The Ivory Tower and Beyond

The Ivory Tower and Beyond: Participant Historians of the Pacific

By

Doug Munro

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To the memories of

Oskar Spate (1911-2000)
Dorothy Shineberg (1927-2004)
Michael King (1947-2004)

Exemplars of humanistic scholarship

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FOREWORD

On the principle that 'good wine needs no bush', it may reasonably be assumed that this book will readily find a large and appreciative readership even beyond the tribe of specialised scholars drawn to it by the sub-title. Even so, regardless of any necessity to do so, it is only proper formally to acknowledge masterly accomplishment not only on Doug Munro's part but by the people about whom he has written. It is, therefore, an honour and a pleasure—no less than a duty—to endorse this work.

Pacific history in a disciplinary and institutional sense was born in 1951 when J.W. Davidson effectively took up his appointment as the founding professor in a department on that name at the Australian National University in Canberra. Behind this appointment lay not only the perennial, pervasive and protean dynamic of intellectual curiosity, but also a timely concern to service the looming pressures for political development (specifically 'decolonisation') within the Oceanic neighbourhood. Davidson, therefore, was a critical figure not only in a burgeoning field of 'pure' learning but also of 'applied' scholarship. Even when he or any of his acolytes were not directly involved in matters of then current concern their studies of earlier phenomena such as explorers, beachcombers, traders, missionaries and the like all contributed to making the present more comprehensible, and thus more manageable. Among his earliest colleagues in this work were Richard Gilson and Harry Maude, while a generation later Brij Lal was an heir of this legacy. However, Davidson was in certain respects himself an heir. Most notably, if he was the Messiah, then J.C. Beaglehole, the Cook authority and a former mentor, was surely his John the Baptist, helping 'make straight his way'.

These people, though many others are also mentioned in the course of the book, constitute Munro's cast of characters. They are dealt with biographically and critically, but in a way that roundly contextualises their careers, their writings and their other activities. Thus it is that the chapters, while being richly informative and insightful, also read like stylish literary essays. This should not surprise anyone who knows the author or his field. Not only is Doug Munro himself a respected

practitioner in the area of Pacific History, but he has been personally acquainted with four of his subjects (among whom there was also a high level of acquaintance), so the result of his labours is detailed and balanced and expansive and bears a refreshing flavour of familiarity.

In so packaging his writers Munro has gone well beyond them as individuals. He has also contributed to our understanding of the topics and times that they researched and wrote about, of the causes that they supported and of the avocations that they indulged. He has, thereby, also demonstrated that historiography (indeed 'historiology'[1]) is crucial for an understanding of History no more and no less in the Pacific than anywhere else.

As Davidson's Samoan clients might have said for his helpful advice on their run-up to Independence on 1 January 1962, it seems fitting to finish by saying *'fa'afetai tele lava*'.

Hugh Laracy
Auckland
12 February 2009

Notes

[1] Penelope J. Corfield, "How To Get Back", *TLS*, 21 November 2008: 22.

ABBREVIATIONS

Archival and Repository Abbreviations

AAHT	Records of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Archives New Zealand, Wellington
ANUA	Australian National University Archives, Canberra
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
ArchivesNZ	Archives New Zealand (Wellington repository)
EA	Records of the Department of External Affairs, Archives New Zealand, Wellington
IA	Records of the Department of Internal Affairs, Archives New Zealand, Wellington
IT	Records of the Department of Island Territories, Archives New Zealand, Wellington
JCBR	J.C. Beaglehole Room, Victoria University Library, Wellington
Maude Papers	Papers of H.C. and H.E. Maude, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 0003
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NLA	National Library of Australia, Canberra
PMB	Pacific Manuscripts Bureau—Manuscript Series
UAA	University of Adelaide Archives
WPHC	Records of the Western Pacific High Commission, University of Auckland Library

Other abbreviations

ANU	Australian National University, Canberra
ASOPA	Australian School of Pacific Administration, Sydney
BDEEP	British Documents at the End of Empire Project
BSIP	British Solomon Islands Protectorate
CP	*Contemporary Pacific*
DO/DOs	District Officer(s)
EO	Executive Officer (of PMB)
GEIC	Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony
JCSMR	John Curtin School of Medical Research, ANU

JICH	*Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*
JNZS	*Journal of New Zealand Studies*
JPH	*Journal of Pacific History*
JPacS	*Journal of Pacific Studies*
JPS	*Journal of the Polynesian Society*
JSO	*Journal de la Société des Océanistes*
LMS	London Missionary Society
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
NFP	National Federation Party
NZCES	New Zealand Council for Educational Studies
NZIIA	New Zealand Institute of International Affairs
NZJH	*New Zealand Journal of History*
NZListener	*New Zealand Listener*
NZMR	*New Zealand Monthly Review*
NZPD	*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*
PHA	Pacific History Association
PIMS	Pacific Islands Monograph Series
PMB/PAMBU	Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
RSPacS	Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU
RSSS	Research School of Social Sciences, ANU
UH	University of Hawai`i
USC	University of Southern California
USP	University of the South Pacific
TLS	*Times Literary Supplement*
UH	University of Hawai‘i
Vic	is the diminutive for VUC and VUW
VUC	Victoria University College
VUW	Victoria University of Wellington
WEA	Workers’ Education Association
WCMS	Wellington Chamber Music Society
WPHC	Western Pacific High Commission

REFERENCING CONVENTIONS

> A biographer who presumes a serious readership…must present the evidence, must not merely have footnotes (which literary publishers and typographers hate) but must bind him or herself to saying nothing that cannot be footnoted.
> —Bernard Crick[1]

This book has been footnoted with respect to primary and secondary sources, and formal interviews, when these are in archival repositories. To keep the documentation within reasonable bounds (despite Crick), I have usually avoided referencing the conversations (face-to-face or over the telephone), interviews, snail-mail correspondence and e-mail exchanges with the numerous people who told me about Beaglehole *et al*. To compensate, the person concerned is identified in the text and more generally in the relevant "Note on Sources" that is appended to each chapter.

I have sometimes relied on my own recollection of events and am mindful of an Oxford historian's experience at the conclusion of a public lecture he had just presented on the occupants of the Beit Chair at his university: "After I had delivered this paper I was pressed to say where I was, what I was doing, and how did I know…".[2] In a similar vein, how do I know that Jim Davidson was unsuccessful in his first attempt at be elected a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge? Because he told me so himself in 1972. I had no reason to doubt his word, and corroboration was found in his letters to his mother and in the records of St John's College. Anyone who genuinely needs to know the source of a particular statement can feel free to contact me.

It should not be assumed that the primary sources cited in this book are on open access; in many cases I had to obtain permission to consult them.

Notes

[1] Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: a life*, rev ed (London, 1981), 119.
[2] Frederick Madden, "The Commonwealth, Commonwealth History, and Oxford", in Frederick Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse (eds), *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth: essays presented to Sir Edgar Williams* (London/Canberra, 1982), 28.

EXPLANATIONS

Davidson's appointment. It has been stated more than once in print that Davidson was appointed Professor of Pacific History at ANU in 1954, presumably on the assumption that his appointment was in the same year as the delivery on his inaugural lecture *The Study of Pacific History*. In fact, Davidson took up his ANU appointment in December 1950 and shortly afterwards he went to England to wind up his affairs at St John's College, Cambridge. On his return to Australia he stopped off in North America to represent ANU's interests, arriving back in Canberra in mid-1951.

Victoria University College/Victoria University of Wellington. Victoria University College (often shortened to Victoria College) was established in 1899 as a constituent college of the University of New Zealand, which had a federal structure akin to that of the University of London. In 1962 the University of New Zealand was abolished and its colleges became autonomous institutions, in control of their finances, their curriculum and issuing degrees under their own names. Victoria University College then became Victoria University of Wellington. VUC/VUW is often referred to as "Vic"; this diminutive is sometimes used in the present book.

The Australia National University. The original Australian National University was founded in 1946 and its first academics were appointed in 1949 to engage in research and postgraduate supervision. There were originally four research schools—the John Curtin School of Medical Research (JCSMR), the Research School of Pacific Studies (RSPacS), the Research School of Physical Sciences (RSPhyS) and the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS). RSPacS and RSSS were loosely referred to as the two Social Science Schools. In 1960 the ANU and the contiguous Canberra University College (a satellite of the University of Melbourne) were amalgamated. Within the new institution, the original ANU became the Institute of Advanced Studies and CUC became the School of General Studies (renamed The Faculties in 1979). In 1992, an amalgamation with the neighbouring Institute of Arts was finalised. Federal government pressure for ANU to amalgamate

with the Canberra College of Advanced Education was headed off; each continued its separate course, the Canberra CAE becoming the University of Canberra. In a later development, RSPacS became the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) and the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History (until 1973 the Department of Pacific History) was merged with the Department of Far Eastern History to become the Division of Pacific and Asian History. Ironically, this was the arrangement in the early 1950s.

ANU's tenure system. The original Australia National University—the part that became the Institute of Advanced Studies—had an unusual tenure system. Academic staff whose positions contained the prefix "Research" (ie Senior Research Fellow and Research Fellow) were on fixed term appointments of three years, with provision for (usually) a two-year renewal. All other positions (Professor, Professorial Fellow/Reader, Senior Fellow and Fellow) were permanent positions. As will be seen, this distinction had particular bearing on Richard Gilson's misfortunes.

Island nomenclature. Pacific localities have often been renamed in the decolonising and post-colonial eras. In this book I have adopted the usage that was contemporary to the period (Gilbert Islands, not Kiribati; Ellice Islands, not Tuvalu). Specifically, the Gilbert, Line and Phoenix Islands, and Christmas Island now comprise the Republic of Kiribati; the Ellice Islands have been renamed Tuvalu; the British Solomon Islands Protectorate has become the Independent Nation of the Solomon Islands; the New Hebrides (an Anglo-French Condominium) is Vanuatu; Western Samoa is now simply Samoa; Fiji and Tonga remain Fiji and Tonga.

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Many people gave assistance in matters great and small in the preparation of this book, whether receiving unexpected telephone calls, answering correspondence, granting interviews, providing source material, affording hospitality, commenting on chapter drafts, being generally encouraging, or any combination of these things. They are so numerous that I hardly know where to begin in thanking them all.

The families of my biographical subjects opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed. The late Ruth Davidson was always supportive of my interest in her brother. Richard Gilson's widow (Mirian Gilson Vosburgh) and children (Helen Carter and Michael Gilson) were equally obliging, as were Tim Beaglehole and Alaric Maude. It is quite a coincidence that the sons of two of my subjects were part of my formal education. Alaric taught me undergraduate geography at the Flinders University of South Australia and Tim taught me Indian history during my truncated Honours year at Victoria University of Wellington. It must be difficult for family members to have a biographer prowling around, but they never interfered or obstructed.

Susan Woodburn, who has written a full biography of Harry Maude and who was then effectively the custodian of the Maude Papers, confirmed my conviction that people working in the same area can co-operate to mutual advantage. She helped restore my faith that a community of scholars does in fact exist. Another person who might not have helped is Francis West. Despite serious differences with Jim Davidson, he never withheld assistance nor encouragement. I have had the benefit of numerous conversations with Niel Gunson about his "esteemed and departed friends", and equally from Ron Crocombe and Alan Ward. Mary Boyd provided access to records in her keeping and commented with great thoroughness on the chapters on Davidson and Gilson. The other people who commented on chapters, or sections thereof, are Stephen Ashton, Bruce Brown, Mike Butcher, Ian Campbell, Ron Crocombe, Stewart Firth, Honore Forster, Bruce Harding, Peter Hempenstall, K.R. Howe, Chris Hilliard, Ronald Hyam, Robert C. Kiste, Barrie Macdonald, Stuart Macintyre, David McIntyre, Malcolm McKinnon, Sylvia Martin, Clive Moore, Colin Newbury, Barry Rigby, Carl Rollyson, and Graeme Whimp.

The many friends and associates of Beaglehole *et al* who responded to my enquiries are listed in the "Note on Sources" that appends each chapter. A particular pleasure of my line of work is getting to know interesting people whom I would never otherwise have encountered.

I have the grateful recipient of institutional support, currently within the History Programme at Victoria University of Wellington (and my thanks to Melanie Nolan and Glyn Parry extend far beyond the ritualistic acknowledgement to successive heads of department). Before then, I was a visiting fellow in the Centre for the Contemporary Pacific, Australian National University for two months, in 1998-99. When I returned to live in New Zealand in early 2000 I was given a very congenial academic home at the Stout Research Centre at Victoria University of Wellington during Vincent O'Sullivan's directorship. I was also the recipient of a History Award from the Ministry of Culture and Heritage only a few months after completing my term as a Harold White Fellowship at the National Library of Australia. That was a wonderful experience. In general terms I was asked to be a good citizen and to make the most of my opportunities. Specifically, I was required to present a public lecture. I chose as my topic "The Prehistory of J.W. Davidson", which has been revised and expanded for this book. In its earlier form it was also presented, in May 2001, as a seminar at the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Canterbury. Some of the material from the chapter on J.C. Beaglehole was presented in July 2007 to the *Three Books, Three Scholars* seminar series at Victoria University of Wellington. Various shorter versions of the chapter on Richard Gilson were presented at the *WAKA: Pacific Communities 2000* Conference, Wellington, July 2000; at the Pacific History Association Conference, Dunedin, December 2006; and as a seminar presentation to the Pacific Studies Programme at Victoria University of Wellington, August 2007. A special word of thanks goes to Paul Kovich of the University of Southern California for assisting my research on Dick Gilson, and to Robert Tristram for incisive discussions on the nature on biography.

The documentary research for this book was carried out in National Library of Australia, the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, the Australian National University Archives, the Barr Smith Library of the University of Adelaide, the University of Adelaide Archives, the Alexander Turnbull Library, Archives New Zealand, the J.C. Beaglehole Room at Victoria University Library, and St John's College, Cambridge. The unsung heroes of historical research are archivists and I am beholden to the many who facilitated my research and responded to my enquiries: Tatiana Antsoupova, Elise Bennetto, Helen Bruce, Tony Connell, Nicola Frean, Christine

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Seldom can the home stretch of a writing project have been such a long and winding road, and the destination to elusive. There were times when I felt more than a touch of affinity with Dick Gilson. I am most grateful to the series editors, Susan Cochrane and Max Quanchi, for their patience and support. Thanks also John Weaver, who gave me time off our research on the history of suicide to finish the book. My family have had put up with a preoccupied husband and father whose mind was often elsewhere.

Permissions

Claire Colvin, for the reproduction of the front cover caricature of J.C. Beaglehole, by her father Neville Colvin, which was originally published in *Cappicade*, 1948; **Barrie Macdonald**, for the reproduction of the map from his book *Cinderellas of the Empire: towards a history of Kiribati and Tuvalu* (Canberra, 1982); **Kenneth N. Singh**, for the reproduction of his comments on *Mr Tulsi's Store*; and the editors of ***Pacific Studies***, for permission to republish an amended version of the chapter on Richard Gilson.

E hara taku toa i te toa takitahi he toa takitini

PROLOGUE

ENGAGEMENT, INVOLVEMENT, EXPERIENCE

> …biography is an exercise in presumption, dependent on a writer resigned never fully to understanding himself while yet claiming substantial understanding of another.
> —W.J. Hudson[1]

> Biography will always be a frustrated enterprise. It will never bring the dead back to life; it will never make us privy to the secret world inside the minds of others, or rescue us from being islanded within our own. This is true of all biographical subjects, as it is true of all lives; but [some subjects prove] more uncooperative than others.
> —Sarah Churchwell[2]

When gathering material for *Down and Out in Paris and London*, George Orwell

> ventured into the East End of London to discover for himself the world of abject poverty and the down-and-outers who inhabit it. Like Jack London earlier he dressed as they did and wandered among them, and suffered with them and for them, and reported back to the world above the abyss how it was down there.… [H]e was yet another recruit to a tradition that goes back at least to the *Arabian Nights*, when Caliph Haroun al Rashid put on the rags of a beggar and wandered freely and unrecognized among the lowliest of his subjects…. [I]t was not unknown for serious-minded students of the ills of society to disguise themselves as tramps for the purposes of investigation. R.C.K. Ensor, a Fabian and historian, had done so; so had Lionel Curtis, a Conservative political philosopher.[3]

Historians have typically taken less desperate and intimate measures to become acquainted with their subject matter.[4] In a more genteel fashion, Edward Gibbon made the famous observation that service in the Hampshire Grenadiers was not useless to a historian of ancient Rome. Thomas Babington Macaulay's father was a leading light in the anti-slavery movement, and Macaulay himself performed public service as a

British parliamentarian before going on to write his multi-volume *History of England*, visiting every battlefield mentioned in the books.

There has been a continuous tradition of mixing historical research with civic engagement. In the 1980's, Edward Thompson's tireless service to the cause of nuclear disarmament, at considerable cost to his historical research, was a singular expression of an involvement with life and affairs that extended beyond the ivory tower—a setting in which Thompson was never really comfortable.[5] In the following decade, the Cambridge historian Richard J. Evans was an expert witness for the defence in David Irving's attempt to sue Deborah Lipstadt (author of *Denying the Holocaust*, 1994) and Penguin Books, alleging defamation that he was labelled a Holocaust denier.[6]

The list of examples, and the causes espoused, could be multiplied almost indefinitely, not least the participant historian *par excellence* Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., who did more than anyone to lend respectability to the close identification of political activism and historical scholarship.[7] The point is that many historians have been conscious of their particular destiny as communicators of ideas to the wider public and as creatures who inhabit, whether by choice or accident, the interface between conventional scholarship and practical action, whose books are informed by their political positioning. Since the 1987 Fiji coups, historians of the Pacific Islands have emerged, so to speak, from the nineteenth century and become more engaged with contemporary events within the region, often rubbing shoulders with their subject matter. But the tradition of participant historian within Pacific historiography is as old as the sub-discipline itself, it being a central plank in the founding father's philosophy of history. From the moment of his appointment as foundation Professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1950, J.W. Davidson (1915-1973) promoted the cause of participant history. It was his "greatest contribution", writes his former student and colleague, Niel Gunson:

> [Davidson] was a firm believer in the value of experience. He had little sympathy for the new theories of the 50s unless the proponents had reached them by experience. He much preferred to enlist persons who had requisite "grooming" for their subjects. Staff and students were virtually handpicked on this basis. Thus H.E. Maude, and ex-administrator, came to write about the people he had administered, R.G. Crocombe and David Stone were experienced colonial officials, Bernard Smith, an art critic, came to write about the European vision of the Islands, Sione Latukefu came to write about the Methodist Church in Tonga from his own background [as a Methodist minister] and Whetu Tirikatene to write about

> the Ratana movement [in New Zealand] in which her family had been involved.[8]

The title of this book reflects Davidson's conviction that historians would write better history if they ventured beyond the ivory tower and brought to bear experience of life and practical involvement in public affairs. It is well to remind, however, that although Davidson saw personal involvement and experience of life as "a valuable part of the historian's resources", he never saw them as a substitute for "adequate formal training".[9]

Apart from the first chapter on J.C. Beaglehole (1901-1971), the backdrop to this collection of essays centres on the pioneering study of Pacific Islands history at the ANU and the particular subjects are some of the people who made it happen in the way it did.[10] The ANU was founded in 1946 as a research university of international standing that would contribute towards the country's post-war reconstruction through applied, collaborative research, preferably in close association with the government—not so far removed from the "participant history" of the undertaker of empire that Davidson became. There were originally two science schools and two social science schools – and predictably a local variation of C.P. Snow's "Two Cultures" was created Down Under. One of the social science schools was the Research School of Pacific Studies (RSPacS), within which reposed the Department of Pacific History under Jim Davidson—who himself had been a student of Beaglehole. Of singular personality, Davidson remained at ANU another 22 years, until his death in 1973 at the relatively young age of 57. During that time the study of Pacific Islands historiography was transformed into a mainstream academic concern: he and his colleagues "played—more than played—their part in rescuing a field from the unlovely fringes of colonial and imperial history and giving it a new identity".[11] He did for Pacific history what others were concurrently doing for African and Southeast Asian history: the subject matter was disengaged from the matrix of imperial history and redefined as the study of culture contacts, or "multi-cultural situations", as he termed them. In his ANU inaugural lecture, he explicitly recognised the practical and epistemological problems, namely learning to use new types of evidence, involvement in another culture (for at the time academic Pacific historians were all non-Islanders), and the need to avoid interpreting indigenous actions and motivations in terms of one's own societal norms.[12] No historian, however much he or she wishes to break out in new directions, can entirely escape the preoccupations of time and place or the influences of nurture and formal training. To be sure, Davidson's so-called new ways were in keeping with concurrent

revisionism in African and Asian historiography: he was following a trend while in the act of being different.[13] But his parallel revisionism was certainly new and revitalising for Pacific Islands historiography, and the Davidson school made significant strides forwards.

The other strand in Davidson's thinking, as mentioned, was the need for engagement, involvement and experience of life as a complement to conventional academic criteria.[14] These were integral to the Davidson tradition (who, in turn, inherited some of it from Beaglehole) and the historians selected for this volume all, to different degrees, illustrate the point. The thought processes that embrace Beaglehole the public figure and Beaglehole the man of letters are inseparable. There are, to be sure, different degrees of engagement and participation, but engagement and participation they still were: they coexist at different points of a continuum. Whereas Davidson engaged in constitutional advising for a succession of Island territories in the throes of decolonisation, Harry Maude (1906-2006) entered academic life in his early fifties and wrote about the areas with which he was familiar; and in some cases about events in which he had participated. Bronwen Douglas described him as Davidson's "outstanding recruit…an anthropologically-trained, former British colonial official whose ethno-histories combined linguistic and cultural expertise, rigorous historical research, conceptual sophistication and innovate method: he took oral traditions seriously as another culture's histories. His essays—especially those anthologised in *Of Islands and Men*—inspired Pacific specialists".[15] Richard Gilson (1925-1963), who wrote a magisterial political history of nineteenth century Samoa, "lived" his subject but had to bear a distressing period of unemployment before re-entering academic life. Such was his roller-coaster life that, having found his feet again, he was struck down by heart failure at the early age of 37, his major work not quite ready for publication. His record as concerned citizen and dedicated scholar demonstrates that participation should not be too closely equated with outright activism, or to put it another way, breaks down "those seemingly impenetrable but nonetheless illusory boundaries that we too easily imagine separate ideas from action".[16] With Brij Lal we close the circle begun by Davidson. As well as writing on Indian indenture in Fiji and on the contemporary history of Fiji, he has the same direct experience in framing a constitution—on this occasion as one of three members of Fiji's 1996 Constitutional Review Commission, which reviewed the contested 1990 constitution in that ethnically-divided society.[17] While the five subjects of this book operated with constraints and contexts, they did so in their individual ways what would not likely have been replicated by someone else confronted with the same

circumstances. These differences have resulted in the chapters that follow being marked by a lack of uniformity in presentation and content. It has simply not been possible or desirable to write to a formula.

This collection of essays reflects largely on the bygone glory days of a pioneering history department—Davidson's "community of scholars"—and beyond, its seminal role in the evolution of the new subdiscipline, and some of the people who made it possible. As well, it reflects on some of its antecedents in the chapter on Beaglehole. My choice of subjects was governed by opportunity as much as by subjective considerations as to their intrinsic importance and their place in the scheme of things. There are others worthy of inclusion but lack of sources was usually the telling factor. All the same, it is difficult to imagine a book of this sort that lacked essays on Beaglehole, Davidson, Maude and Gilson as representative of the departed generation. If the collection smacks of a boys' club, I can only plead that two women whom I approached would not hear of it: "Don't you dare!" said Dorothy Shineberg.[18] So the final line-up is Beaglehole, Davidson, Gilson and Maude representing an older generation of professional Pacific historians, and Lal the present cohort. It would have been impractical to have included anyone younger than Lal. Any such person would be in mid-career and still to make his or her mark, resulting in whatever I write lacking a sense of closure. Coincidentally, my chosen five are of four different national origins. Beaglehole and Davidson were New Zealanders, Gilson an American, Maude an Anglo-Indian, Lal an Indo-Fijian, and no one is from Australia, the place where the study of Pacific history took root. Their areas of specialist interest include places as distinct from each other as Samoa, Kiribati and Fiji.

The five historians have been important in the development of Pacific Islands historiography; their work, both inside and outside the academy, has helped make Pacific studies and the Pacific itself what it is today. Yet they are somewhat forgotten, or at least distant and detached, apart from Brij Lal who is still within the academy. There is always the danger, as the decades roll on, and as academic fashions and scholarly preoccupations change, the collective memory of an academic specialisation will recede. The former greats then become yesterday's men, less read, if at all, and at risk of growing "distant on the ear"—the phrase used by James A. Michener (in *Tales of the South Pacific*) about the receding memories of Guadalcanal and the US servicemen who won that crucial engagement of World War II.[19] Of course, "there is an inescapable indeterminacy about all questions of reputation",[20] just as there is often little awareness of the lines of continuity and discontinuity that underpin generational change. There are

few *aides memoire* and the only Pacific historians so far accorded the accolade of a biography are Harry Maude (conjointly with Honor Maude) and John Beaglehole.[21]

My motivation for writing these biographical essays is akin to those of Maxine Berg, the biographer of Eileen Power, an historian who Jim Davidson greatly admired. Remove the gender aspect, and Berg's incentives mirror my own:

> I have written this book for Eileen Power, historian, because she deserves to be remembered as an economic historian, a medieval historian and a historian who made a major cultural impact. I have written it for other historians whose own perception of the past and their intellectual heritage has been greatly impoverished by a loss of knowledge of her work and the issues which excited her. Finally, I have written for all those curious to know how one woman became an intellectual and a scholar, established a successful career beyond the glass ceiling, enjoyed being a woman and yet was so quickly lost as a historical figure in her own right.[22]

Besides, it is a very natural human yearning to be appreciated during life and in the afterlife. As Jeremy Popkin so eloquently said, "The dreams that impelled Jean-Jacques Rousseau to write his *Confessions*—of being truly understood and acknowledged by others and of being remembered after his death—are widely shared".[23] And as W.K. Hancock's remarked, "each generation must both examine the sources more deeply and re-examine the concepts that serve to elucidation those sources; this necessary process is marred only when the after-comers show themselves ungrateful and ungenerous toward the pioneers".[24]

That, however, is the problem: "History is, really, the least grateful of disciplines…. it is difficult for a historian to be remembered for his history…. we don't read our old historians like those in literature read their own greats…. we don't look back to our Melvilles and Emersons like those in literature do…. ironically, history is one of the least historical of the humanities…".[25] History as a discipline is extraordinarily prone to seduction by the fashion word of the moment, which is then overtaken by the next passing fancy, whose adherents claim as the key to historical understanding. When Richard Glassen commenced his graduate coursework in the US in 1995, the postcultural/poststructural/ postmodern revolution was "in full throat":

> Many of my bewildered colleagues…were filled with a woozy sensation that coherent writing, speech, even thinking, were near collapse…. [A]lthough [postculturalism/poststructuralism/postmodernism] seemed permanent in 1995, we could not realize that they were beginning a steep

> decline. They, too, would pass. And pass they have; each year has made these "post-" movements look increasingly antiquated.[26]

The five historians wrote significant works of history, and without recourse to these various "post-" movements. A justification for the biographical approach adopted in this book is that any academic monograph will reflect the training, the milieu *and* the personality of its author. There is a relationship, not a separation, between writers and their works, and not just historians: Beaglehole pointed to this when he confessed to having "great difficulty in separating [Cook] the man from the surveyor and the navigator.[27] But in some historiographical writings and intellectual biographies it is as though authors are detached from their works, as though a text is independent of the person who researched and wrote it, or else a given text is axiomatically seen as a product of its day and age. This is the equivalent of the convenient fiction that only the public dimension of political lives is worth worrying about.[28] The anthropolgist Edmund Leach made the point, which is central to this book, that: "Unless we pay closer attention than has been customary to the personal background of anthropological works, we shall miss out on most of what these texts are capable of telling us".[29] The same applies equally to Pacific history.

The weakness of purely intellectual biographies is the impression conveyed that historians do not have a life outside of their writings, or if they do it is unimportant to their work.[30] An antidote would be to consider how John Beaglehole's changing personal and professional circumstances during the early-1940s altered his views on New Zealand history and his outlook on New Zealand itself. "No one researches and writes in a vacuum", as Jacqueline Leckie has reminded us, "and knowledge production still involves the domestic division of labour, professional and personal relationships, and other 'distractions,' including political and community causes that some academics recognize".[31] Creative output is not simply a function of academic training, institutional pressures and the vagaries of publishing, funding and patronage, but the product of personal and emotional circumstances.[32] Delving into other peoples' lives, in order to find the linkages between the professional and the personal, was certainly different to anything I had hitherto attempted: in the words of Ellen Schrecker, "It forced me to become a journalist, a detective and a pest, as well as the historian I am trained to be."[33] The need to take account of the personal dimension is just one reason why the individual chapters are solidly grounded on personal papers, interviews and my own observations. Personal predilection also enters the picture: I am comfortable with John Clive's statement that "Virtuous souls surely exist

who will take nothing on trust, and who wish to examine evidence before agreeing with any sort of conclusion. (If those souls are *truly* virtuous, they should by rights pursue their quest for truth in the archives!)"[34] Another reason for recourse to personal papers and interviews is because one cannot write about a historian from his or her published writings alone.[35] To know the writer one must equally know the person. And the development of Pacific historiography is more readily understood if one knows what motivated it practitioners, what their options were, how they handled life's chances, and the role of individual personality in all this. Or as Hugh Laracy puts it, "a proper appreciation…is impossible without knowing something of the mind of the man and of the concatenation of causes and contingencies that lie behind it".[36] Thus my emphasis is different to those who are more preoccupied with identifying "underlying patterns" than in delineating "matters of personality".[37] It is not, of course, one to the exclusion of the other. But in this case the selective stress is on the latter, whilst intermeshing the historiographical and the institutional aspects.

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Biography is not the only, or necessarily the most appropriate way of writing history. There are things that biography can uniquely do. Conversely, there are things—lots of them—that biography cannot do, does not claim to do, and should not be expected to do. David Cannadine is perfectly correct to say that the study of the British monarchy as an institution has been retarded by an overly biographical approach.[38] But a predominantly biographical approach seems preferable in this particular instance. It is my perception, for example, that personalities and personal relationships are often as important, in university settings, as policies, committees and buildings. Even the most inflexible and intolerant of university environments can be moderated if individuals within them are sufficiently determined to preserve the essential of a humane culture and the substance of academic freedom, and to resist the inroads of rampant managerialism. The focus on individuals is simply to acknowledge that people and group dynamics are central to any explanation of how an institution works—something abundantly demonstrated in the official ANU history[39]—and how an academic discipline progresses. And while the five subjects of this book operated with constraints and contexts, they did so in their individual ways what would not likely have been replicated by someone else confronted the same circumstances.

All this is not to say that the writer and the work are more or less coterminous. The gap between intention and execution is especially apparent in the case of Gilson, who struggled to finish his book and who, in fact, did not live to see its completion. Davidson's publishing plans, like the road to hell, were lined with good intentions that largely fell by the wayside. And when Harry Maude, in his obituary of Davidson, observed that few scholars fully achieved what they set out to do, one detects an autobiographical ring.[40] There is another dimension to the gap between intention and performance: we can never attain our own standards.

It is probably an advantage that this book is about five individuals rather than one. Robert Skidelsky, himself no mean biographer, has suggested that biographers should be "more prepared…to explore the typology of their subjects and not just their individuality".[41] Such lateral perspectives result in looking further afield for explanations of behaviour and motivation, and in making comparisons with individuals in similar situations. Such an approach often yields answers, or at least suggests clues, that are not so evident when the focus is on a single person. In particular, it helps safeguard against the biographer's besetting sin seeing the world as their subject saw it. Dealing with five people has been that sort of counterbalance: I am compelled to see my chosen five in relation to each other (typologically) rather than in isolation (individually), and to explore the intersections of their lives.

But what are the commonalities? What is the skewer—the themes, issues and concerns that are common to the five? Apart from their engagement with the Pacific Islands, one is initially struck by how little they have in common and how dissimilar their personalities—which explains the quite different focus of each essay. There are generational and national differences; their academic interests vary, as one might expect; neither do their priorities necessarily coincide; and there are inevitably differences in their approaches to life. The search for a common thread is also complicated by their differing levels of engagement beyond the ivory tower. The point of this book is to explain why their lives were not totally absorbed by the academy and to present a case why they sought differing levels of engagement with the world out there (or in Harry Maude's case why he ultimately sought refuge within the academy).

Take the individual cases, in summary. Beaglehole, by background and by temperament, considered it a moral duty to contribute towards making New Zealand a better place, and he gave freely of his time in support of civil liberties, the preservation of historical sites, cultural endeavour, and a more decent civic culture. His tenacity had the religious fervour of devout atheism. Davidson's commitment to participant history stemmed from the

influences of his undergraduate teachers (Beaglehole being one of them), his experiences at Cambridge and Oxford, and was crystallised by the happy accident of fortune in 1947 when the New Zealand prime minister sent him to report on the Western Samoa trusteeship; and he never looked back. A good deal to do with it, I argue, reflects a personality that was passionate, outgoing and committed to causes: he preached participant history and practiced (and wrote about it) the way he did because it enabled the heart and the head to come together. Much the same can be said of Brij Lal, where choice of subjects went beyond the usual criteria of aptitude and inclination and into the realms of immediacy and involvement. "I have a commitment to my discipline and profession", he has said, "but my greater commitment is to the subjects I write about". Thus, this grandson of an Indian indentured labourer wrote his first book on the origins of Indo-Fijian emigration. The 1987 coups were the subject of his second book, *Power and Prejudice* (1988). The overthrow of the Bavadra government had a profound personal and national effect. It was, he told me, "a major event in the life of one Pacific Islands nation" adding that "there is something fundamentally wrong and immoral about deposing a duly elected democratic government through a military coup".[42] Such was his knowledge of twentieth century Fiji political history and commitment to his country that in 1995 he was appointed to the three-member Fiji Constitution Review Commission; he wrote about that too, thus embracing the mantle of participant historian as well as that of historian of contemporary Fiji.

Richard Gilson is somewhat different. He closely followed contemporary events in Samoa, and the world at large, but as an informed academic and concerned citizen rather than as participant historian. He demonstrates the fine line between outright participation and an involved concern. Gilson was a scholar's scholar if ever there was one, but as Davidson noted, Gilson was

> deeply conscious of the responsibility of the Western Powers towards developing countries….It [is] not surprising therefore that…he should think of tackling the tangled history of Samoa during its period of contact with the Western world. He already knew, and felt affection for, [Samoa] and its people; and, since he was wont to charge the world's political leaders, perhaps work as a historian in a colonial society could satisfy his sense of obligation as a man, as well as his curiosity as a scholar.[43]

In other words, there are degrees of engagement, which itself is multi-faceted. John Beaglehole, for example, had no particular affinity with