

Dialogue

Berths and Anchorages: Pacific Cultural Studies from Oceania

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Rethinking Pacific Studies Twenty Years On

TERENCE WESLEY-SMITH

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There was a seer named Mau,
The King's attendant at sea,
And he told a thing unto me,
Yea, to its telling I hearkened,
That the drifting canoe has reached land.
The canoe, friend, is almost in sight,
Midst the unresting wave that is breaking,
Breaking and imperiling man.

—VOYAGE OF ULAMOLEKA TO
NIUA TOPUTAPU, 1875¹

Nevertheless, metaphors are serious things. They affect
one's practice.

—STUART HALL, "CULTURAL STUDIES
AND ITS THEORETICAL LEGACIES"

DANGEROUS METAPHORS AND DRIFTING CANOES

In 1995, Terence Wesley-Smith identified three rationales for institutional program building in Pacific studies, including pragmatic, laboratory, and decolonizing/empowering orientations. Among these, Wesley-Smith highlighted that one of the rationales, the "empowerment" of indigenous peoples, was a major trend related to the indigenization of the academy (Mihesuah and Wilson 2004). Moreover, Wesley-Smith's insights seem to resonate with the observations of scholars like Arif Dirlik concerning overlapping "trends" coming out of the dismantling of the Cold War rationales for area studies, including novel ways of conceptualizing spatialities, such as Oceanic and diasporic studies (Dirlik 2005, cited in Wilson

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2010, 5). A flurry of conferences and meetings arose during the 1990s and through the first decade of the new millennium to discuss the evolution of Pacific studies as an organized field of study.² Among them, the 2000 symposium hosted by the University of California–Santa Cruz (UCSC) Center for Cultural Studies, titled “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” stands out as a high-water mark in its discursive evolution from area studies toward interdisciplinary studies essentially serving as a declarative model, well timed on the cusp of the twenty-first century and the ushering in of a paradigm of increasing biopolitical securitization, militarization, and neoliberal controls.

The UCSC symposium proceedings were published the following year in a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* (13:2), which for a long time was featured prominently on the University of Hawai‘i (UH) Press webpage for the journal and which is also now freely available through ScholarSpace, the UH Mānoa digital institutional repository. This special issue indeed now serves as a core part of many Pacific studies graduate courses, anchoring students to the interdisciplinary trajectory of the field. Two equally strong metaphors were presented for students to grapple with as they groped their way along an interdisciplinary pathway. The first was that Pacific studies was on the periphery or “the edge” of cultural studies and Native studies and that, beyond that, Pacific studies was becoming increasingly visible on the Pacific Rim. More prominent than the “edge” was the metaphor of the canoe as presented by Vicente M Diaz and J Kēhaulani Kauanui, who noted: “Pacific studies has been likened to a canoe through which extensive and systematic interdisciplinary and academic focus on the Pacific has taken place.” Since the canoe had already been invoked as the metaphor for Pacific studies being a vehicle for integration, they predicted that, “for its presence, its resources, its ability to facilitate increasing numbers of Pacific Islanders in the academy, its ability to be used, Pacific studies’ mobility continues to serve as a particularly seductive vessel for us” (Diaz and Kauanui 2001, 322–323).

The decade after the UCSC symposium saw a multisited incubation of what Wesley-Smith had signaled as the “empowerment rationale,” undergirded by a definite leaning into postmodernism, as Wesley-Smith had put it: the movement that “recognizes the key roles of creativity, subjectivity, and poetics,” encouraging researchers to be “reflexive, to acknowledge the contingent and open-ended nature of inquiry, to incorporate multiple voices into their narratives, and to experiment with new ways of presenting material” (1995, 128). For Pacific practitioners, this loose “edge” was

both blessing and curse: while discourse swarmed around issues of representation, theoretical anchors were less than stabilized. Critical theory largely emanating from continental spaces had not (and still largely has not) been able to cope with specific Pacific Oceanic diversities of places, languages, and histories. While a focus on representation and inside/outside dialectics of the postmodern paradigm was the easiest option for integrating indigenous bodies, it came at a cost. The empowerment rationale and the assumptions involved about indigenous and insider discourse, coupled with this loose summation of interdisciplinarity, seemed so complete that at least one scholar a decade later queried whether the empowered “creativity” emanating from the UH Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies over the past twenty years was an “incubated” offspring or a splitting and “replication” of a profoundly attractive ideal (Macpherson 2010).

Lest this be taken the wrong way, it is important to gain some comparative perspective on how interdisciplinary programming can vary in growth according to institutional place and how growth can be organic, yet also quite mimetic. Stuart Hall, for example, had quite a bit to say on the expansion of cultural studies in American institutional contexts, which, for our purposes, is significant enough to quote at length:

I don't know what to say about American cultural studies. I am completely dumbfounded by it. I think of the struggles to get cultural studies into the institution in the British context, to squeeze three or four jobs for anybody under some heavy disguise, compared with the rapid institutionalization which is going on in the United States. . . . The enormous explosion of cultural studies in the United States, its rapid professionalization and institutionalization, is not a moment which any of us who tried to set up a marginalized Centre in a university like Birmingham could, in any simple way, regret. And yet I have to say, in the strongest sense, that it reminds me of the ways in which, in Britain, we are always aware of institutionalization as a moment of profound danger. Now, I've been saying that dangers are not places you run away from but places that you go towards. So I simply want you to know that my own feeling is that the explosion of cultural studies along with other forms of critical theory in the academy represents a moment of extraordinarily profound danger. Why? Well, it would be excessively vulgar to talk about such things as how many jobs there are, how much money there is around, and how much pressure that puts on people to do what they think of as critical political work and intellectual work of a critical kind, while also looking over their shoulders at the promotions stakes and the publication stakes, and so on. Let me instead return to the point that I made before: my astonishment at what I call the theoretical fluency of cultural studies in the United States.

Now, the question of theoretical fluency is a difficult and provoking metaphor, and I want only to say one word about it. Some time ago, looking at what one can only call the deconstructive deluge (as opposed to deconstructive turn) which had overtaken American literary studies, in its formalist mode, I tried to distinguish the extremely important theoretical and intellectual work which it had made possible in cultural studies from a mere repetition, a sort of mimicry or deconstructive ventriloquism which sometimes passes as a serious intellectual exercise. My fear at that moment was that if cultural studies gained an equivalent institutionalization in the American context, it would, in rather the same way, formalize out of existence the critical questions of power, history, and politics. (1996, 273–274)

Taken together, it is possible that this triangulation of metaphorical, declarative, and leaning-toward-insider-ish representation may have combined to create an unintended consequence similar to what Hall asserted as formalizing “out of existence the critical questions of power, history, and politics.” The confluence of these patterns, metaphors, and trends in Pacific studies created for me, at least, a paradigm in which “edge” became regularized as the center and in which the canoe was perpetually at sea, polarized inside an affective prism that valued (although in some ways also fetishized) indigenous knowledge. I myself was producing a preponderance of reflexive narratives, retaining a noncommittal stance toward truth regimes.

This was all well and good, but at some point, I realized my own critical anchoring was essential. Careful meditations on the land later brought me to comprehend anchorages and berths as being perhaps more important, both metaphorically and literally, than the canoe because of the immutable geospatiality of place and because of the ways in which place is obscured by the rest of the world when they look at Oceania as a region or at area studies as a discipline encapsulated by the floating canoe. And in reference to Pacific archipelagoes, the berths and the anchorages of the canoe may be considered productive in this theoretical work.

At least some of the time, I have come to believe that this is what often happens with learning interdisciplinarity, particularly in terms of representation of Pacific studies scholarship. This is not to say that critical and transformative questions do not occur, only that the visibility of these kinds of questions within institutional contexts is becoming scarce. I think there are real reasons for this, many of which do not square as nicely as we might like to think with “empowerment” priorities. So as not to be misunderstood, I am not saying that this confluence of metaphors, patterns,

and trends has been prone to the kind of ventriloquism Hall mentioned because of the indigenization of academic spaces, but rather that this has arisen as a systemic reaction on the part of entrenched power to the experience of the “empire” writing and talking back and to the seemingly sudden influx of new voices, perhaps perceived as cacophonous. Given this, there may have developed a type of discursive replication, serving the interests of a few, that has essentially devalued the power of indigenous collectives within institutional spaces by confining the intellectual work of indigenous scholars to focusing on issues of representation.

This kind of discursive replication of the canoe metaphor was, perhaps, an outcome anticipated by Diaz and Kauanui when they applied the cautionary adjective “seductive,” or, more specifically, the caveat about “its ability to be used” (2001, 323), implying the canoe’s pragmatic limitation (or “profound danger” in Hall’s framing) in transforming the academy’s power imbalances. The canoe, it would seem, is dangerous *because* of its liminality and transportability, not just in ushering in indigenous scholars to this work but in terms of its tendency to drift within the dangers of institutionalization itself. Again, to be clear, the danger in institutional contexts is that scholars are sometimes oriented toward engaging “interruptions” (Hall 1996, 271) rather than grappling directly with foundational, underlying issues.

Despite the possible dangers encountered with the offering of these potent metaphors, the “edge” and the “canoe” have worked productively to expand the discourse. But in order to continue to interrupt the counter-reactions, the much-needed “homegrown theory” of and inside of Pacific studies needs tending.³ To do this work, at times the canoe must make landfall in order to transform the power structures of the institution. For my purposes (suggesting that we more clearly orient and situate a place-sensitive research paradigm in Pacific studies), berths are for Pacific studies a posteriori stable points of reference. Berths are not to be mistaken as stable points in exactly the same way that “points” are stabilized in a continental grid. This being said, berths are not, in my interpretation, equivalent to the ecological metaphor of “roots” or its homonym “routes.” But they are in fact real spaces influenced and constrained by geography, holding real memory of journeys, departures, homecomings, and crossings. And they are most importantly spaces of reciprocal exchanges that signify, create, and maintain relationships over distance and across time. Anchorages, likewise, are often reefs, which are in constant formation. In other words, the entire world and everything in it is moving and fluid, and this

sense is especially amplified by oceanic space. Oceanic berths, like oceanic lines in oceanic space, bend, particularly at sea, where mutable signs are abundant and constantly in flux. But, as I touch on next, the immutability of land signs is that which I equate with the interruptions that will constitute specific Pacific Oceanic theory.

The 2000 UCSC symposium dispersed an enduring visibility around the “seriousness” of the edge and for students, activists, and emerging cohorts in the millennial generation conveyed the “deadly seriousness” of redeeming indigenous knowledge as signified by the canoe. However, the schools and programs of Pacific studies are still small, institutionally speaking, and it is sometimes the case, at least in my experience, that too few individuals are working in Pacific studies to make a concerted effort toward institutional change. Disciplines like cultural studies and anthropology remain absent at the University of the South Pacific (USP), so it becomes even more imperative that Pacific studies in institutional spaces like this one engage and prioritize in curriculum programming the volcanic base that formed cultural studies proper and fed its deployment. At the moment, culture, for example, is often conflated with the performing arts of the Pacific and is co-opted for marketing purposes more than it is studied for its power. I need not belabor the point that the plane on which conferences like the 2000 symposium and comparable elite meetings function (those requiring significant funding and established institutional support to attend) is essentially power forming, with a fierce legibility that is translated into printed discourse that then gets repeated and that sustains the careers of its makers, making certain utterances visible and others invisible.⁴ As a student, I had very little awareness of this, but as a classroom teacher, it became readily apparent to me, even disturbing—giving new meaning to the axiom “ignorance is bliss.”

RE-TURNING TO ETAK: THE IMMUTABILITY OF LAND

It is significant that Diaz and Kauanui’s introduction to *Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge* pairs its discussion of the canoe metaphor with an elaboration of the Micronesian navigating technique of etak. Etak involves a “reckoning [of] the distance traveled and one’s location at sea by calculating the rate at which one’s island of departure moves away from the traveling canoe and the rate at which a second reference island moves along another prescribed star course”—emphasizing that these islands moved (Diaz and Kauanui 2001, 317). Although in their render-

ing of “Pacific studies as a canoe,” Diaz and Kauanui emphasized that “if there is a stable point from which one gauges one’s position, it is the canoe” (2001, 317), I rather see this statement as open to fluid interpretation. A skilled navigator above all knows the limitations of each of her techniques. While the various navigating techniques and even the affective experience of voyaging render the canoe a stable point, it is the berth and landing of the canoe that is the ultimate allegorical axis that a place-based involution of Pacific studies requires.

In comparison, the traditional knowledge of the Tuita clan of hereditary navigators in Tonga conceptualizes the Ha‘apai and Vava‘u islands as a “row of Puko trees” (Lewis 1979, 77).⁵ This technique involves reading immutable signs, that is, signs that are consistent when land is near (as opposed to mutable signs, which are in flux due to atmospheric conditions of possibility). One member of the Tuita clan shared with David Lewis that among his clan it was “customary not to aim for a specific island. . . . ‘It is enough that we strike *the row* of Puko trees,’—which he [Ve‘ehala] explained as meaning that Vava‘u and Ha‘apai are like a row of these very high trees, and one only needed to hit the row not a particular tree. In the same way a canoe captain would aim for the middle of the group instead of for an individual island” (Lewis 1979, 77, italics original). Similarly, in Micronesia, “before losing sight of the land of origin, the navigator must look back to know which star it will disappear under so he can determine the course for the land of destination—it is a critical celestial navigational reference” (Larry Raiget, quoted in Krause 2015, 304). Both these techniques are consistent with the principle that land—let’s even say archipelagoes, to be more precise—is the ultimate ordering apparatus within the ontological and epistemological systems of oceanic navigation. Diaz and Kauanui conceded that, even in employing nautical metaphors, “there is something landed and very materially grounded in seafaring metaphors and sensibilities” (2001, 318). Conversely, and just as empirically important, there is something very fluid in the materiality of walking about especially small islets, atolls, and islands whose spatiality is arguably all, or mostly, edge without center. This is not to say that islands do not move, because they certainly move in observers’ perspectives, particularly from the affective platform of a moving vessel. This is rather to say that regardless of whether one is on land or at sea, islands move in perspective—the curvature of perspective from the edge of islands whose contours expand or contract fractally depending on the scale of observation inside larger archipelagoes. This fractalizing character, in which cen-

ters appear and disappear on the basis of scale and perspective, ensures an activity of constant delineation and re-delineation.

Thus my feeling is that the multiply situated and now increasingly instituted Pacific studies demands a return of the discourse to the landedness signified by berths, anchors, and anchorages in order to ground and multiply the many “edges” of Pacific studies to each of their place-based institutional contexts and ensure continuity of the critical questions of power, history, and politics that form a core part of the powers that cultural studies develops to interrupt and achieve its ideals of transformation. Without this double-sided “berthing,” or close alignment (so as to resist drifting), Pacific studies runs the risk of what Hall referred to as “mimicry or deconstructive ventriloquism which sometimes passes as a serious intellectual exercise” (1996, 273). Berths, anchors, and anchorages will likely facilitate the next phase of “empowered” practices of the “pluralistic” approaches needed to access and transform power grids in Oceania, especially within the learning project of Pacific studies.⁶

There is room in this reconfiguration of edges, islands, canoes, berths, and archipelagoes to further respond to what Malama Meleisea called for prior to Wesley-Smith’s mapping of the Pacific studies’ rationale. In 1987, Meleisea published “Ideology and Pacific Studies: A Personal View,” in which he conscientiously employed autobiography to do exactly what critical theory was doing: critiquing ideology and interrupting sets of problematics. Moreover, he pointedly remarked that the real work of Pacific studies would not *feel* empowering, even though it ultimately would *be* empowering. The “real focus of Pacific Studies,” he wrote, should be that which is “difficult,” “painful,” and “hard”: “to look carefully at what we had once and have now. . . . [to] compare our very limited choices. . . . to look critically at the way in which we ourselves have made choices prior to, during, and since the colonial period. . . . to ask why we made these choices and ask whether we might still have other options” (Meleisea 1987, 152). Meleisea’s profound sentiment tends to be overshadowed by the affective fervor of the word “empowerment” and the ways in which it has been deployed, especially in aid and underdevelopment discourses after political decolonization and independence movements—a word that, again, has largely been co-opted by neoliberal imperatives, a word tending to be one of placation rather than a stirring call to continue the painful work of epistemic decolonization.

In this sense, Stuart Hall’s words ring true about the “deadly seriousness of intellectual work” as being a “deadly serious matter,” and this

seriousness with its affect seems somehow at odds with “empowerment,” as if to feel empowered is unilaterally a positive experience (1996, 273). Indeed, accessing and relinquishing real power—the power over life and death and, as always, our resources—and claiming it *from somewhere else*, as the word “empowerment” explicitly means—is profoundly difficult and painful, and it is not a stretch to say could be deadly, if one looks deeply enough. Of course it would take a larger genealogical inquiry into the word “empowerment,” but a brief search of the Online Etymology Dictionary dates the modern popularity of the word to 1986, making it a rather trendy word that bears revisiting.⁷ To wonder whether “empowerment” is a word that fits what has actually happened from the point of view of the indigenous practitioners who have been part of the “indigenization” of area studies is another question that bears another look (Wilson 2010, 6). The empowerment rationale adhering inside the discourses of aid and development, especially from the *longue durée* of a cultural studies critique of hegemony, also invites examination in the aftermath of political decolonization.

CULTURAL STUDIES BY, FOR, AND FROM OCEANIA

Following in the wake of the *Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge* publication, Houston Wood delved into extending cultural studies *for* Oceania, emphasizing that “multiple epistemologies must be embraced,” as “each produces different truths and realities” (2003, 341). Outlining three emerging perspectives for research in Oceania, Wood held that “discipline,” “interpretation,” and “practice” “differ enough to warrant thinking about them separately, especially since the choice of which to emphasize determines so much about the research process and product that follows” (Wood 2006, 33). Wood’s sense was that “Hau‘ofa’s and others’ . . . focus on practices is preferable to discipline- and interpretation-based approaches”—a judgment based “in large measure on how much it [the research] seems likely to promote diversity in Oceania, as well as on how much it supports place-based autonomies” (Wood 2006, 34). Wood’s essay clarifies how we might better articulate “empowerment” in Oceania: around diversities and autonomies, which are a significant anchoring for an “edgy” empowerment prone to academic, administrative, and institutional abuse of intellectual power. Wood encouraged the formation of a region-specific cultural studies that dealt with identity (regional and individual), process, reciprocity, epistemologies, genres,

orality, and theory. Anchors and anchorages correspond metaphorically to what Wood called a “practice-based approach” to Pacific studies (2006) and are in a similar vein to what the USP Oceania Centre’s postgraduate program in Pacific studies has been aiming to do as they have been struggling to reinvent themselves from the ashes of a transforming institutional terrain. A cultural studies *by, for, and from* Oceania prominently emphasizes Pacific and Oceanic ways of knowing—“each researcher’s choice of theories, concepts, and methods shapes the eventual results” (Wood 2006, 34)—and for good reason, since any other perspective runs the risk of reproducing the same power imbalances, inaccuracies, and ethical biases. As Wood has noted, “The emerging cultural studies in Oceania should commit itself to constructing products that look different from those created by the disciplines that have traditionally investigated Oceania. If not, cultural studies will probably resemble most other Euro-American disciplines, working in Oceania but not being of or for it” (2003, 358).

Berths and anchorages are part of the nautical/maritime language invoked by the metaphorical canoe. Fishing up these additional allegories is an important way to continue reiterating research and scholarly practice from within Oceania according to the specific promise (as well as limits) of each place. Deploying Pacific studies as a metaphorical canoe from inside a berth provides students a specific, place-based orientation to develop a set of interdisciplinary practices and critiques around how body, writing, text, and textualism all function within a cultural studies for Oceania.

Because Pacific studies is an interdisciplinary space of scholarship, there is a sort of distance from the discipline-based research perspective; indeed, the Pacific-studies-as-canoe metaphor was meant to express this sort of freedom, leaving certain disciplinary conventions and developing new ones based on alternative interpretations and practices. But the other perspectives, interpretation and practice, as Wood mentioned, require more attention, as these are the areas that hold the strongest possibility for continuing the transformation of the Oceania Centre. I think this is what Diaz and Kauanui referred to in their passage that the “same mobile effect [of the canoe] also impels us toward cultural studies” (2001, 323). Here I want to interrupt with a subtle shift that helps me conceptualize the multiplicity/repetition of oceanic space while interrupting the militarized and class traces of the word “mobility.” I want to emphasize *motility* rather than *mobility*. Mobility, particularly in a neoliberal and continental worldview, implies upward and forward movement, which I want to avoid because it is bound to reproduce hierarchies. In contrast, motility implies sideways,

backward, upward, downward, frontward, and importantly diagonal, three-hundred-and-sixty-degree movement. “Motility” is a trickster word and implies a multitude of ins and outs, resisting and interrupting how some disciplines emanating from the nineteenth century have used the word “mobility” to express class sentiments, as well as militarizing and policing unit movements, and opening up space to see broader registers for institutional action.

CONSORTIUM BUILDING: INSIDE AND BEYOND UNIVERSITIES

The imaginary of the berth and of anchorages unique to each institutional power context is appealing for reiterating Pacific studies on the edge and, increasingly, on the inside. Stewart Firth’s call more than a decade ago for a consortium with “emphasis . . . on exchanges of every kind: of information over the Internet, of staff, of courses and simulations, and of students” is significant for an institution like USP (2003, 147). A consortium of berthing spaces for Pacific practices and processes of learning, teaching, and researching is waiting to emerge. In this imaginary, a distributed university like USP would fare well, for the placement of each campus as a specific berth of specific/Pacific ways of learning and teaching is perhaps our greatest gift to the scholarly world, and these multiple campuses can reiterate how the principle of multiplicity underlies all things Pacific. Although, as Firth mentioned, many possibilities exist inside and between institutional contexts in terms of collaborations and exchanges, a major anchoring point in the empowerment rationale must be located firmly outside the university, not in some amorphous framing such as “communities” but in the real structural conditions that affect people and their engagements with forms of power. I find this clearly articulated in the writings of Pacific studies coming out of a burgeoning group of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary “Pacific Islander studies” research students on the West Coast of the continental United States (Yoo and others 2011) or in the newly established Critical Pacific Islands Studies certificate program at City College of San Francisco. These diasporic students are in many ways demanding different things of Pacific studies, based on their multiple berths. For example, the high incidence of imprisonment among Tongans, Samoans, Kānaka Maoli, and other Pacific Islanders in the continental United States and in Hawai‘i (not to mention that for indigenous peoples elsewhere including Aotearoa, Australia, and the Pacific archipelagoes) asks Pacific studies to engage with diverse discourses to answer critical

questions about policy, imperialism, and an increasingly securitized world order. Learning and research practices in Pacific Islander studies make “a conscious effort to extend far beyond the classroom” (Yoo and others 2011, 159). On the edge of the continental United States, California-based students and scholars have written that the field of Pacific Islander studies “must necessarily bridge rigorous and interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching with political engagement in the service of PI communities. This praxis privileges collectivity” (Yoo and others 2011, 159).

Critical Pacific Islander studies reverberates with and is synergistic with ethnic studies, a field that spans continents and shares headwaters with cultural studies. Prior to rumblings on North America’s West Coast, in Aotearoa, the twentieth-century motilities of Pacific Islanders had even earlier been routed organically on the institutional berthscape. From the tail of Maui’s fish, the University of Auckland’s Centre for Pacific Studies was born on the heels of wide proletariat displacements and indigenous and native uprisings. This center was heralded by the publication of *Class and Culture in the South Pacific* (Hooper and others 1987), establishing a strong bottom-up reversal of anthropological study of Oceania, signaling a fresh start pinpointed on the post-Cold War breakup of intellectual thought, area studies, and the empire writing back. It placed the purpose of the study of the Pacific squarely within the university to be first and foremost *for* as well as *about* Pacific people. In the decade or so following, Aotearoa has also been a site of expanding Pacific studies approaches to learning and teaching as a result of innovators like Teresia Teaiwa, whose mobility between Fiji, Hawai‘i, and California has been well documented in her essay “Native Thoughts” (2005). Teaiwa’s Pacific studies berthing space at Victoria University of Wellington features the integration of indigenous and creative practice within curriculum and assessment design that motivates both serious intellectual and embodied learning (Teaiwa 2006).

The Pacific Islands studies program at Brigham Young University–Hawai‘i (BYUH)—despite its precarious placement in a religious university with ideological roots at odds with the decolonizing and restorative justice ideals of cultural studies and native studies—strives to achieve much more than a modicum of healing via its floating classroom canoe *Iosepa* and its Mālama ‘Āina programs, which emphasize land responsibility, stewardship, and cultural practice among its students, who are largely of Pacific heritage. The approach to learning taken by Tēvita Ka‘ili at BYUH’s International Cultural Studies program has Maui-like trickster tendencies

of working within the institutional structure to develop transformational spaces for learners. His curriculum incorporates and privileges indigenous ways of knowing by doing and includes service learning and embodied practice within assessment structures, thus widening learner engagement beyond the written word: it awakens multiple senses and effects different kinds of change and awareness in learners. The undergraduate curriculum of the UH Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies involves a great deal of service learning–based curriculum, which undergirds students’ classroom learning experiences with practical lifeworld experiences. These are just a few of the many emerging practices in university settings. These rumblings in Oceania and on the rim do indeed show that the fissures, fractures, and ruptures around the “edge” hold growth potential and continue to expand. I am sure I have missed many others, but please forgive me that shortcoming.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: THE IMPOSSIBLE MANIFESTATIONS OF OCEANIA

The point of learning is to manifest possibilities. Maria Bargh wrote that “neoliberalism is a flourishing ideology in the Pacific . . . supported worldwide by not only an institutional web of support but also an intellectual one,” functioning as a “powerful myth,” which, she contended, must be resisted (2001, 270). It was just this kind of resistance in which the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture was initially founded—after years of dreaming and struggle—by the late Epeli Hau’ofa. It is a subversive project but one that USP was once (quietly) known for. During the 1970s, the first decade of the university’s founding, there emerged perhaps the embryonic Pacific studies that took form in the Pacific literary scene. *MANA*, a now defunct journal, became a platform for publishing Pacific literature. The now-dismantled Institute for Pacific Studies (IPS) published over three hundred manuscripts, many in indigenous Pacific languages. These institutional forms of memory reflected the power, the optimism, and the politics of critical questioning that drove and defined the Pacific independence movements.

I came to work at the Oceania Centre in 2011, which by the time I arrived two years after Epeli’s death had been attached to Pacific Studies, a postgraduate program. Epeli’s vision that nurtured a community of artists was waning, and I came in time to see a succession of administrators hiring arts professionals with limited academic training. I felt incredibly

impotent as a scholar working in this berth whose institutional drift seemed to be toward increasing commodification, with Oceanic culture and dance as a fetishistic sign of regional unity and complicity within this increasingly neoliberal, post-traumatized academic-industrial complex. After the high tide of independence gave way to a desperate desire to inherit the puppeteer's neocolonial strings, USP fizzled and bottomed out. Despite my readings as a graduate student, I could not see the radical politics of change that I had read about and that had been in embryonic form at USP. I mistakenly thought that USP would be a place of troublesome scholars, unsettling and activating the slumber of docile would-be subjects of state and institutionalized power. I thought that, rather than creating office workers, Pacific studies at a university in the South Pacific in a place like the Oceania Centre would be making "cultural workers"—critics and artists advancing a "new politics of difference" as Cornel West put it (1990, 93). Herein lies the rub of the awkward positioning of Pacific studies at an institution like USP, which began to seem permanently attached to the discursive neocolonial economic development–industrial complex and also to the tragic demise of what was intended to be a radical and remarkable indigenous center for the production of arts, the Oceania Centre.

It is odd, though perhaps intentional, that Pacific studies never took root at USP until the new millennium, and similarly perhaps not so odd that anthropology would have been unwanted. But it was perhaps too far from the metropolis to catch the rumble of cultural studies, where, just left of Birmingham but dressed like a peasant with a pipe emerging from his bearded face, we found a professor carrying the specter of Marx. Epele Hau'ofa carved away an intellectual space alongside other luminaries of Pacific thought who found refuge from the excesses of the 1980s in the little university spread across twelve archipelagic nations, and he did it in the way only a rogue Tongan outcast could. Perhaps the Oceania Centre was misunderstood by the institution during its time but was allowed to operate without interference because of the great reputation and mana of a scholar-storyteller like Hau'ofa. He liked that it seemed to operate outside of and under the radar of the rest of USP. Even though the Oceania Centre was underfunded, he somehow midwived an organic "red wave" that bled into the stars and still stands as a high-water mark in the still incompletely told story of Pacific arts⁸—as it became centralized from within one of the institutions established to provide the Pacific Region with an architectural formation. His experimentation contributed to our understanding of how precarious, fleeting, and yet somehow still utterly relevant regionalism is,

particularly for the independent Pacific. But it was much more than that. The Oceania Centre was a bold intervention—a stable measurement of all that we needed to keep going toward. It was a learning space that showed us just how, for the large majority of learners, classroom-style brick-and-mortar learning imported by nineteenth-century missionaries was not working as well as it ought to.

The Oceania Centre conceptualized its work in the metaphor of the *peau kula*, the red wave, a force of destruction for many islands, especially those without protective reefs. What remains true of a *peau kula* is that reef formations often provide a protective groundswell that can protect against these deadly tidal waves. I learned this during the 2009 tidal waves in Ha‘apai, where we sat ensconced on a volcanic mount, the waves dispersing energy and never threatening because of the reef’s protective barriers. Each berth has its own shape: some have protective reefs; others are open to destruction.

Sometimes a memory comes to me now of staring at a computer interface called “Moodle” that we used to teach 1,200 or more students through an online introductory course called *Pacific Worlds*—a course with a migratory power that came to USP from the University of Hawai‘i. While sitting in this office (which has the exact dimensions of a prison cell), I would overlook the lush greenery of grounds that once served the military-industrial complex as a Royal New Zealand Air Force base (my office was in the former hospital, and the view included the small house in the back that served as the morgue). Carvings from the Oceania Centre—traces of which can be found in print form in works by Katherine Higgins (2008), Margaret Jolly (2007), and Jione Havea (2007)—had been left, after being chainsawed and dismembered, to decompose outside my office window. Two large shipping containers held the surplus stock of the Institute of Pacific Studies Press that, unsubstantiated rumor had it, had narrowly missed a fiery demise after IPS was disestablished (I prefer the word “dismantled”—much less Orwellian and more Foucaultian). As Stuart Hall wrote: “There is all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics” (1996, 274).

Where to from such disconcerting views? I take an odd comfort in the words of student activist Mario Savio, who stood on the steps of Sproul Hall at the University of California–Berkeley in 1964, in reference to protesting the institutional apparatus: “There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t

take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!" (Savio 1964).

Thus for me, in this berth, at this impossible moment, the word "empowerment" is too obtuse, too tainted by neocolonial agents for the next phase of Pacific studies to flourish, too likely to be co-opted to the demands and contours of neoliberal markets. I dwell particularly on Malama Meleisea's wise counsel: to take a look at where we are and where we came from and to consider that which is most painful, most difficult—and go from there. In this there is the potential for radical transformation, but this inevitably is an incredibly disempowering practice, so I must re-invent a term to describe this: it is a process I call "impossible manifesting"—involving dreaming beyond, reaching for the incredible third and fourth and further dimensions, the worlds stacked on this one, the multiple heavens, the upturned bowls and parallel dimensions that we have traditionally had no fear of frequenting. It was through the frequenting, the doing—the practice—that our power came. So to be converted to power we must question all power, starting with the power entrenched in the hallowed temple spaces of the "new Oceania": universities, boardrooms, ministerial offices, chancelleries, and so on.

As Pacific studies struggles to find and specify its berthing in the academic-industrial complex and define its relationship to the archipelagoes and peoples of Oceania while also expanding to its diasporic communities on the continental rims, it joins with other safe harbors, like cultural studies or ethnic studies, where there is a demographic need for institutional space to make and participate in knowledge production and moreover in the application of knowledge wisdom for social well-being. A consortium of berthing spaces for Pacific practices and processes of learning, teaching, and researching is waiting to emerge but seems caught in a breech position in the birthing canal. A consortium first and foremost suggests numbers, and there are not enough professional actors, there is not enough fiscal support, and with a lack of administrative will, recurring funding crises will prevent this from making change.

Whatever evolution and "involution" (revolution from within) does happen, I am convinced it must happen in multiple, and at times contradictory ways, in multiple locations, because this is the essence of creativity, a shifting between poles and the emergence of new lines of flight that come

out of the struggle—and, believe me, we are in the thick of it. In a hundred years, our seabeds will be well on their way to supplying the world with minerals and precious metals, it appears that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is on its way, joining a bevy of other doomsday devices. In a hundred years, Pacific studies may likely still be institutionalized, the same hubs and some expansion on the inside in indigenous studies in each archipelago, with more growth outside in Asia and on the Pacific Rim for purposes that continue to incarcerate Pacific futures. In a hundred years, each berth will articulate discursive practices rooted to its own lands and seas, continuing a process of epistemic warfare: the battlegrounds of the university seem to be changing, increasingly policed by surveilling administrators.

If we succeed at this epistemic war—whether inside the institution or more likely in spite of it—it will be because we continue as many wise ones have been doing: looking to our genealogies of place and power to draw from for our theoretical staffs, being willing to alter, indeed, to throw ourselves on the grids of power and rewrite this “new Oceania” in the twenty-first century. Although I would love to agree with Audre Lourde that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house (2007), I am convinced that only *with* the master’s tools will the master’s house be dismantled, by rewriting these laws that bind and by rerouting that which creates: the hā. Ours will be a dismantling of false inscriptions, to be sure: we will do it with pen and paper, canvas, and digital coding, as well as with rocks and stones, and with healing hā and chants. We will dedicate this hā while we raise our pens and lift our sacred mountains, celebrating the creation of each new Hunga Ha‘apai.⁹ We raise our pens and move rocks and stones to shore up our crumbling coasts. We raise our hearts and defend our waterways, giving back to that which feeds. We raise our pens and nurse seedlings to repopulate our endangered trees and healing herbs. We raise our pens and give birth to a new generation of farmers, fishers, navigators, artisans, healers. We raise our pens close-fisted and will not release them until our peoples, lands, and oceans are released from the death grip of dependency and false consciousness as we come to understand the true capital of mana moana. Our ink will not dry up, for it is sourced from the soot beneath Hikule‘o’s fingernails, which flows continuously from the deepest layers of Pulotu. . . . *We’re still not in the past-future, Epeli, but we are getting there . . .*

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Notes

1 Epic poem published by Lo‘au University, Facebook Translation, 26 Aug 2014. “Ulamoleka, the chief fisherman of the Tu‘i Kanokupolu, went to Niua Toputapu to espouse a beautiful chiefly maiden of that island. After his long voyage, however, he’s mortified by the girl’s refusal of his proposals. Friends and relatives of the girl, who didn’t wish the match, had represented to her that Ulamoleka’s too old for her and that he’s not of sufficiently high birth. The poem’s his reply to the calumniations of his ill-wishers. The text’s published (1875). A manuscript text’s preserved. These texts, which differ slightly, have both been used in the translation here presented.” https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=808394262527279&id=386680401365336 [accessed 27 July 2014]

2 These conferences included “Pacific Islanders in America,” Brigham Young University–Hawai‘i (2000); “Pacific Islands, Atlantic Worlds,” New York University (2001); “Vaka Vuku: Navigating Knowledge; Pacific Epistemologies,” USP (2006); “Pacific Worlds and the American West,” University of Utah (2008); a Pacific component of the American Historical Association conference at the University of California–San Diego (2010); as well as a number of events at the University of Michigan. The UH Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands Studies hosted several as well. I consult literature especially from the 2000 symposium. This essay does not capture the full gamut of the elite discussions that have come to define Pacific studies proper by Pacific studies circles but rather focuses on those that have been most widely circulated among students at all levels. This list can be expanded to a decade earlier by looking at Diaz and Kauanui 2001, 323, which lists at least seven more major conferences during the 1990s leading up to those after the 2000 UCSC symposium.

3 Teresia Teaiwa wrote that Pacific studies “lacks homegrown theory” (2001, 346) and later provided the tantalizing caveat that “the theoretical significance of Hau‘ofa’s work has yet to be fully appreciated” (2005, 23).

4 In a post-conference blog, Diane Aoki noted that Vince Diaz, for example, had raised the issue of the “shadow side” of the conference, leaving her wondering whether he had meant her and people like her—the non-superstars of Pacific

studies: “When Vince [Diaz] talked about the shadow side of the conference, I thought he may be talking about the likes of me. I am the shadow side, not because I am a dark person, but because I had (past tense) a feeling of not advancing, as some of the super stars of the field had, all these brilliant young scholars. I was a schoolteacher before the program, and I went back to teaching after the program” (2010).

5 Interested in a theory of “expanding” targets, David Lewis gathered and inscribed evidence of the “often surprising ability of navigators to find small targets, not only after planned ocean passages but also when storm-drifted unfortunates have to seek desperately for shelter.” The technique, told to Lewis independently by four indigenous navigators from different parts of Oceania including Tonga, appears “to have originated independently of Western science and to have escaped modification by outside influences” (Lewis 1979, 76).

6 See Wesley-Smith, this issue (155): “I readily acknowledge the need for a pluralistic approach to Pacific studies research and teaching in the region.”

7 Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=empower>. [accessed 15 Sept 2014].

8 The few publications to date about the work of the Oceania Centre include Hau’ofa 2008; Higgins 2008; and Hereniko and Stevenson 2012. Hau’ofa’s essay was based on a keynote delivered in Australia; Higgins’s book was based on fieldwork at the Oceania Centre; and Hereniko and Stevenson’s edited collection was based on their own short appointments at the Oceania Centre between 2010–2013. Lingikoni Vaka’uta’s 2013 MA thesis adds value from the perspective of a resident artist.

9 “Raise Your Pen” is a US-based grassroots movement against the mass incarceration of Pacific Islander youth. The movement was inspired by the tragic death of Siale Angilau, who was shot and killed by a US federal marshal on 21 April 2014 in a federal courthouse in Salt Lake City, Utah, when, holding a pen, he tried to attack a witness who was testifying against him. Hunga Ha’apai is a newly emerged volcanic island in Tonga. *Pulotu* is the Tongan word for the underworld.

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Abstract

The canoe has been a dominant metaphor constituting the discursive growth of Pacific studies in its transformation from a multidisciplinary to interdisciplinary project. In the first half of this essay I grapple with extending the canoe metaphors discussed by Vicente Diaz and J Kēkaulani Kauanui in their 2001 article “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” and in the latter part I discuss programming at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture and Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific. Not wholly rejecting the “seductive metaphor” of Pacific studies as an interdisciplinary canoe between fields of study, my intention rather is to seek how to expand the metaphor productively toward anchorages and berths to produce homegrown theorizing of our intellectual practices, including creative practices. Practice-based research paradigms are increasingly being utilized in Pacific studies, and this kind of re-engagement with the discourse is productive. For a more holistic and pragmatic as well as intellectual and political Pacific studies, the canoe must make landfall, to complete a hermeneutic circle that began with the theoretical placing of the canoe as the animus of the interdisciplinary project in 2001.

KEYWORDS: cultural studies; Native Pacific cultural studies; Pacific Islands studies; the University of the South Pacific; Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture, and Pacific Studies; metaphorical canoes; berthing spaces