Cultural studies in Australia over the past fifteen years has developed a particularly critical focus on the role of European and Anglophone perspectives in the construction of the history and frameworks of identity with respect to the notion of nation. Critical approaches to engagements with indigenous populations and concern with postcolonial perspectives on cultural readings have foregrounded political and ethical approaches to cultural studies. A foremost theorist within Australian contexts is Nicholas Thomas, who has been for a number of years Director of the Centre for Cross Cultural Research at the Australian National University, Canberra. Thomas is the author and co-author of a series of books that have had their focus on Oceania and Pacific cultures. His approach has been within the frameworks and perspectives of critical assessment of orthodox historical and anthropological studies of the Pacific, in order to infuse alternative historiographical procedures that work particularly from considerations of post-coloniality.

This paper approaches a series of monographs authored or co-authored by Thomas in order to critically assay their rereading of Pacific cultural studies. The perspective taken in this paper will be developed from the works of Michel Foucault that focus on historiography, as well as on the late work by Foucault on modernity and bio-power. Foucault’s unfinished project on the bio-politics of modernity has been recently extended by the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, (Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life), and this paper will be drawing extensively on the works of Agamben as a critical moment in the critique of Thomas. Our aim is to explore more fully the implications of engagements in the research of Oceania by agents whose own cultural frameworks subtend from predominant European (or global) conditions.