response to the critiques lodged by these authors. Nor would they likely be satisfied by the increasingly voiced acknowledgment within the profession that the traditional use of the “ethnographic present” tense in ahistorical descriptions and analyses has obscured our understanding of societies as much as it has abetted the perpetuation of stereotypes and no longer valid images of Pacific peoples. With a few exceptions, the contributors seem less interested in improving the practice of anthropology than they are in directing its efforts toward political objectives.

“It is the duty of social scientists everywhere to expose the problems faced by Pacific peoples as they resist destruction and extinction,” say the editors (xxviii, emphasis added). Others would stress not only our “duty” to be advocates for political causes and movements, but also that we have no choice in the matter. Thus, Simeone Durutalo asks, “Is a disengaged, detached, disinterested (in the critical sense of the word), neutral anthropology possible?” (209). Although such a goal may always have been illusory (or, as most of the contributors would have it, a disingenuous pose), for him there is no doubt about the future: “Within the contemporary reality of a heavily nuclearized and militarized Pacific, the answer is clearly in the negative” (209).

We are reminded, as we are throughout the book, of the slogan popular in the 1960s and 1970s, “If you aren’t a part of the solution, you’re a part of the problem.” For the editors, at least, the only “solution” appears to be that we all join them and their contributors, of whom “most are active supporters of the concept of a nuclear-free and independent Pacific” (xxi). It would be a pity if the cogent and constructive aspects of this wide-ranging critique became unnecessarily mired in legitimate current debates over an independent Kanaky or Belau’s constitution.

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Thanks to the timely publication of Gananath Obeyesekere’s The Apotheosis of Captain Cook, Pacific anthropologists can at last turn away from the deluge of revisionist theories about the conspiracy or assassination of John F. Kennedy to engage the debate over our own mythic-historical moment, the “apotheosis” and ritual murder of Captain James Cook at Kealakekua Bay, Hawai‘i, on 14 February 1779. Obeyesekere, a distinguished South Asianist and authority on psychological anthropology, bursts onto the Polynesian scene as a “stranger king,” confidently and masterfully striding over the turf of areal specialists. This incursion deserves our enthusiastic welcome and careful examination, for it raises issues of critical importance for the historical anthropology of the interface of Europeans and Pacific Islanders: not only is it imperative to uncover local categories of meaningfulness, but it is equally
vital to identify western ideological assumptions, patterns of discourse, and psychological dynamics.

_Apotheosis_ moves toward its ambitious goal of reinterpreting the dominant popular and scholarly understanding of Cook's fateful visit to Hawai‘i along six related paths. First, Obeyesekere tries to undermine the accepted paradigm by a new “critical reading” of the western sources (e.g., ships’ logs and journals, missionary histories, and ethnographic descriptions) that have been mined as evidence for the claim that Cook was identified by the Hawaiians with their fertility god Lono. Far from being objective reports of what Hawaiians did, said, and thought, these sources are, for Obeyesekere, a massive projection on Hawaiian consciousness of western “myth models,” especially the generalized early modern idea that Europeans (Columbus, Cortes, Cook) were superior or divine beings in the eyes of “primitive” peoples. Obeyesekere’s critical reading involves, further, showing the specific personal, political, and rhetorical forces that shaped the writing and editing of western texts about Hawai‘i.

Second, Obeyesekere performs a parallel critical reading of purported “Hawaiian” discourse about Cook as Lono, noting that at least by the 1820s Hawaiians had become so influenced by the previous western assumption of Cook’s apotheosis that even native language sources are not immune from this bias and therefore cannot be used as a transparent window into the traditional past. Although Obeyesekere does not mention this, when the missionary William Ellis visited Kealakekua Bay in 1823 he found that the chiefs there reflected sorrowfully on Cook’s memory while looking at the plates in the folio volume of Cook’s voyages (Ellis, _Polynesian Researches: Hawaii_, 133). Obeyesekere finds that Hawaiian discourse—at least what is available to him in translation—is characterized by multiple voices, genres, and perspectives.

Third, Obeyesekere mounts a complex argument (against Sahlin) that the historical coincidence of Cook’s arrival at Kealakekua Bay and the Makahiki festival then in progress is not in itself grounds for supporting the Cook-as-Lono identification. Hawaiians were not foolish enough to suspend their “practical rationality” to deal with this unique and momentous event in favor of a mechanical mythico-ritual logic based on stereotypical reproduction, and there is evidence that Cook’s advent actually did delay or alter the ritual schedule (as Sahlin also claims). Sahlin’s use of rigid calendrical calculations to compute the stages of the Makahiki is rejected on the grounds that this ritual was only systematized during the period of Kamehameha I.

Fourth, Obeyesekere proposes a new explanation of what did happen in 1778–1779 that not only fits the facts as revealed by his critical reading of sources but makes sense of Hawaiian and European cultural categories and political motives: in order to draw the British into his ongoing struggle against the forces at Maui, Kali-ni‘ōpu‘u, the paramount chief of the island of Hawai‘i, invested Cook as a high chief and, after Cook’s death, used his remains to perform a post-mortem deification, again with an eye toward military gain. So what for
Sahlins is an innovative mythic identification and ritual killing becomes for Obeyesekere a political installation and strategic deification.

Fifth, *Apotheosis* tries to discredit Sahlins’s account of Cook in Hawai’i by challenging, at times in a line-by-line fashion, specific interpretations found in his many well-known publications. Obeyesekere is particularly bothered by the notion that Hawaiians experienced their world only by seeing historical events as enacted myths—but this is not at all what Sahlins actually argues, as is especially clear from his discussion of Hawaiian performative culture, historical narrative, and practical engagement, three critical dimensions of his comparative theory that are not dealt with by Obeyesekere. Much attention is given to refuting the idea that the death of Cook was a reverse *kālī‘i* ritual, the sham battle in which the king, linked to the warlike god Ku, proves his usurping powers and then moves inland to encompass the female agricultural forces associated with Lono. But in saying that the scene of 14 February is “strangely reminiscent” of a sham battle rite, Sahlins (*Islands of History*, 129) is not claiming that the Hawaiians actually performed a ritual backwards but only that Cook’s ships, in returning to the bay while the forces of Kū were in ascendance, were categorically out of place given their association with the Lono pole.

Obeyesekere’s own *mana* is manifested in his accusation that Sahlins invented the description of a “hundred” Hawaiians joining in Cook’s murder (182); that number and description are in fact found in the contemporary journal of Captain James King (Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, 3:1, 557). Sahlins is also castigated for using a passage from an “official” (ie, published) journal by this same King (179), and then two pages later Obeyesekere uses the *same* “official account” to protest another Sahlins argument. Furthermore, for one who contends that western scholars fail to appreciate the “tropic” character of the discourse of the other, Obeyesekere should never have failed so many times to grasp the parodic, witty, and allusive quality of Sahlins’s writing style.

Sixth, Obeyesekere directs his subtle skills in psychological interpretation to a rereading of Cook’s psyche and finds the standard opinion of him as a heroic humanitarian grossly inaccurate, for in addition to the wise and generous “Prospero” dimension there is the darker “Kurtz” layer, where unreasonable cruelty and passionate rage toward both crew and Islanders nearly led to mutiny and probably contributed to his death. (No doubt Cook “lost it” while visiting Hawai’i, but he did not sail “round and round” the island of Hawai’i, as Obeyesekere mistakenly states on pages 44, 53, 78, and 80).

Here, Obeyesekere only tantalizes us with his deconstruction of Cook, since this will be the subject of another eagerly awaited major publication.

For the record, readers should know that I served as Sahlins’s archival research assistant in Hawai’i and later wrote a dissertation under his direction.

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