critics. One finds increasingly that critical analysis of representations is not enough. Until this critical project is fully worked out as to the alternative landscapes and practices of research it suggests, the posing of final interpretations, visions really, as in this work, will prove irresistible in confronting questions, such as, What were cargo cults all about as to their referents in social life, even after their construction as a kind of colonial discourse has been explored?

George E Marcus
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In his latest work, this prolific author mounts a detailed critique of colonial discourse studies. Because much of this theory originated in South Asian historiography, readers of this journal might wonder what the book has to offer them. The answer suggested here is that anyone caught up (like the reviewer) in “the oxymoronic contortion of ‘an anthropology of colonialism’” (7) will be rewarded by the careful reading that Thomas’s argument demands.

Thomas starts from the unexceptionable position that colonialism is hardly a monolithic phenomenon in its expression or effects, nor is it to be completely understood solely in political or economic terms. But, he argues, even though there is an increasing body of literature on the cultural aspects of colonialism, “a great deal of writing on ‘colonial discourse’ fails to grasp this field’s dispersed and conflicted character” (3). Therefore, the book is intended to introduce the reader to “the complex range of debates concerning colonial representation” (xi) and to suggest more appropriate methods of analysis.

Chapter 1 begins examining the politics of colonial studies. Here one of the book’s strengths quickly appears: Thomas never lets the reader forget the complexities of the situations and representations to which such studies must pay attention. Hence Edward Said’s critique of “Orientalism” is itself found to be overgeneralized, and in need of analysis in terms of the specific context in which it was produced. The representation of colonized peoples can be shown to change over time, but in no simple, linear fashion nor according to a single political agenda. Footnote 10 to this chapter (197–201) provides an excellent introductory bibliography of relevant literature.

The problem of the second chapter is to show “how analysis can establish that ‘culture’ and ‘colonial dominance’ are deeply mutually implicated without reducing one to the other” (41). While the contributions of such writers as Homi Bhabha, Abdul R JanMohamed, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are recognized, Thomas faults them for their relative neglect of resistant forms of discourse created by the colonized. Thus “(T)hough pre-colonial elements and syncretic forms are almost invariably found to be signifi-
cant by historians of various anti-colonial movements, it is not clear how, if at all, they are recognized in theories of colonial discourse” (57). One might say that this has been a continuing difficulty in some of the recent literature on Melanesian “cargo cults.”

But this is just one facet of a crucial issue for anyone attempting an anthropology of colonialism: how to portray the physical, social, and cultural devastation wrought by colonizer power in its historically specific manifestations while, at the same time, providing an equally adequate, historicized account of the continuing efforts of the colonized to maintain or regain control of their lives. Thomas recommends using Bourdieu’s emphasis on agency and practice to complement Foucault’s demonstration of the discursive nature of power—a welcome corrective to the fetishization of Foucault too common in current anthropological writing.

Despite his emphasis on historical specificity, Thomas remains concerned lest colonial studies lapse “from analysis into mere empirical particularity” (66). Chapter 3 suggests strategies for maintaining a sense of continuities and coherence in studying colonialism’s culture(s). Thomas draws an interesting contrast between a “religious” representation of colonized in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—when the only significant aspects of Indians were nakedness and paganism (73)—versus a “natural history” or “anthropologized” approach in the nineteenth, characterized by an “overt, pervasive, and extraordinarily confident racism” (77). A significant point here is that essentialized depictions of nonwestern people can be produced even by anthropologists or others with no racist motivation. Clifford Geertz’s work serves as an example.

Chapter 4 contains the most material drawn from the Pacific Islands, some recycled from the author’s journal articles. Thomas contrasts a colonial project of “governmentality,” exemplified by Gordon’s administration of Fiji, with that of “conversion,” as seen in Methodist missionizing in the western Solomons. Governmentality is associated with the “natural history” understanding of the colonized, conversion with an earlier representation of “savagery.” However, the author continues to emphasize that actual history is more complicated than these neat dichotomies suggest.

“Imperial Triumph, Settler Failure” is perhaps the thinnest chapter in the book. Fewer exemplary materials are offered to depict another facet of contradiction in the colonial enterprise. However, the final chapter, “The Primitivist and the Postcolonial,” will be of special interest to readers of this journal, who should be well aware of the debates over “constructing indigenous identities” (172), or what has been more often called “the invention of tradition.” Thomas has great fun skewering “New Age primitivism” in which indigenous people are portrayed as possessing the ultimate secrets of life, but he does not let anthropologists off the hook as he notes that their typifications may be equally essentialist (190). On the other hand, he wisely reminds academics that, in the hands of oppressed people like Maori, essentialized discourses can have considerable value for those “whose projects
involve mobilization rather than analysis” (188).

It is a measure of the merit of Colonialism’s Culture that it provokes disagreement that cannot be developed within the brief compass of this review. Some serious students of colonialism are still inclined to agree with Nicholas Dirks (Colonialism and Culture, 1992, 175) that the whole efflorescence of colonial discourse studies may have gone so far as to obscure essential historical and political issues. Thomas, to his credit, has created the kind of nuanced argument that can inform even those, like the reviewer, who stubbornly believe that analysis should begin with political economy before proceeding to issues of representation. Whatever one’s position on such debates, this book can be highly recommended.

EUGENE OGAN
University of Minnesota


Historians have made several attempts to narrate the past of the Pacific Islands from ancient times to the present, but this is the first try at a regional overview for this century. As someone who has taught twentieth-century Pacific history for several years, I looked forward to this book’s publication for its potential use as a classroom text. The results embody some of the strengths of the field today, and all of its limitations. They also demonstrate the challenges of editing an anthology.

A glance at the table of Contents produces mixed feelings. Of the eighteen contributors, only two are native to the Pacific Islands and only two are women. All but one are based in Australia (8), New Zealand (5), and Hawai’i (4); the sole exception is a Belgian who teaches at the French Pacific University in New Caledonia. Considering that JW Davidson became the first “Pacific” historian at the Australian National University forty-five years ago, those numbers and categories say a great deal about how far the field has “progressed.” Apparently three more indigenous Islanders, including two women, were asked to contribute, but one refused, one dropped out, and another wrote an essay that did not fit the book’s format. Although references are cited in the notes at the end of each chapter, it would have been helpful to have a selected bibliography at the end of the book, and the three maps are all of the entire Pacific, not of subregions discussed in the chapters.

Even more dismaying are the chapter titles. Part 1, which deals with “Colonisation,” lives up to its topic by grouping everything according to colonizing powers, in combination with catch-all geographic terms that co-editor Howe, in his preface, describes as “flexible.” Some odd headings are yielded, such as “Britain, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand in Polynesia,” under which Roger Thompson