

REPRINTS

PLACE, MOVEMENT, AND SOCIALITY IN OCEANIA

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INTRODUCTION

This special section on place, history and sociality in Oceania consists of three articles published in *Suomen antropologi* in 1998 and 2006. The articles by Anna-Leena Siikala (1998), Edvard Hviding (1998) and Tom Strong (2006) were published as independent articles in three different issues. The authors examine different questions in three different locales, Mauke on the Cook Islands, the New Georgia group in the Solomon Islands and the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The articles are written from very different theoretical perspectives and partly in rather different contexts of anthropological discussion. However, they all address key themes in Oceania and the study of Oceania, namely rootedness and movement, and they all examine how relationships are built, maintained and enacted through places, place-making activities and the land. Reading the articles today, fourteen and twenty-two years after their original publication, they form an interesting entity that merits their republication as a special section.

The Finnish folklorist Anna-Leena Siikala (1943–2016), who conducted research on oral traditions and mythology in Siberia as well as

in the Cook Islands, examines in her article place-making and spatial memory in oral narratives on Mauke, Cook Islands. The stories, often with mythological points of departure, recount the genealogies of heroes connected to the present. For the master narrators of these histories, the names of heroes are key words with which the narrators can recount prolonged or condensed versions of the histories. This is, as Siikala notes, the ‘vertical’ part of the histories. As she describes in her article, places in the Mauke landscape are similar mnemonic devices: the narratives describe places where the heroes’ actions took place and these can be followed vertically, or spatially, across the islands. Describing her own fieldwork in Mauke, Siikala notes how a master narrator emphasized the importance of telling the narrative *in its place* and followed the logic of the landscape in recounting it. This ‘horizontal’ aspect of the narratives connects the different islands, heroes and genealogies with each other into network of narratives. This network illustrates the hierarchical relations between chiefs and places.

Edvard Hviding, from the University Bergen, who has conducted long-term

research in the Solomon Islands, especially on environmental issues, turns in his article to other kinds of narratives about the Pacific Islands, namely European accounts of trading and tourism in the Solomons. Through the historical accounts of a Scottish *bêche-de-mer* trader operating in the 1840s and 1990s accounts of ‘adventure tourism’ in the Solomons, Hviding analyses intercultural contacts and how the various parties involved have sought to make sense of each other. Hviding shows how in the 1840s, just before colonial subjugation, the Solomon Islanders in many ways held the upper hand in the encounters with European traders and used them for their own purposes and ends, for example in inter-island feuding, while Europeans played along in order to be able to trade. Thus ‘common projects’ were possible despite the different intentions. Hviding notes how Solomon Islanders, like all Pacific people, were long accustomed to making sense of people from afar and related to them on the basis of previous knowledge, but not rigid schemes. Turning to the post-colonial situation, in which the moral certainties of colonialism have evaporated and people form new relations, Hviding shows how Solomon Islanders make sense of the myriad of actors, such as loggers, miners and tourists.

Thomas Strong who has conducted ethnographic research in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Uganda and Ireland, writes also explicitly about a post-colonial setting, namely about the Eastern Highlands of PNG in the early 2000s. In his article, Strong examines how people in the Eastern Highlands relate to each other and the state in a context of neoliberal structural adjustment programs. Strong examines two cases: people’s worries about the possibility that registration of customary land—part of a neoliberal reform—might lead to land alienation, and local warfare, which also relates

to land issues. Strong shows how land in the Eastern Highlands is highly valuable, not only because people get their livelihood from it, but because of the social relations that govern its use. The land, held by local kin groups, sustains people’s physical and social reproduction, and by insisting on communal land ownership, people also insist on holding to the relations the land mediates. Strong concludes the article by noting that people in settings such as the Eastern Highlands find ways to govern themselves, and whether those ways conform to notions of effective or fair liberal governance is irrelevant, because it is not clear whether the people in question wish to be so governed.

The articles are—as noted—written from very different perspectives, and as interventions into particular anthropological discussions. Anna-Leena Siikala’s article is in many ways a ‘classic’ folkloristic analysis of oral narratives. In the mid-1990s anthropologists began focusing more on place and the spatial aspect of myths, stories and social relations (see for example Basso and Feld 1996; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995). During this time, scholars of Oceania began to focus on place, rootedness and movement as well (see Fox 1997; Fox and Sather 1996). Siikala’s article is squarely rooted in this tradition, and it explores classic Austronesian themes of origin, place-making and movement—especially Polynesian seafaring, exploration and establishing new lineages on new islands. Hviding and Strong examine classic Oceanic themes as well: Hviding focuses on movement and trans-cultural contacts, while Strong looks at land as a media of relations. Both, however, address other discussions of their time. Hviding explicitly wants to examine trans-cultural contacts beyond simplistic notions of ‘globalization’, ‘hybridization’ or bounded cultures. In a similar vein, Strong wants to look at governance and state-relations

in a post-colonial setting beyond facile ideas of 'failed states' or 'resistance'.

There are, however, important shared themes. Both Siikala and Hviding look at places and place-making by examining narratives. In Siikala's article, the focus is on how places work as mnemonic devices and mediate the mythical stories—thus creating a network of interlinked places that are, in true Polynesian style, in a hierarchical relation to each other. Hviding, on the other hand, looks at how 'Western' narratives seek to portray the Solomon Islands in different ways: for tourists as 'islands lost to time' or places of 'untouched' wilderness for conservationists. These narratives obviously overlook how Oceania's forests are often the product of people's long-standing interaction with their lived environment (Filer et al. 2009; Bell, West and Filer 2015). Such narrative place-making, namely the depiction of areas as 'wilderness' and 'unused', was used by Europeans to legitimate colonial annexation, as Papua New Guinean literary critic Regis Stella (2007: 49–51) has shown in his examination of colonial-era depictions of Papua New Guinea.

As Hviding shows in his article, this kind of depiction and narrative place-making happens also during the post-colonial era, when the forests of Oceania are presented as 'virgin' or 'unused' by loggers, conservationists and the tourist industry. Here Hviding's article is in line with, and partly predates, political ecology research, which has stressed that natural resources are made by revaluing environmental components as commodities and detaching them from local uses and meanings. This process is often connected to the making of the 'frontier', namely depicting certain areas as having abundant and unused resources waiting to be used. (Bell 2015: 131; Bridge 2011: 825; Stella 2007: 49; Tammisto, this issue). A key question in these processes is whose definition

of use and value 'sticks'. In his article, Hviding shows how 'adventure tourists', hoping to venture off the beaten track and to find the unspoiled Paradise on Solomon Islands, quickly retreat to the comfort of holiday resorts after meeting the material realities of tropical forests and lagoons full of reefs, as well as discovering that ostensibly 'empty beaches' are governed by local fishing rights, fruit and land are someone's property, governed again by complex local rules.

In the case described by Hviding, the Solomon Islanders in the 1990s were very much in control of their land and lives, not unlike in the pre-colonial situation when European traders started frequenting the islands. By refusing to grant special status to adventure tourists, but expecting them to follow the local rules governing the use of land, sea and trees, the Solomon Islanders engage in 'cultural resistance', as Hviding notes, and assert their ways of governing their environment.

This is very much in line with Strong's notion that by insisting on the inalienability of communally owned land, people in the Eastern Highlands of PNG insist on the relations that govern the land and are mediated by it. This assertion takes the form of physical place-making: in 2001, university students in PNG protested the government's privatization initiatives, which were based on demands by the International Monetary Fund as a condition for large-scale loans. Four young men were killed by the police in the protests, one of them from the Eastern Highlands. The man's rural kin linked his death to their worry about land mobilization and alienation and stressed how the protester 'died for his country'. His kin built a mausoleum, usually reserved for important leaders, on his grave to make sure his death had a lasting effect, and that it would be remembered in those particular terms. Through this form of place-making, the making of an

impressive and long-lasting grave, the rural people of the Eastern Highlands wanted to make explicit their control of the land and their ways of governing it.

This brings me to the final common thread in the three articles that I want to lift out. Places, constructed through narratives and praxis, can embody and materialize larger political orders and value orders (e.g. Rodman 1992: 641). This becomes evident in all the articles. On Mauke, places are not only mnemonic devices that help recounting the narratives, but through the narratives they are organized hierarchically in relation to each other embodying political hierarchies between lineages and chiefs. Hviding and Strong show how, in different ways, places are used on the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to assert relations through which the local people, those who are placed, want to relate to each other, their land and to people from elsewhere. Here the articles show what Aletta Biersack (2006: 16) explicated, namely that 'place' is not the local opposite of 'global', but rather something in and through which global, or translocal, processes are manifested and enacted.

With this brief introduction, I have sought to very briefly contextualize the three articles and show how they have been published as interventions in different discussions, but how they also discuss common themes. Reading them twenty-two and fourteen years after their original publication, the articles address issues that scholars, like myself, interested in place, space and political ecology in the Pacific and beyond continue to discuss. I thus invite the reader to explore some of 'hidden treasures' buried in the printed archives of *Suomen Antropologi* and visit old places that are still relevant today.

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