

## **‘Island Builders’: Landscape and Historicity among the Langalanga, Solomon Islands**

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The emergence of the Langalanga is a result of multiple waves of migration. They first came down from the Kwara’ae and Kwaio mountains of Malaita Island to the Langalanga coast, and later moved to offshore islets and built their own ‘artificial islets’ in the lagoon. After more than three hundreds years of residence on the artificial islets, the majority of the Langalanga people moved onshore in the past few decades as a result of a series of historical developments, especially after the attacks of several cyclones from the 1950s to early 1970s. The unique feature of their landscape—‘artificial islands’—is regarded by the Langalanga people as their cultural marker today, even though the majority has abandoned their residence there. This paper examines why and how, in cultural and historical contexts, artificial islet is appropriated by the Langalanga people to represent themselves.

By exploring the conceptualization and appropriation of landscape among the Langalanga, we find that landscape is a key component of how people perceive, memorize and represent history (i.e., their historicity), and how they configure the sense of selves. Through the studies of local views of landscape, this paper looks at the triangle relationships between human (self, collective selves, identity), history (ancestral past, shared past) and landscape (place, landmarks, surroundings).

First, the direct interactions between humans and landscape includes how people utilize landscape for subsistence and as boundary marks that separates people into different groups. Features of landscape are also referential points when people described their actions and directions. They also play roles in the conceptualization of time, as evidenced in the local names of months, in which the specific scenes in their landscape are often portrayed.

Second, the relationships between landscape and history: landscape and landmarks are often used as codes of memory of the past through myth, legends and stories. Landscape features are markers of the past. Landmarks or signs on the landscape are sometimes seen as the symbols of the ancestral past; they can be seen as the codes of memory presented in myths or legends.

The picture grows to be more complicated when humans are articulated with

landscape through history (human→history→landscape). When people are named for a place or talk about a place name, they need to make reference to the historical events or ancestral activities associated with the landscape. When a place name is mentioned, the emphasis is on the ancestors who initiated the name or how the name is linked to a particular ancestor. The names of places and people are markers or codes of memory of the past, on the one hand; but on the other hand, the acts of naming a place by an ancestor also transfers the power to the place and thus empowers it. Coupled with the discussion above, landscape for the Langalanga is more than the inscription of memory or the encoding of memories ('landscape of memory' by Kuchler 1993), but is part of a process of remembering ('landscape as memory').

Third, between humans and history: people often remember, recall and reconstruct their past through legends, narratives, songs, rituals or genealogies. In many societies, landscape is significant in these means and plays a key role in their mode of historicity (human→ landscape→ history). Studies have shown that the 'spatialization of time' (Fox 1997a: 17), or the 'spatial conception of time' (Basso 1996: 34)—history is described in terms of landscape, place names, and migration paths—are widely seen in many cultures (e.g., Fox ed. 1996, Jorgensen 1990). One form is what Fox called 'topogeny'—the recitation of an ordered sequence of place names. The mainstream migration narratives in the Langalanga trace their ancestral origins in the mountains of Malaita Island and detail the paths their ancestral heroes took in their journey from the mountain to the seacoast. Place names and features of the landscape are presented in a lineal pattern. This 'spatialization of time' articulates humans to history through the features and transformations of landscape.

Through the exploration of the entanglement between humans, landscape and history we are able to comprehend the position of landscape in the Langalanga culture, and why it is sensible for them to make use of a particular feature of landscape to represent themselves. This paper argues that through this culturally patterned mode of organization of memories of the past and its entanglement with a wider range of powers and relations in a historical context, the artificial islands become the dominant symbol in the process of differentiation and representation of self and other.