PROLOGUE

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First Fieldwork: Pacific Anthropology, 1960–1985 explores what a generation of anthropologists experienced during their first visits to the field at a time of momentous political change in Pacific Island countries and societies, and in anthropological theory and methodology. The collection—inspired initially and in part by Bill Heaney’s reading of Terence E. Hays’ *Ethnographic Presents: Pioneering Anthropologists in the Papua New Guinea Highlands* (1993)—picks up where Hays left off, in the late 1950s. Answering some of the same *how and why they conducted their fieldwork in the places and ways they did* questions, the volume’s contributors give us a broader selection of Pacific Islands societies and topics. Individual chapters range from candid reflections on working with little known peoples in poorly mapped places to reflexive analyses of adapting research projects and field sites to better fit and reveal local politics and concerns. Not missing in these personal accounts and auto-ethnographies are the often harsh emotional and logistical demands placed on fieldworker and interlocutors as they attempt the work of connecting and achieving mutual understandings. Throughout is the conviction that fieldwork and what we learn from and write about it are necessary components of a robust anthropology. Demystifying a phase begun in the mid-1980s when critics considered any and all attempts to describe fieldwork and its relation to ethnography as inevitably biased representations of the unknowable truth, *First Fieldwork* contributes to a renewed interest in experiential and theoretical nuances of fieldwork then and now.

Focusing on what is arguably the richest of fieldwork experiences, the authors look back to uncover the essential structures and challenges of fieldwork: connection, context, and change. What they find is that building relationships with others and having others include you in their lives—once referred to as “achieving rapport”—is determined as much by our subjects as by ourselves. Examining connections made or attempted in the contexts of their first fieldwork, and bringing to bear subsequent understandings and questions—new contexts from which to view and think—about their first fieldwork experiences, the contributors provide readers with multidimensional perspectives on

fieldwork and how it continues to inspire anthropological interpretations, writings, and commitment. A crucial dimension is change. Each chapter is richly detailed in history: theirs/ours; colonial/postcolonial; and the then and now of theory and practice. While change is ever present, specifics are not. Reflecting back, the authors demonstrate how that specificity defined their experiences and ultimately their ethnographic re/productions.

One historical and timely attribute of *First Fieldwork* is its focus on the Pacific. The Pacific has long been famous (or infamous, depending on your point of view) for its anthropologists: Malinowski for his long-term fieldwork and participant observation in the Trobriand Islands; and Mead as iconic, forever-in-the-field or museum anthropologist and public spokeswoman on culture. Many of the authors in this volume knew Margaret Mead, some receiving her advice on fieldwork (but not always taking it). We all studied these ancestors and, thus, knew better than to do everything their way or to see things only through their lenses. The Pacific is also a major field for the study of the politics of culture and the war on anthropology that flourished during the time frame of this volume. *First Fieldwork* examines changes and improvements in anthropology in the Pacific throughout the years 1960–1985 and demonstrates a continuing need to reflexively ground our ethnographies and theories in our fieldwork experiences.

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