Fig. 3; Table 1). The two most common forms are (i) rectangular with upright slabs of coral, sometimes replaced with or including lime mortar from one of the now-demolished missionary buildings with a layer of coral gravel sealing the interior surface, and (ii) cement graves made from imported construction materials. There were also two unique occurrences, one of piled coral slabs and a "bottle grave",

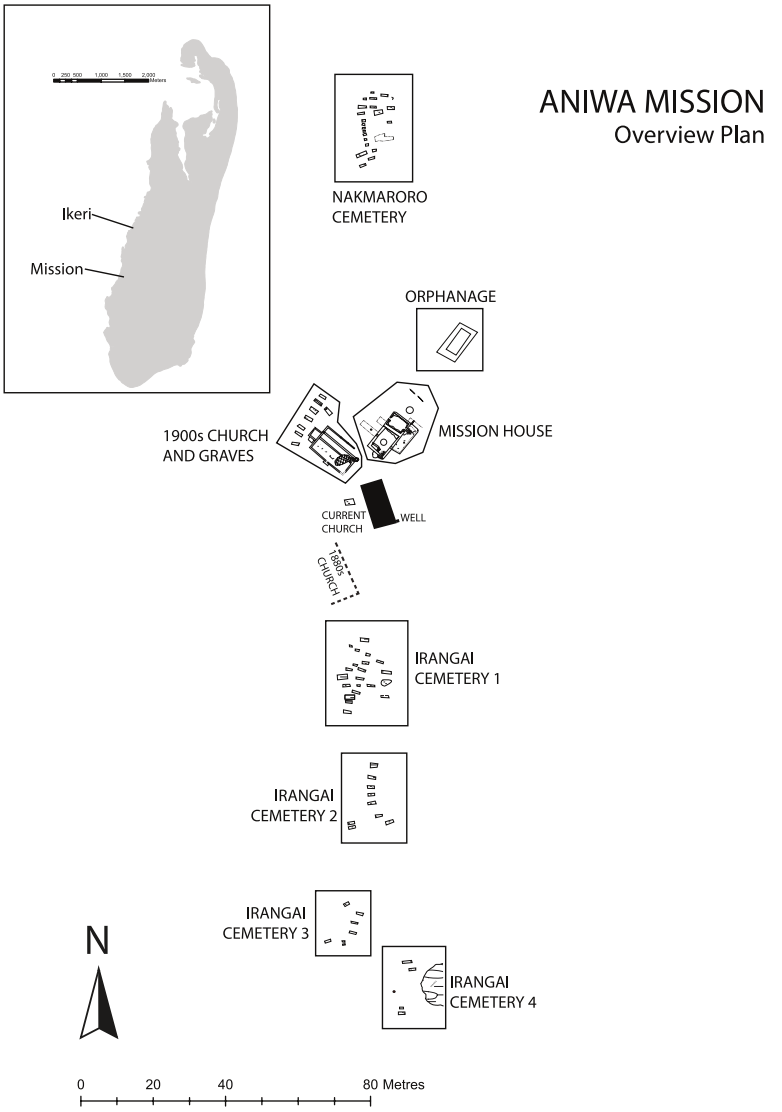

Figure 2. Plan of the main Aniwa mission features and surrounding cemeteries. The small rectangular features represent graves documented during surveys of this area.

Figure 3. Examples of the variants in grave form from Aniwa: (a) coral slab-lined; (b) cement; (c) bottle grave; (d) heaped coral.

Table 1. Distribution of grave forms in the main cemetery areas.

Area/cluster	Slab-lined (adult)	Slab-lined (child)	Bottle grave	Heaped coral	Unknown (damaged by cyclone)	Cement	Total
Nakmaroro	8	10	1	1	0	0	20
Irangai 1	11	5	0	0	0	5	21
Irangai 2	10	4	0	0	0	2	16
Irangai 3	5	2	0	0	0	0	7
Irangai 4	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
1900s church	6	0	0	0	0	2	8
Current church	0	1	0	0	0	4	5
Ikeri	6	1	0	0	4	0	11
Total	49	24	1	1	4	13	92

both at Nakmaroro. While the cement graves represent cash expenditure, the kinds of elaborate imported headstones Lilomaiava-Doktor (2016: 175, 177) documents for contemporary Sāmoans are not present in Aniwa. However, the presence of grave goods on many of the most recent cement graves (see below) may represent an impulse to materialise the wealth of the family in a similar way.

Irangai

The cemeteries in Irangai, to the south of Paton's mission, cover an area of roughly 2,500 m^2 that groups into four clusters with conspicuous gaps in between. The largest cluster of graves is the one closest to the mission in the north, with smaller clusters to the south. The burials in Irangai 1 include prominent church elders and their family members. The 21 graves in Irangai 1 are primarily of the slab-lined form (16/21), but there are also five recent cement graves that date to the second half of the twentieth century. All of these graves are associated with people who had strong ties to the Church. In contrast, moving south through Irangai 2, 3 and 4, the smaller clusters appear to be divided into family groups. The size of the clusters gets smaller going south through these cemeteries (Irangai 2 = 13; Irangai 3 = 7; Irangai 4 = 5). There are no mortar graves in Irangai 3 or 4, and notably the two mortar graves in Irangai 2 are the northernmost ones in that cluster. Oral traditions indicate that Irangai 1 and Irangai 4 have been used from the 1940s through the present. While not remembered as well, local histories indicate that the other clusters at least date to after the 1890s, when there was no longer a permanent European missionary presence on Aniwa.

Also notable for Irangai 4 is the presence of a large banyan tree (Bislama: *nabanga*) that formed a boundary for the kava drinking and dancing ground (Bislama: *nakamal*; Aniwan: marae) named Ramangasa. The graves of Irangai 4 date to no earlier than the 1940s, and in one case much more recently, again reflecting the relatively current nature of these features. It is somewhat ironic that even though the "traditional" use of marae for dancing or drinking kava has subsided, they nonetheless remain important places on the landscape through their renewed use as burial grounds (as is also the case for Ikeri; see below). Between our 2017 and 2018 field seasons, a local community member was buried at the southernmost cluster of graves at Irangai 4. This burial was surrounded by a wooden fence draped with cloth. Inside of the enclosure was a grave in the "traditional" coral slab form. In addition, there was a small (50–100 cm diameter and height) mound of ash from a fire that had been kept lit to mark the 30-day mourning period from the date of burial.

Local colleagues explained that this apparently continuous practice related to the family group making an explicit historical link to their ancestral lands. Another instance of constructing a new coral slab-lined grave in May 2018

Figure 4. Contemporary burial from 2018, featuring the ash mound and wooden surrounding structure over the upright coral slabs.

confirmed that this form of mortuary ritual was an important contemporary as well as historical practice (Fig. 4). Significantly for archaeological research, within a few years the wood and cloth will have rotted away and the ash mound dispersed, leaving only the coral slabs, which is what we have documented elsewhere in the island. The recent nature of these mortuary monuments has provided an important challenge to assumptions about demographic decline and missionary influence in the formation of historical cemeteries. The graves of Aniwa appear to post-date the period of major colonial epidemics, and indeed new graves of this form continue to be constructed in the present.

Third Church and Current Church

Two clusters of graves surround the third and fourth churches constructed around the mission area. There are six coral slab-lined graves and two cement graves to the north of the footings of the third church in Imarae, which was built in 1894 and blown down by a cyclone in the 1950s. The other group consists of four cement graves to the east of the current standing church on

the site as well as a stone-lined marker outlining the graves of three children (two of the Patons' children and one of their grandchildren) to the west of this building. The most recent of the graves around the third and current churches dates to 2016. We were told by local informants that these graves were associated with people who were senior in the church (deacons or elders) but also associated with the traditional land area of Imarae.

Nakmaroro

Nakmaroro is another cemetery located in the vicinity of a previous marae of the same name. Nakmaroro's graves date primarily to the second half of the twentieth century, based on the artefacts present and local memories. The cemetery consists of a cluster of 20 graves, half of which were a smaller size, suggesting child burials. There is historical evidence for high child mortality (Miller 1981: 49), though considering the more recent date of most of these graves it is unclear whether such a pattern continued in the decades after missionaries departed from Aniwa. Most of the graves at Nakmaroro (18/20) are of the slab-lined form. Four of these integrate fragments of lime mortar, some of which have the impressions of wooden lathes. This material would most likely have been robbed from collapsed mission buildings, many of which were destroyed in a major cyclone in the 1950s. Integration of the fabric of missionary constructions in grave lining is an example of the ways that mission heritage has been localised in terms of indigenous tradition or *kastom* in southern Vanuatu (Flexner and Spriggs 2015; Flexner *et al*. 2019: 411–13).

Nakmaroro included single examples of two forms of burial that are unique amongst the graves recorded. One is a slab-lined grave that has been surrounded by beer bottles. Local memory indicates a woman being buried in this grave. The bottles are an amber, machine-made form with embossed labels indicating the 1960s, with a *terminus post quem* of 1965. Burley (1995) has documented the use of beer bottles and cans as grave construction material on Tonga. He warns against the simple equation of bottles with drinking, and suggests it is also their aesthetic value and physical properties as construction material that are prominent in the minds of those who use these items in constructing graves. The other unique grave form at Nakmaroro is a mound of heaped coral and lime mortar building material. There were no memories of who is buried in this grave, but the form and size suggests it may contain a person who was of some importance in the community.

Ikeri

Ikeri, a former village area located approximately 1 km north of Paton's mission, contained two clearly visible clusters of slab-lined graves, though it should be noted that their apparent spatial discreteness may be slightly

Figure 5. Cluster of slab-lined graves from Ikeri. The far-right grave, said to be a child burial, was reset at a larger size decades after the initial interment.

misleading. The area in between also had graves which were heavily disturbed by a tidal wave that inundated the area during Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, leaving behind a jumbled area of surface stones, some of which were grave stones. The southern "cluster" consists of three graves located on the historic marae, which is bounded by two large banyan trees, as at Irangai 4. The northern cluster (Fig. 5) includes a child's grave whose stones have been reset further apart to make the grave appear larger, another reminder of the ongoing transformation of these features by living people connected to particular places on Aniwa.

Grave Goods

Grave goods were common throughout the Aniwa cemeteries, placed as offerings or integrated into the grave architecture in some cases (Table 2). In the Irangai cemeteries, two slab-lined child graves documented in 2018 at Irangai 2 included a metal jaw harp, buttons, and fragments of a slate pencil and writing slate. The slate pencil and writing slate may represent a nineteenth- or twentieth-century date (our older colleagues in Vanuatu remember using slate pencils in school through the 1950s). At Irangai 4, the presence of a very large iron cauldron on the surface may have been

Table 2. Types of grave offerings from Aniwa cemeteries ("X" indicates presence).

Grave good type	Nakmaroro	Irangai 2	Irangai 4	Contemp. church	Mission church
Ceramic bowl		X			
Ceramic mug		X			
Clothing			X		
Flashlight		X			
Glass bottle (brown)	X				X
Glass bottle (green)		X			
Glass bottle (clear)		X			X
Glass bottle (blue)		X			
Glass bottle (other)	X	X			
Glass cup				X	
Glass plate				X	X
Metal bowl	X	X			X
Metal cooking pot			X		X
Metal lap-lap grate					X
Metal mug	X	X			X
Metal plate	X	X		X	
Metal spoon	X				X
Metal teapot		X			X
Metal machete			X		
Plastic bottle	X	X			
Plastic container			X		
Plastic flowers			X	X	
Ribbon			X		
Shoes			X	X	X
Tinsel				X	
Asthma inhaler		X			
Aerosol container		X			

an offering, or perhaps was used to cook meals during the 30-day vigil for one of the earlier burials in the area. Other common offerings among the Irangai graves include bottles that would have contained alcohol, perfume or other liquids, enamelled metal plates, bowls and pots, and on one of the more recent examples, a cathode-ray tube television and a DVD player. At Nakmaroro, in addition to bottles, there were enamelled metal cups and bowls left as offerings, which may have contained food or drink when initially placed on the graves. These offerings likely related to the personality of the individual and the family and community's wishes to both remember and perhaps propitiate and continue to care for the atua of the deceased. They may also be a representation of family wealth and wellbeing, though this was not particularly remarked upon by our Aniwan collaborators. These graves remain very much in the community's consciousness and, as indicated by the more recently deposited grave goods, continue to be visited on a semi-regular basis.

Artefacts had been placed by local people in the roots of a large java plum tree during cleaning of the Ikeri site in 2018. The artefacts included a case gin bottle which likely dates to the missionary period, a cordial or sauce bottle and two patent medicine bottles (Fig. 6). One is "WESTON'S WIZARD OIL//THE UNIVERSAL AMERICAN MEDICINE", and the other less complete example reads "…O'S…[EFFER]VESCING//[LIGH]T SALT". Frank Weston, of the aforementioned "wizard oil", was an American

Figure 6. Patent medicine bottles and shellfish remains from Ikeri.

performer and patent medicine salesman who notably toured Australia in the 1870s and 1880s (Miller 2007). The sale of the whole island of Aniwa to the Presbyterian Church precluded the establishment of any traders on the island, but Aniwans were in regular contact with traders based on Tanna, and so the presence of these items is no surprise. The area disturbed by Cyclone Pam included shellfish remains, pig tusks and bones and metal artefacts including sewing pins. It is unclear whether these objects consist of offerings or derive from the period when the area was actively inhabited in the 1800s. Probably it is a combination of these things.

CEMETERIES, ANCESTORS AND SPIRITS IN A CHANGING PACIFIC

Colonialism wrought major changes in the Pacific region, affecting political economies, island ecosystems, religious belief and practice and demographics (here we focus on the latter two phenomena; for overviews see Flexner 2014, 2020). Evidence for large-scale population collapse following the introduction of Old World infectious diseases is common throughout the Pacific (Kirch and Rallu 2007). The New Hebrides islands were no exception. General population decline in the New Hebrides was noted by contemporary observers including Christian missionaries during the 1800s and 1900s (e.g., Gunn 1914: 113–22; Speiser 1922). Historical analysis has also sought to reconstruct the structure of population collapse in the archipelago (e.g., McArthur 1981). The most thoroughly documented population decline in the southern New Hebrides is that of Aneityum, where Spriggs (2007) has traced a series of major epidemics from the 1850s until the early 1900s. An initial population of over 3,500 plummeted to a low of around 300 within that period, and the island remains largely depopulated relative to its contact-era density. Major epidemics were also recorded on Tanna during the 1850s and 1860s (Adams 1984: 116–33) and on Aniwa from the 1840s to the 1890s (see above; Miller 1981: 46, 49; 1985).

At the same time that Pacific Island populations were collapsing, European missionaries entered the region with the goal of converting the survivors to Christianity. Conversion to Christianity was not a simple, straightforward process in the New Hebrides, despite the way it was often depicted in missionary accounts. Islanders didn't simply become Christian subjects, leaving behind all traces of their previous "heathenism" (see Keane 2007 for a similar discussion of the Dutch Calvinist missions in Indonesia). Rather, islanders incorporated Christianity into a broader universe of beliefs and customary practices, referred to as kastom in Bislama, Vanuatu's pidgin (Flexner 2016). One of the practices in Aniwan kastom that changed was mortuary ritual. Burial at sea was actively discouraged by missionaries in the New Hebrides, but much of the change may also have been driven by local people and their adaptation to changed settlement patterns and connections

to customary land via ancestors. The traditional practice of burial at sea (Capell 1958: 18–19; Steel 1880: 379) was replaced with burial in formal cemeteries featuring graves lined with coral slabs or mounded coral or marked with bottles, and eventually raised cement graves.

Recent studies of grave form and location in Rotuma (Rensel and Howard 2016), New Guinea highlands (Gibbs 2016; Jacka 2016) and Sāmoa (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2016; Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016) have uncovered some common threads within ongoing changes to Pacific Islander relationships to death and burial. Specifically, these studies have revealed the ways that contemporary grave markers are used by Pacific Islanders to assert ownership over land, reflect the prestige and wealth of particular family groups and mediate disputes. Contemporary grave-marking also reflects ongoing concerns about relationships to the spirits of deceased ancestors.

Spirits were and are a worry for Pacific Islanders, as they could cause injury, misfortune or death, especially where the deceased individual was killed by warfare or sorcery. Often relationships with spirits had to be controlled by ritual specialists to minimise the risk of such harm (for an example from southern Vanuatu see Bonnemaison 1994: 178–80). Proper mortuary ritual was another way of controlling these spirits. On Aniwa and neighbouring Futuna, atua were seen as universally dangerous, though traditionally only certain atua were believed to persist in the mortal realm beyond the period of mourning (Capell 1958: 36–37). After conversion to Christianity, it is possible that a more immortal form was granted to all atua in line with Christian cosmology, though this is not clearly remarked upon by the missionaries or subsequent ethnographers.

After the main period of missionary influence on Aniwa, people widely adapted new forms and practices of leaving consumer goods as grave offerings. These practices materialised ancestral relationships. Assertions of kinship relate to ongoing connections to land (*fanua*), and often more specifically to particular marae, a term that referred both to a sacred space for dancing and drinking kava and to the traditional hamlets consisting of groups of houses surrounding an open space (Capell 1958: 2–3, 9–10). Relationships to land and to atua were also shaped by processes of Christian conversion, and thus these stories are inherently intertwined.

Demographic decline in some cases caused claims about ancestry and territory to become ambiguous or contested because of discontinuities in ancestral lines. Other factors, such as economic development, are also relevant to transformations in Oceanic mortuary rituals. The ability to offer a "modern" grave to one's ancestors could be linked to personal or familial prestige. Where graves are located likewise remains significant and in many cases is tied to expressions of ancestral connection. This is clearly the case for burials on now-abandoned marae of Aniwa. These are not either/or

factors. Burial practices relate simultaneously to the pragmatic concerns of the living and their spiritual concerns for the dead. Relationships to spirits, contemporary political and economic competition, and assertions of land rights are all connected ongoing processes derived from colonial and post-colonial history in Vanuatu.

* * *

A variety of ritual dynamics are at play in the cemeteries of Aniwa. The mission-era cemeteries do not reflect in a simple way the demographic collapse and religious conversion of populations in these islands over the course of the 1800s. It is quite likely that sea burial, practised on Aniwa (Capell 1958: 18–19; Steel 1880: 379) as well as neighbouring islands (Humphreys 1926: 89–90, 118), continued to be used for some time in the mission period. There is also the possibility of people being buried in unmarked graves, particularly during the severe outbreaks of epidemic disease commonly documented by the missionaries.

The graves themselves are not directly related to outbreaks and related demographic decline. They are instead a reflection of cultural choices made by Aniwans, largely independently of missionary influence and largely after the period of population collapse had ended. The slab-lined grave is likely an introduced form adapted to the local context. It seems likely that this form came initially to Aneityum with the Sāmoan and Rarotongan teachers who came to the southern New Hebrides ahead of European missionaries beginning in the 1840s (Liua'ana 1996) and was later introduced to Aniwa, possibly via Aneityumese teachers. Regardless of from where it was introduced, this form of grave became widespread after the missionary period in Aniwa and continues to be used through the present. It was common for people to use not only coral limestone but also fragments of lime mortar to line the graves. This reflects an integration of missionary materials into local interpretations of Christian belief, alongside changing ideas about kastom or tradition. Likewise, the widespread presence of grave offerings might indicate a continuing sense of obligation to spirits or ancestors. If atua are still potentially dangerous, or at least beings who require ongoing relationships with the living, then these are material markers of propitiation.

These cemeteries were not constructed in empty landscapes. The terrace on which Paton built the Aniwa mission has been occupied for at least 2,600 years, and there is abundant archaeological evidence on and below the surface. Paton (1907, vol. 2: 130–31) notes clearing mounds of bone from the mission grounds, which he assumed to be evidence of cannibalism, though the bones are much more likely to have been evidence of earlier burials. It was common for local people in the southern New Hebrides to settle missionaries on spiritually dangerous ground, including former burial

grounds (Flexner and Willie 2015). Encounters with the restless atua of the deceased were considered particularly hazardous. As cosmological and spiritual beliefs shifted with the adoption of Christianity, the relationships with atua may also have changed, though they were and are still periodically propitiated with offerings. Simultaneously, being able to point to ancestors buried in particular places—and indeed, continuing to assert the right to bury people in specific places—reinforces a sense of belonging and ownership over parts of the island, linked through extensive kin networks.

People throughout Vanuatu have historically used foreign people, goods and concepts to mark evolving connections to land while leveraging such relationships for political purposes (Flexner 2019). The Aniwa cemeteries represent a variety of processes, including assertions of territorial connection but also connection to ancestors, kinship and atua. More broadly, what these changing burial practices reflect is a pattern of Aniwan people adopting introduced beliefs and materials, then adapting them creatively within an evolving sense of kastom as people in the New Hebrides continue to negotiate their relationships with the colonial world. This pattern of behaviour is not restricted to the colonial period (Flexner *et al*. 2019). Rather it reflects a long history of innovation and resilience as local people from Aniwa negotiated relationships with each other, with regional neighbours with whom they had kinship and exchange relationships, and with interlopers from the outside world.

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Corresponding Author: James L. Flexner, Department of Archaeology, Quadrangle Building (A14), University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia.
Email: james.flexner@sydney.edu.au. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2577-5991

Brianna Muir: School of Archaeology and Anthropology, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. Email: Brianna.Muir@anu.edu.au.
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0320-4415

Stuart Bedford: Department of Archaeology and Natural History, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Jena, Germany. Email: stuart.bedford@anu.edu.au.
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6476-5617

Frederique Valentin: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris, France; MSH Mondes à Nanterre, Nanterre, France. Email: frederique.valentin@cnrs.fr.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0575-7681

Denise Elena: Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Aniwa, Vanuatu.

David Samoria: Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Aniwa, Vanuatu.

THE ROLE OF CHECKERS (JEKAB) IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

ALEX DE VOOGT
Drew University

ABSTRACT: The Marshall Islands have an active community of competitive players of checkers (jekab) who use a rule set that is particular to the region. This game is featured in tournaments held during cultural celebrations on multiple islands in the archipelago, while the activity is considered an integral part of public life as it is witnessed on the islands. Marshallese checkers is shown to create a liminoid space in which a diversity of players in terms of age, language and socioeconomic circumstances interact across the playing board. Marshallese checkers supports the idea of board games as social lubricants that helps to explain how board games cross these borders so effortlessly historically as well as contemporaneously. The public presence, the rules and the diversity of players exhibited in the Marshall Islands point to a rich history of and a continuing future for abstract board games in the Pacific Islands.

Keywords: checkers (jekab), board games, social lubricant, horizontal transmission, anthropology of play, Marshall Islands, Micronesia

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In his thesis work, Walter Crist, an anthropological archaeologist who focuses on social complexity in ancient Cyprus, introduced the idea that board games act as "social lubricants" (Crist 2016). He subsequently expanded on this idea in an article that included a series of examples from antiquity (Crist *et al.* 2016). These two studies suggest that games, specifically board games, may function like wine and feasting in that they facilitate interaction, particularly between distinct cultural groups. More specifically, the abstract nature of board games allows people with different sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds to interact in novel ways. Unlike physical sports (e.g., West 2014), they require little organisation, may involve only two people and require few physical materials, which are often reusable.

In the work on social lubricants the concept of liminality, as introduced by Victor Turner (1974), is central. Liminality is a state whereby people can step outside normal social practices and bend familiar cultural elements and societal structures (p. 60). The *liminal* state is mostly part of an obligatory transition, as is often seen in "rites of passage" (Van Gennep [1909] 1960). Turner contended that play, or more generally "leisure", created an element

of "optionality" where going outside the norm happens in what he termed a *liminoid* space that is neither transitional nor mandatory. The liminoid is distinguished from the liminal in that more freedom is allowed. "It is less serious, and actions are not as proscribed" (Crist *et al.* 2016: 180). Turner mentions chess as an example of a liminoid activity that also "seems to need no goals or rewards outside itself" (Turner 1974: 68). Liminoid states also can be entered through the use of social lubricants. For instance, liminoid states created by intoxicating substances may allow for interactions otherwise not permitted in society (see also, e.g., Dietler 2010).

Game play, according to Brian Sutton-Smith (1997: 93), creates "a metaphoric sphere that can conjoin what is otherwise apart and divide what is otherwise together". This resonates with the idea that people can step outside normal social practices. Thomas Malaby (2009: 211) speaks of play as "an attitude that is totalizing in the sense that it reflects an acknowledgment of how events, however seemingly patterned or routinized, can never be cordoned off from contingency entirely". His view goes beyond the idea of meaning-making as the central role of play in society (p. 207). Instead, play and games introduce contingency; the participants accept an uncertain outcome of a cultural practice. In the case of Majuro checkers players, examined herein, a gardener may dominate a director in a series of games with both players having entered the game accepting this uncertainty. Play, and specifically abstract board games (Danilovic and de Voogt 2020) such as checkers, facilitate this interaction since not only is the outcome uncertain, it is not governed by chance as in gambling games (e.g., Festa 2007) but by the cognitive abilities of the players.

Playing checkers is not so much meaningful in the sense that the status of the winning player is at stake. The status of a player outside of the game is irrelevant and often unknown to the participant. If by acting in a liminoid space players are agents in the history of games, which means that they interact across boundaries both within and between societies, then evidence of this agency should be present in contemporary gaming practices. Unlike organised play, such as sports or board game tournaments, which could affect one's status in society, and unlike gambling where stakes or debts are exchanged (see, e.g., Oxfeld 1993), playing board games may result in interactions that are mostly, although not exclusively, meaningful as a "social lubricant". It offers participants, in this case Marshallese players, a possibility of interacting competitively with individuals from other social groups.

With the concepts of liminoid spaces and social lubricants in mind, the current distribution of games attested both in archaeology and anthropology is better understood. This distribution process is characterised as horizontal transmission, i.e., from peer group to peer group, crossing multiple

boundaries—in this case, geographic, socioeconomic and linguistic boundaries—with identical playing rules found across time and space (de Voogt *et al*. 2013). The ways in which board games facilitate contact between players and hence advance the distribution of board game rules and practices is little understood. Contemporary ethnography, as opposed to the archaeological evidence discussed by Crist *et al.* (2016) that mainly consists of material culture, may better inform this process of transmission and do so in more detail.

I evaluate the idea that competitive checkers (*jekab*) in the Marshall Islands serves as a social lubricant and creates a liminoid space in which players can interact with those with whom they would not interact otherwise. I suggest that some players are motivated to play in order to access this social interaction while for others the play needs to have no goals or rewards outside itself. In addition, the playing practice has become part of Marshallese cultural identity through its visibility in central Majuro and in yearly festivals. These aspects were explored by examining the public playing practices of competitive checkers in Majuro during fieldwork in 2017 and 2018.

METHODS

During a stay in Majuro in December 2017 and January 2018, the public checkerboard near the Robert Reimers Hotel was observed at different times of day. Videos were made of games to record specific rules and playing practices. Short interviews were conducted with some of the lead players conversant in English to confirm game rules and explain situations in the game. This was followed by interviews with staff at the Alele Museum, an institution also responsible for cultural festivals on the island. Their staff facilitated additional conversations on different days, both at the Robert Reimers site and at the nearby senior centre, that focused on the history of the game and the contexts of expert play as well as individual players' personal experiences with checkers. Only players active in these locations were approached.

The study concentrated on competitive play and largely excluded the role of checkers at home or in other contexts. Competitive game play allows for a precise description of game rules and usually features a well-defined and relatively small community of players, a practice which has been widely documented (see, e.g., de Voogt 1995, 2005; Herskovits 1932; van Beek and Dorgelo 1997). Competitive play may occur in different spatial contexts but is characterised by the intensity with which the game proceeds and the need for specific rules.

The game rules, as well as changes in rules over time, were documented in detail through interviews with individuals as well as a group of players. For instance, in group conversations it was possible to determine who had

the longest experience in the game and who had been teaching who. Senior players were asked about changes in playing practices during their lifetimes to determine historical developments.

Linguistic information on checkers terminology from the Marshallese-English Online Dictionary (MOD 2009) was confirmed with players on site, while a visit to the Waan Aelon in Majel in Majuro served to collect information on the practice of making checkerboards, which was also discussed with players active at the public playing board.

CHECKERS IN CONTEMPORARY MARSHALL ISLANDS SOCIETY

In a study intended to confirm Roberts *et al.*'s (1959: 600) assertion that "simple societies should not possess games of strategy and should resist borrowing them", Garry Chick (1998) included games from the Trobriand, Fijian, Māori, Marquesan, Sāmoan, Gilbertese, Marshallese, Trukese, Yapese, and Palauan societies. Chick's analysis only included games of strategy for Māori and Yapese. However, recent research in Kiribati (de Voogt 2018) challenges Chick's description of the distribution of "games of strategy" as he overlooks checkers playing in Kiribati. In addition, the Trobriand Islanders are also known to play checkers, a game widespread and popular in these islands (Sergio Jarillo de la Torre, pers. comm., 2017). The current study also identifies checkers in the Marshall Islands. Chick found few board games or "games of strategy" in the Pacific, even though the Trobriand, Kiribati and Marshall islanders have played strategy games for at least half a century. For instance, Alexander Spoehr (1949: 213), in his ethnography of the Marshall Islands, states, "A form of checkers has been played by all ages since German times, and playing cards are in use", but apart from this one sentence he does not elaborate. Chick excluded the game of checkers as it was introduced after contact with Westerners, but the presence of games of strategy does go against the idea that some societies resist borrowing them.

The game of checkers is now widely known throughout the Marshall Islands and played informally and competitively, although not necessarily by all islanders on each island. It is found in public places, giving the game broad exposure in the communities in which it is found. The game is present and appropriated by society with local terminology, self-produced boards and locally sourced pieces. On Majuro, there are three occasions or holidays on which there are tournaments—May 1, February 15 (Memorial Day) and September 29—and this tradition goes back for at least a decade. The September date coincides with a cultural festival that includes canoe paddling, basket weaving, coconut husking and fire making. Up to four checkerboards are used in a knock-out tournament with cash prizes for the winners (see Fig. 1). No other board or card games feature in this festival,

and together with ludo (*jikere* or *jekidri*, similar to American parcheesi), it is one of few board games that is often homemade. The Waan Aelon in Majel (WAM), a group of artists in Majuro known for their canoe making, also produce handmade checkers and ludo boards using locally sourced *lukwej* or *luwej* (*Calophyllum inophyllum* L. [Guttiferae]; known as *tamanu* in Polynesia) wood, while homemade boards are commonly made of plywood with a painted checkered pattern, as confirmed by players on Majuro as well as on neighbouring Kiribati.

Checkers is set apart from proprietary games such as Candyland and Monopoly, which are also known but only in their commercial form. The Marshallese language has adopted a few terms specific to checkers, often cognate with English, and others for games in general (see Table 1). The words for "game" and "checkers" are adapted to Marshallese phonology, the latter transformed in a way that the English etymology is no longer recognised by the Marshallese. Other terms are common words used in other contexts, with the exception of *jaṃtiltili* 'to capture many pieces', which appears specific for a games context and is particularly appropriate for checkers.

Table 1. Marshallese words used in checkers (source: MOD 2009)

Marshallese	English
bar jinoe	'to draw a game/begin again'
bōke	'to take' (to capture); e.g., *bōke im etal* 'take it and go'
iroij	'king'
jaṃtiltili	'to capture many pieces'
jebo	'draw/tie'; e.g., *keem eo inne jebo* 'yesterday's game was a tie'
jekab	'checkers; to play checkers'
jekaboot	'checkerboard'
keem	'game'
wa	'playing piece'; 'something that moves'

Since it is played in public places as well as in the home, the game of checkers has become part of the cultural environment, as witnessed by outsiders as well as noted by the Marshallese themselves. A twenty-first-century blogger writes, "The gentlemen play checkers at Robert Reimers every day. Apparently they hold a tournament and according to Jabby, the

winner gets 'bragging rights and meat' " (Gersh 2005). A recent guidebook notes: "Next to Robert Reimers Enterprises (RRE) is a covered table area that pretty much serves as the town square. Old men play *checkers* (coral vs. pop-tops). It's the easiest place in town to sit down and get to know locals—everyone is quite friendly" (Levy 2003: 58; emphasis in original). They both mention Robert Reimers, the hotel next to which the only regular public checkers play takes place on Majuro. In the imagination of the Marshall Islanders themselves, the scene of men playing checkers is equally salient. In a 2017 poem by Marshall Islander Randon Jebro Jack (*Ta in "Marshall Islands?"*), written while in Hawai'i, one of his couplets reads: "What do *I* think of, / When I hear the words, *Marshall lslands?* / Greeting others, / "Ah *iakwe waj! Ejet am mour?*" / "*Emman emman!*" / Friendly smiles to total strangers / Having Kopiko coffee with fresh doughnuts / With the uncles playing checkers / Outside on the take-out's tables / Smoking USA Gold cigarettes / Going to work 30 minutes to an hour, / LATE /…" (Enright 2017).

Figure 1. Checkers tournament during the 2016 Cultural Festival in Majuro. Photo courtesy of the Alele Museum, Majuro, Marshall Islands.

The checkerboard near the Robert Reimers Hotel (Figs 2 and 3) shows only part of this cultural practice. The tournaments in Majuro, three a year, include players that do not play in public, and according to those at Robert Reimers, they occasionally include women. Outside of Majuro, the most consequential tournament is found in Kwajalein Atoll, on Ebeye Island, during their February 9 Memorial Day festivities. Cash prizes are much higher there and Ebeye players are recognised as some of the best in the country. Team play is featured, with each island putting forward its lead players for yet another prize. The regular players in Majuro defend their home islands, further emphasising the countrywide exposure. But while players may remember the name of last year's champion and the cash prizes are welcomed, the next day near Robert Reimers any champion may have his winning streak interrupted at some point. The game is high-paced and the loss of just a single game will force a player to leave the table and possibly even a tournament; these conditions guarantee that most single players cannot dominate the game for long. Banter, intimidation and laughter keep all participants engaged. This dynamic has both historical significance and contemporary implications.

A PRELIMINARY HISTORY OF CHECKERS IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

Geographic Origins

Checkers has many variations, each with a distinct distribution around the world (Murray 1952; Parlett 1997; Van der Stoep 1984). The movements of the king, the possibility of capturing backward, mandatory captures of multiple pieces—they all point towards select properties that are highly distinctive and historically relevant. Even though independent innovation cannot be ruled out, it is clear even the most detailed rules remain in place across time and space for both card and board games (de Voogt *et al.* 2013). Any situation in which the rules clearly diverge requires explanation in terms of historical contact rather than assuming independent innovation.

In the Marshall Islands, the checkers game rules point in one direction. Their version is similar to American "pool" checkers, especially popular among African Americans and in the American Southeast; it is distinct from traditional American checkers and easily recognised. American or "straight" checkers allows pieces to move and capture only in a forward direction. The players capture by jumping over an opponent's piece. Once a piece reaches the other side of the board, it is promoted to king and may move and capture backwards. In pool checkers, pieces only move forward but may capture backwards. Once a piece reaches the other side, it is promoted to king and may cross multiple empty squares at a time; it becomes known as a "long" or "flying" king. Straight checkers has been the dominant version in United States tournaments, while pool checkers was favoured only in some of its regions.

While an American version of checkers reaching the Marshall Islands is hardly a historical surprise, it is of interest that it was checkers, as opposed to chess, that became established (although some Marshall Islanders refer to checkers as "chess" when speaking English). There are two possible reasons. First, the abstract nature of the game and the limited gaming implements make checkers both easier to adopt and easier to manufacture locally than chess. Second, pool checkers is particularly popular as a street game because it can be played much faster than straight American checkers. The adoption of pool checkers suggests American soldiers or whalers were more likely to have introduced the game than missionaries, tourists or colonial officials.

Checkers as played in the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Nauru has one particular rule that is different from contemporary American pool checkers. This rule makes Marshallese checkers identical to what is commonly known as Russian draughts. Elsewhere in the world when a checker piece reaches the far end of the board it becomes a king, but if there are more captures to be made, either the crowning of the king has to wait while the piece continues capturing or the piece will have to rest on the far side before it can make captures as a king in a subsequent move. In Russian and Marshallese checkers, the piece transforms into a king mid-move and will continue as a "flying" king as soon as it has passed the far row. There are very few places in the world where the rule is applied this way, and it is a curious sight for any player who is unaccustomed to it. An independent innovation in the Marshall Islands is unlikely as this Russian rule is also present in the Trobriand Islands (Sergio Jarillo de la Torre, pers. comm., 2017), with whom the Marshallese do not engage. What is historically more likely is that this set of rules was common among American soldiers, even though we have no records of their specific game rules to confirm this. As American pool checkers did not become standardised until the 1960s, this Russian variation may date from the early 1940s.

The introduction of pool checkers does not preclude an earlier introduction of checkers by missionaries or other foreigners. On the contrary, the possibility that missionaries introduced the game to the Pacific (e.g., Austen 1945) would make the adaptation to the specific rules of pool checkers equally understandable. In other words, Pacific islanders' initial familiarity with the game makes interactions (competitions) with American soldiers or whalers even more likely and a region-wide adaptation of the American rules especially plausible. The modern vocabulary predominantly supports an English-language influence since the French (*dames*), German (*Damen*) and Spanish (*damas*) names for the game are not attested.

The suggestion by Spoehr (1949) that the game rules have a German heritage is, however, less likely. Two Marshallese rules differ from the rules of the German game. Apart from the absence of a crowning of the king mid-

move, German pieces cannot capture backwards. It is possible to play many games before witnessing a piece that becomes king and continues capturing in the same move, but if pieces cannot capture backwards everything changes, as this would greatly affect the strategies that can be employed throughout the game. Such a change would not constitute a mere local innovation but would lead to a significantly different game. Thus, it is unlikely that Marshallese checkers has a German origin; additionally, this is supported by the fact that the rules are identical in so many Pacific places that do not have connections with Germany.

Timing of Introduction

Players in Majuro remember the names of great players of the past who were active as early as the 1950s. Depending on the island they were from, individuals recalled names of at least one generation before themselves. One of the older players (age 73) recalled a name that happened to be the grandfather of one of the players on the scene, two generations removed from a man now 50 years old. This suggests that competitive play existed as early as World War II. It also indicates a continuous history of competitive play since at least the 1950s, when the game was apparently already widespread among the Marshall Islanders. However, oral histories could not confirm that American soldiers had introduced the game, as in the minds of these players the game had always been in the islands. Several elderly players were asked whether players had interacted with soldiers at any point in time, but could also not confirm so; they had started to play after the war when they were in their teens. There was no storytelling about how the game had come to the islands or whether the rules had changed—the game and its rules had always been there. The long-term presence of competitive play, perhaps from its first introduction, suggests that much of the appeal has been its competitive aspect. It was the game's fast-paced nature that had made pool checkers popular on the streets of American cities; checkers appears to have been adopted in the Pacific for similar reasons, but its historical origins have been forgotten. Today Marshallese playing rules are different from those of the German, French, Spanish and British colonial powers in the Pacific; there remains some historical but no longer a conscious connection with an American introduction.

FACILITATING INTERACTION IN MAJURO

> On a Sunday morning in Majuro, the public checkerboard near the Robert Reimers Hotel sits idle. Among the tables set on a sidewalk between pillars, with an overhang protecting it from the elements, the checkerboard is permanently nailed to a tabletop. Its squares are painted in black and red, 64 times. The street corner has people, mainly men both young and old, smoking,

> resting, alone or in groups. During this particular rainy Sunday, the place was abandoned, until ten in the morning when two nine-year-old boys started playing checkers. They were applying some rules but not others, frequently forgetting to capture, but mostly enjoying their time, laughing and posing for pictures when asked. Soon the place was abandoned again. At noon one man sat behind the board, grooming, smoking, but not playing. The pieces were not arranged but abandoned in a huddle. There were at least two other empty tables to sit at, but he chose the one with the checkerboard. Perhaps a fellow player would show up—but he left not much later. The rain poured more incessantly, and some people rested at the other tables, men and boys, the occasional woman. A slow day for the checkerboard. (Author's fieldnotes)

Despite the scarcity of action on this Sunday in December, it illustrates the life of the board, the activity surrounding a place of play. It is an optional activity, always there but not always used. A fleeting occurrence in the day of two boys. Elsewhere in town people were also pausing, sitting on benches, together or alone, drinking coffee or tea, or just resting. One activity is not more popular, comfortable, convenient or meaningful than the other, as that would instil too much of a judgment. Note that the children did not play for hours but just a couple of games before they continued their day with other things. Unlike Roberts *et al.* (1959) and Chick (1998), who hypothesised that strategy games would be disruptive in egalitarian societies as one player would be better than another, it has since been shown that competitive games are commonly played in egalitarian societies as in any other (see Chick 2017; de Voogt 2017; Sbrzesny 1976). In the Marshalls, there is a winner of the day as opposed to a winner in society. Such observations are also not specific to the Marshall Islands. Game boards may be used in passing without the pretence of a tournament and without the prestige of a sculptured or ornamented game board (e.g., Walker 1990), or any rules that indicate a gambling purpose.

What the context and the playing practice in Majuro shows is that the Marshallese play board games with informal and optional participation, as we also find elsewhere in the world. The game is appropriated to the extent that the board is an integral part of the furniture, the pieces are both small and large pieces of coral and the language of the game is local.

When observations continued in the evening, twice there were players who took advantage of the electric lighting to engage in a game. Two young male players in their late teens or early 20s played a few games and left an otherwise deserted corner. Twenty minutes later, a man age 35 and a boy age 15 played a few games as well. The morning, the afternoon and the evening only saw players without an audience, without a single person present other than themselves and, briefly, the researcher. The boy and man

Figure 2. A pair of checkers players during the evening on an otherwise deserted street corner in Majuro, Marshall Islands. Author's photo, 2017.

were not relatives but just friends, and the older one said that his family was elsewhere and he was teaching the boy to become a better player. The space in which these games took place allowed for encounters between players of different backgrounds, but outside the gaze of society. There was no audience to praise the winner; the games took place almost invisibly and had no reward other than the game itself.

Monday morning presented a different scene. A breakfast kiosk opened up next to the benches. Five or more people would hang out, often alone, sometimes in groups, mostly avoiding the checkerboard. Drinks and food as social lubricants are well attested and, just as in archaeological contexts (Crist *et al.* 2016), the game board is an appropriate addition to a place of liminoid activity. Although the literature mostly refers to psychoactive substances, such as alcoholic drinks, as social lubricants, feasting practices include all types of food and beverage. In the Marshall Islands, no alcohol was served in the public space where checkers was played. More specifically, the players rarely combined drinking or eating of any kind with their game of checkers; coffee or sandwiches were mostly if not exclusively consumed after a game had been completed.

Around noon the scene attracted seasoned checkers players. After a game, the one who loses makes room for the next player. Games take between three and ten minutes; there is banter and laughter; pieces hit the board or are scratched forward with force; players even move pieces if it is not their turn, pointing out their threatening next move; sometimes a bystander will interfere and play, though his move is commonly reversed. While, according to the men, there have been competent female players who competed in tournaments, no women frequent the public playing board. This is also true for the semi-public board housed at the senior centre behind the Alele Museum. The men at the senior centre are commonly retired, but at Robert Reimers they come from different age groups. Players commonly enter matches in their late 20s, and are regularly present, often continuing to compete, well into their 70s. On any one occasion, there are players with an age spread of some 20 to 30 years.

When asked about their champion, they said none of them was the best player as they all would have their good and bad days. That afternoon was a long sequence of games. From 12 o'clock onwards there were about six onlookers at any one time, including young children attracted by the

Figure 3. Two competitive players during a checkers game. Note the scars on the checkerboard made by forcefully sliding the coral pieces across its squares. Author's photo, 2017.

excitement. At the end of the afternoon, just after four, at least 25 people had gathered near the kiosk: women with children, groups of men—but only five were watching the checkerboard. These five were all players waiting their turn, not yet tired of an afternoon of checkers. All others sitting around at different tables and on ledges around the coffee shop were neither paying attention nor showing any interest in the checkers scene. The players had become as isolated as the pair of players on the Sunday night before.

No bets were placed, no drinks or food accompanied the men; they would eat after a game was finished in order not to be distracted during the match. These players are a different group from the earlier pairs that sat across the checkerboard. These men competed, they raised the game to a battle of minds, they added a social dynamic that is particularly relevant to show how a board game facilitates interaction along multiple dimensions: age, geography and socioeconomic background. Again, the game did not offer "rewards outside itself", but created a liminoid space in which highly diverse individuals interacted competitively.

FACILITATING INTERACTIONS IN THE REGION

Majuro has a particularly diverse checkers community, and a brief inventory established that players had come from all over the Marshall Islands. One afternoon, there were seven players, 23 years apart, from seven different atolls: Kwajalein, Rongelap, Ailinglaplap, Ebon, Maloelap, Ujae and Arno. They had all learned their playing skills outside of Majuro in their early 20s. They said that work or school had brought them to Majuro where they now interacted with fellow players from around the country. Their professions ranged from schoolteacher and museum director to fireman, policeman, small-business owner and gardener.

Although two players were cousins, competitive play is rarely a family matter. One player recalled that his uncle was a famous player before him, but they never played; he had not even asked, although it was not considered improper. Another player had learned the game from his father, who "had been a player himself once". His father was taught by a player from a different island. When it comes to competitive play, it is more common to be taught by peers rather than family members. According to the players interviewed, it is better to learn one's playing skills from multiple people who come from different islands or countries. Players meet at the board and family relationships are happenstance. Unlike games played in the home, which are almost exclusively played among close friends and family, the competitive game creates a community that overarches families, islands and, to some extent, neighbouring countries in the Pacific.

One of the younger competitive players was asked if he ever played people from outside the Marshalls and he mentioned good players from

Kosrae and Nauru who had visited and had given him a "good game". But these foreigners did not visit regularly as they were "busy men" and it was a hike from the airport into town. Other players attested to US Peace Corps members interacting with the Marshallese through a game of checkers in the past. An elderly player, age 79, when asked about the generation of players before him recalled that on his island of Arno, the chief of the island, by the name of Tobo, would play long hours with a man from Kiribati who had married a woman from Arno. These stories suggest that international connections through migration or occasional travel are frequently cemented through checkers and have a long history in the region.

An elderly player from Tuvalu, living on the islands for the last 20 years, was particularly well travelled. He was familiar with other checkers variations but confirmed that only one set of rules was played in the Pacific, whether you were in Tuvalu, Kiribati or the Marshall Islands. He said with a laugh, "Very funny. I don't speak the language but I hear that everyone is contributing [to the game of his opponent]. When the guy loses, he gets angry at someone in the audience." Language barriers did not impede his participation. In his words and with a smile: "This is the only place other than going to the bar. But you cannot play when you are drunk." He pointed out the few men he knew and with whom he chatted before, during or after a game. One day, he was found reading a newspaper at a table next to the board. It was 11 in the morning, a little early for play, but 20 minutes later he had found the first player for the afternoon, just the two of them, soon to be joined by others. He would then leave the scene for a few hours, but at four in the afternoon he was back and played his second set of games for the day, laughing at every win. He actively sought the social interaction offered by a good game of jekab.

The game of checkers facilitates interaction beyond age and socio-economic background. Players who were taught the game on different islands or even in different island countries meet at the playing board in Majuro. They play the same rules and compete with equal enthusiasm. Tournaments or cultural events facilitate such interaction at a grander scale, but Majuro also captures those who are traveling through, those busy men from distant places equally eager to compete when they happen to be in town.

* * *

The answers to the question of why people play are diverse and resonate with theories from evolution to frivolity without any satisfactory consensus, as Sutton-Smith (1997) has demonstrated at length in his aptly titled book, *The Ambiguity of Play.* But the presence of the game of checkers in cultural festivals and its visible practice in the centre of Majuro has added a social

identity. Playing checkers is part of being Marshallese: even if not all Marshallese participate, they are all aware of its presence.

The players active at Robert Reimers compete when playing checkers, using well-defined playing rules that point to a specific history. For the individual player, jekab does not seem to need "goals or rewards outside itself". The reward is the game itself, not the possible outside status or cash prize. In addition to this autotelic aspect, board games facilitate interaction. Players may seek the possibility to interact and compete with people outside of their social-economic environment, of different age groups and from different geographic locations. Even linguistic differences do not prevent such interaction.

The game of jekab is closest to American pool checkers, which may have been introduced during World War II. Since then the game has become part of public life. The name of the game now adheres to Marshallese phonology, while the boards are locally made. The coral checker pieces make it more challenging to keep track of a king while the movements of the king itself still derives from its largely forgotten American origins. The game is given a visible place in society. The board is centrally placed in Majuro, nailed to a table in the main square, for all to see and for a select few to play their competitive games. Each year, the best players are part of locally organised tournaments during national holidays and featured alongside canoe paddling and coconut husking at a yearly cultural festival.

Checkers in the Marshall Islands provides evidence that the role of board games in society includes that of a social lubricant, an observation that aids understanding of the presence of a social activity that often only includes two people using limited resources with seemingly little wider social significance. The international dynamic of the game of checkers in the Pacific is illustrative of horizontal transmission as it is understood for board games. The game is found across linguistic, cultural and geographic boundaries and has remained unchanged across time and space. But beyond what archaeological evidence could show, the Pacific islanders give evidence that this process is not only true for the design of the board but also for the details of the rules. The highly specific and somewhat unusual rule for the crowning of the king is consistently seen across the region. Despite the many possible variations of checkers, the Marshallese and several of their neighbours insist on this particular rule set.

The idea of social lubricant helps explain how board games cross the borders of society so effortlessly and has found further evidence with Marshallese checkers. The game creates a liminoid space in which players from multiple generations and socioeconomic backgrounds interact. This interaction is found across islands and island countries. The continued presence of jekab in the centre of town and in cultural festivals also affords

the Marshallese a visible part of Marshallese culture and identity. Individual players may participate to access this liminoid space for social interaction, they may engage in what they perceive as a culturally specific activity, or they may play without requiring a goal or purpose outside the game itself. In each case, jekab in the Marshall Islands continues a history of cross-border interaction and cultural celebration at the checkerboard.

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AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Alex de Voogt, Drew University, 36 Madison Ave., Madison, New Jersey 07940, USA.
Email: adevoogt@drew.edu | https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1763-2288