

A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands, edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa. Suva, Fiji: The University of the South Pacific School of Social and Economic Development, in association with Beake House, 1993. ISBN 982-01-0200-6, xvi + 144 pages, tables, notes, bibliography. Paper, US\$9.95.

Epeli Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands," is an already well-traveled thesis: it debuted at two University of Hawai'i campuses in 1993; was published in *The Contemporary Pacific* Spring 1994 issue; was cited by Cultural Studies guru James Clifford (University of California, Santa Cruz) in a recent essay; and has been solicited by Arif Dirlik (University of California, Berkeley) and Marshall Sahlins (University of Chicago) respectively for separate republications. "Our Sea of Islands" has also become the title for a South Pacific ocean resources newsletter, and the theme of at least one Pacific Islands studies conference.

Several factors contribute to the trans-Pacific currency of "Our Sea of Islands"; these include Hau'ofa's reputation as a quixotic writer and scholar, the site of enunciation for the thesis (Hawai'i), and its resonance with "the west's" burgeoning market for scholarship on diaspora and postcoloniality. *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* is a collection of essays responding to Hau'ofa's thesis which necessarily anchors the discussion in a very particular set of pedagogical concerns. Edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Hau'ofa, the essays in *A New Oceania* are all by academics at the University of the South Pacific.

The collection not only "rediscovered our sea of islands," but resituates that university at critical crosscurrents of intellectual inquiry.

In "Our Sea of Islands" Hau'ofa is writing against a social, historical, economic, political, academic climate at the university in which dependency theories predominate; where "small" island-states are perpetually constructed as subject to or neglected by continental desires. He proposes that students of the Pacific might yet claim alternative futures, presents, and pasts by reimagining the space they inhabit. Instead of seeing ourselves as separated and isolated by the vast Pacific Ocean, Hau'ofa takes inspiration from what he observes as the ancient and contemporary reciprocity between islands and their migrant kin. In "Our Sea of Islands" he reinscribes us as intimately connected by the ocean. Instead of being small Islanders, we become OCEANIC peoples. Hau'ofa's theorizing is an explicit rejection of a pedagogy of hopelessness:

What kind of teaching is it to stand in front of young people from your own region, people you claim as your own, who have come to the university with high hopes for the future, and to tell them that their countries are hopeless?(5)

In general, the responses to Hau'ofa's proposal in *A New Oceania* fall into three categories: the celebratory, the cautionary, and the critical. Waddell's introduction to the volume, and his essay, "The Power of Positive Thinking," are the most unapologetically celebratory of all the responses. An intimate spirit of friendship per-

vades his writing, as he reflects on the significance of Hau'ofa's oceanic identity—the product of roots that span Tonga, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji—and his own complex Canadian Pacific positionality. Waddell offers Hau'ofa the suggestive words of Gabrielle Roy, “that nowhere in this world is the centre” (35). Reifying neither homelessness nor rootlessness, Waddell is celebrating decentered notions of “home” and a redefinition of “roots.” (Black British scholar, Paul Gilroy, evocatively uses the term roots/routes.) While this sort of postmodern/post-colonial interrogation and reinvention of identities has developed into an industry of its own in metropolitan universities, it has yet to seduce many scholars at the University of the South Pacific.

Douglas Borer's essay “Truth or Dare” and Joeli Veitayaki's “Balancing the Book: How the Other Half Lives” are the most critical of Hau'ofa's vision. Borer interprets “Our Sea of Islands” as an “old and tired” claim to a “natural destiny of greatness.” He even goes on to say that “Marx's false dream of an international class consciousness has been resurrected in the form of Epeli's vision of an intra-Pacific cultural consciousness” (85). Veitayaki accuses Hau'ofa of pandering to his students: after years of telling them “the painful truth” (they're small, underdeveloped, and dependent) he tries to please them with a new perspective that is “mostly superficial and unrealistic, certainly severed from the situation in the Pacific. . . . Epeli is romanticizing the past” (116).

Veitayaki goes on to say that the notion of diaspora has been sensation-

alized, and that myths, legends, and oral traditions can shed little light on the contemporary problems of Islanders. With a “realist” sense of urgency, Veitayaki suggests that “Our Sea of Islands” muddies the waters and distracts Islanders and scholars from finding practical solutions to managing their resources.

But rather than dismissing Hau'ofa's poetic theorizing out of hand, the majority of essays in *A New Oceania* simply call for practical supplements to his vision, their tones tinged with a mixture of celebration and caution. A number of the essays endorse Hau'ofa's call to construct supra- or transnational identities for the contemporary Pacific, while highlighting his problematic retention of the hierarchical categories Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia. Many of the responses invoke E F Schumacher's “small is beautiful” thesis to moderate what seems to be perceived as Hau'ofa's “big dreams”—the argument commonly made is that small economies are more sustainable and less likely to draw the restrictive scrutiny of big powers.

There are also those who assert that islands should not get lost in this oceanic vision, because land continues to remain the principal site for human activity in the Pacific. Several writers gently remind Hau'ofa of the sad or ugly visions of rural poverty and urban deprivation in the Pacific that he has suppressed in “Our Sea of Islands”; others warn against waking the dead “Pacific Way.” Given the historical and contemporary complexity of the Pacific, given the multiplicity of internal rivalries and the intensity of exter-

nal pressures, the one thing these writers from the University of the South Pacific agree on is that the region needs vision—but Hau‘ofa can offer only one of the necessary perspectives. In his essay, Sudesh Mishra uses the term “celebratory resistance” to describe a position in relation to the neocolonial west, but it seems that most of the academics in *A New Oceania* are also taking up such a position vis-à-vis Hau‘ofa.

The volume closes with an “open-ended” essay, a response by Hau‘ofa to the responses. Here, more than in “Our Sea of Islands,” the specifically university-(de)centered engagements of his work are clarified. “Our Sea of Islands”—and certainly *A New Oceania*—must be read in both the light and the shade of the University of the South Pacific’s history: in the light of the euphoria and vigor of anticolonial independence movements, and student life that overwhelmed the university’s inaugural years and produced some of the region’s premier scholars, artists, politicians, and activists; in the shade of neocolonial dependency, “post-coup” trauma, and postcolonial tribalism, which has the ability to turn the university into what Hau‘ofa has called “a beautiful cemetery.”

What is most appealing about the collection is its effort at interdisciplinary dialogue. While “Our Sea of Islands” is traveling almost exclusively among cultural studies and postcolonial scholars abroad, *A New Oceania* is the product of the essay’s circulation among departments of administrative studies, business studies, economics, geography, history and politics, literature and language, marine studies,

ocean resources management, planning and development, and sociology. Most of these departments are part of the School of Social and Economic Development, with which the editors are all affiliated in different capacities: Eric Waddell was professor of geography at the time, but has since returned to his home in Canada; Vijay Naidu is a reader in sociology as well as a pro vice chancellor; and Hau‘ofa is head of the school. The diversity of fields from which academics have been willing to engage bodes well for the ever-challenging task of interdisciplinary dialogue. We should now also look forward to responses from the department of education and psychology, University Extension, and the Institute of Pacific Studies, for whom the “sea of islands” thesis would seem to have particular resonance.

Unfortunately, even though there are a significant number of women in key academic positions at the University of the South Pacific, women are underrepresented in the volume. Jenny Bryant and Vanessa Griffen, however, bear the burden of representation well, and provide some of the more engaging and thoughtful critical essays. Certainly “Our Sea of Islands” and *A New Oceania*’s neglect of or obligatory attention to Pacific women’s physical and conceptual relationships calls into question the “our-ness” and the “newness” of such spaces.

The editors of *A New Oceania*, however, made a sincere attempt at broadly distributing “Our Sea of Islands” and published all the responses that they received. *A New Oceania* signifies the willingness of scholars at the University of the South

Pacific to reconsider the philosophical foundations of their shared pedagogical practices. Given that the university caters for the tertiary education of more Pacific Islanders than any other institution in the region, this is a crucial development.

Epeli Hau'ofa once suggested in an interview with Subramani that his novel *Kisses in the Nederends* (1987) be placed alongside the Bible in motel rooms. In fact, in 1993, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the University of the South Pacific, Hau'ofa was able to achieve an earnest distribution of *A New Oceania*. At the university graduation ceremonies that year, each student was presented with a copy of the collection of responses to "Our Sea of Islands." When asked whether he might consider providing incoming students with free copies as well, Hau'ofa answered that if on-campus students were interested in the book they had access to it, but he was more interested in sending the book "out there"—but with real people, not faceless distribution or retail companies. *A New Oceania* may rival "Our Sea of Islands" yet in its travels. For one thing, the book is so loosely bound that each page is perfectly poised to go on its own thrilling voyage, to discover and be rediscovered.

TERESIA K TEAIWA
*University of California
at Santa Cruz*

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The Pearl-Shellers of Torres Strait: Resource Use, Development and Decline, 1860s–1960s, by Regina Ganter. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-522-84547-9, xvii + 299 pages, maps, figures, tables, plates, appendixes, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. A\$29.95.

Michel de Montaigne, in defiance of the expansionist commercial logic of his time, railed against the depradations of sixteenth-century resource-raiders thus, "the richest, the fairest and the best part of the world topsitruvied, ruined and defaced for the traffick in Pearles and Pepper." Four hundred years later, Ganter's case-study of the rise and fall of the Queensland pearling industry is the sportscasters' "*deja vu* all over again."

The first rush to the Queensland pearl-fields followed within a year of their discovery in 1868. As rapidly as new pearlshell deposits were found, they were stripped of shell and, despite the opening up of more and more distant beds, "that first extraordinary harvest" was never repeated.

The once vibrant and important export industry evolved from and perpetuated colonial resource-raiding in Torres Strait, "at the margin of the South Pacific." A century later, unwilling either to abandon its "fossilised" practices of labor and natural resource management or to add value to its product through local processing, the Queensland pearlshell industry imploded. Depressingly, the structural weaknesses that brought about its collapse (evident as early as the 1890s) were apparent in the Australian indus-