Despite recent postmodern pressures in the humanities toward reflexivity and authorial self-consciousness, it remains uncommon for scholars to explore their personal intellectual orientations publicly. A workshop held at the Australian National University in Canberra late in 1991 offered a number of well-established Pacific historians the opportunity to do just this: to interrogate their subject choices and historical practices, and to position their work within the changing historiography of the region. In this volume, *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and Transformations*, Brij Lal, himself a Pacific scholar of high standing, has presented fourteen of the papers in a collection that is consistently interesting and, in places, illuminating and clarifying.

The majority of the contributors entered advanced studies keen to establish their engagement in the orbit of the "island-oriented" history advocated by Jim Davidson, founding professor of Pacific history at the Australian National University. Gone were the days of viewing Pacific pasts through the lenses of British imperial or colonial history. The validity of indigenous peoples' own preexisting cultures and societies, and their own perceptions of and responses to western intruders, were the starting point for the island narratives that came into print and proliferated through the 1960s and 1970s. This innovation has been followed in turn by the inevitable reappraisal.

The contributors here explore their own sense of where Pacific history has headed since that time, and where in their opinion it should go. Of the area's shortcomings a few refer to the selectivity of islands chosen by Australians for examination: the northern Pacific, the French Pacific, and Maori lives have been left to the Americans, the French, and the New Zealanders respectively. Some contributors have become impatient with microstudies, and instead support a spirited effort to treat Pacific peoples' experiences within wider comparative frameworks across the region, and globally across other sites of comparable historical experiences. Many confess to beginning research with some detachment from indigenous peoples, few of whom they knew or whose islands they had visited. In the course of their careers they have, however, developed a closer engagement with Pacific peoples, and in addition a sensitivity to postcolonial critiques of white western scholarship. In all, *Pacific Islands History* offers scholars a richness of fresh ideas, and entry to understanding issues at the cutting edge of this area of the discipline. It is difficult to cover all the writers' work individually in a brief review, and I address a selection of chapters to offer a further sense of the quality of the publication.

Both Clive Moore and Jacqueline Leckie address issues of labor, bringing indigenous peoples' and migrant peoples' experiences into comparative frameworks drawn from their broad
and generous historical engagements with these areas. Clive Moore’s chapter is particularly useful, because he went beyond his brief to present a substantial resume of Pacific labor in the context of western intercolonial flows of labor. His own current research, inspired by an oral history project among descendants of Melanesian sugar plantation laborers in northern Queensland, promises to be exciting and significant.

Peter Hempenstall’s and Robert Aldrich’s chapters point us to their own and others’ work on German and French colonial possessions in the Pacific, showing confident mastery of their fields. Hempenstall’s initiation into Pacific studies was facilitated by Oxford-based specialists including Colin Newbury. He turned, he said, to the question of islanders’ resistance to colonial rule as “a certain subaltern response” to traditional Oxford concerns and styles: he was “a colonial Queenslander from a militantly defensive, minority Catholic subculture...straining against the easy, confident assumptions of intellectual and political superiority” emanating from the university’s elite. But for him the British emphasis on a comparative approach has remained a significant imperative in his work on Melanesia, although theoretically he urges the decolonization of the ways historians represent the Pacific past: “Images of the Pacific still suffer from the Orientalist virus.” Robert Aldrich came to his research on French possessions in the Pacific through his specialism at a Sydney university in the history of modern France during a decade of enormous conflict between settlers and indigenes. He remains convinced of the utility of studying the history of the metropolis alongside the colonial frontier, and of Pacific scholars extending their skills to read historians working outside the English language.

When historians work on small populations, especially those located geographically on the margins of the world’s political power, they have difficulty attracting attention outside their immediate areas. The chapters of David Hanlon, Bronwen Douglas, and Caroline Ralston in particular deserve a wider airing, because they address key historiographical or theoretical problems shared across the discipline as a whole. David Hanlon talks specifically of the intellectual divide that can separate American, European, and Australian historians from island historians, with their own historical memories. Indigenous peoples’ notions of linear narrative and causality often differ sharply from western paradigms. Hanlon discusses a case study, from the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, of local historians’ use of sorcery as an explanatory model for judging the outcomes of two wars. He concludes that the writing of the history of peoples with such beliefs impels western historians to a perspective that is “inclusive or considerate of sorcery,” if they want “a more vernacularly tolerant, sensitive and different way of doing history in the Pacific.” Bronwen Douglas addresses the critical challenge of postmodernism to history, in positive terms, sharing her “ongoing personal journey from unreflective empiricism to reflexive pluralism.” She urges Pacific historians to understand and engage with new critical theory as
a means to enrich their reading of texts and their interpretation of cultures. Caroline Ralston in turn emphasizes the need for women’s specificities to be taken into consideration in all historical situations, as she traces her own recognition of the utility of gender analysis through an important study of Maori women.

Finally, Sione Latukefu’s chapter, “The Making of the First Tongan-born Professional Historian,” makes compelling reading for understanding the intellectual journey of a scholar whose kin and community background are representative of the objects of Pacific historians’ inquiry. In particular, he confronts his readers with their secular assumptions about the impact of Christian faith and practices on indigenous Pacific peoples, a corrective echoing some of David Hanlon’s concerns. With all the constructive writing the collection contains, this insightful contribution from a Polynesian island scholar looks distinctly solitary. No one should deny any historian the right to research subjects across ethnic or racial divides, but one would feel more comfortable if white voices were heard amid those of a comparable number of Pacific peoples. That must be an urgent agenda for the politics of research and publication on the Pacific over the next decade.

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Until the 1970s, books about missionaries in Oceania were usually of an “inspirational” kind. The regular appearance of such books caused no reaction other than surprise at there being purchasers who would enjoy reading them enough to want to buy them. In the meantime, during the South Pacific’s educational boom years before independence, a host of images about missionaries arose among academic newcomers confronting Pacific societies that had long since yielded to Christianity. There was much criticism of the alleged lack of missionary respect for traditional cultures. The habit of mind, during an age of religious decline in the sixties, was to downplay theological depth, preferring the portrayal of missionary religion as a kind of metaphor for European political or economic domination and little else.

In 1978 Kenelm Burridge’s biting essay, “Missionary Occasions,” blasted field anthropologists for an ignorance of, and prejudice against, Pacific missionaries (in Boutilier, Mission, Church, and Sect in Oceania). Since then, an adjustment seems to have occurred in the thinking of those previously inclined to equate all missionary endeavor with a philistine chauvinism toward the cultures of other races.