

L(o)osing the Edge

Teresia K Teaiwa

Cumbersome though it sounds, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies” describes precisely what some of us have been producing for years without knowing what to call it.

We see our work as the expression of “Native” genealogies, “Native” commitments—complicatedly entangled with, but distinct from “colonial” products.

We ground ourselves in the “Pacific”—large and fluid as that space is—we strive to make, keep, and nurture political, cultural, intellectual, emotional connections with each other and others.

“Cultural Studies” does not describe so much a shared methodology, as it does shared frames of reference—a new theoretical canon, perhaps—and new modes of representation, a language or structure of scholarship that is in the process of becoming (Peter 2001; K Teaiwa and Kabutaulaka 1999; T Teaiwa 1998; Kauanui 1998; Matahaere-Atariki 1998; Diaz 1997, 1995, 1993).

“On the Edge” describes the place, the position I believe some of us feel we must, prefer, or fear to occupy as pioneers of the new scholarship.

This paper is organized around my own historical and political consciousness of intersecting academic, geographic, and political fields.

On this side of the page I grapple with the various components of Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge. On this side of the page

‘A ‘ohe o kahi nana o luna o ka pali; iho mai a lalo nei; ‘ike I ke au nui ke au iki, he alo a he alo.

The top of the cliff isn’t the place to look at us; come down here and learn of the big and little currents, face to face. (Pukui 1983, 24)

This proverb gets to some of the critical issues we face in trying to define Native Pacific Cultural Studies. It warns against perspectives from the edge—of high cliffs—and invites a more intimate approach to knowledge.

The proverb has personal significance for me because it comes from a book that was gifted to me by a dear friend, Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio, who by coincidence shared a panel with me at the Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge symposium. Selecting this Hawaiian proverb was also a conscious political decision on my part because the majority of papers and presenters at this conference were Hawaiian or connected to Hawai‘i.

This proverb provides a conceptual structure for understanding the emergence of “Native Pacific Cultural Studies.” Calling us away from the edge, it encourages us to learn of the big and little currents, face to face. For me, the intellectual and professional trajectories that converge in the moment of the symposium at the University of California, Santa Cruz are significantly personal—face to face. To this end, I provide a “partial” history of

I am dogged by the possibility of losing the edge. On the other side of the page I loosen up notions about where the edge is.

some of the big and little currents that have shaped gatherings of Native and Pacific scholars, before Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge.

NATIVE

In my native tongue—Kiribati—my name is spelled “Teretia.” In my native language, *tere* means “the edge.” *Tia* means “the one who is” or “the one who stands.” The word *tia* conveys a sense of highly developed skill or mastery. *Te tia borau* is our navigator. *Te tia reirei*, the teacher. There is no such thing as *te tia tere*, but if I were to invent such a title by bringing together two preexisting native concepts, it would suggest “one who is the edge,” “one who stands at the edge,” or “the one who masters the edge.”

My name, however, is not *te tia tere*. My name, *Teretia*, is an inversion of the “one who is, stands at, masters the edge.” Although I have often felt that I am standing on the edge of something, I have never felt that I have mastered the edge. The edge makes me nervous. I am not a *tia tere*, I am only Teretia—at the edge of mastery, standing, being, not quite there. My name is created by an edge, but mastery of that edge is lost in my name.

The native is personal. The personal is essential. For the edge.

My name, Teretia, is also a Catholic, non-native name. I was named for my mother’s sister. My mother is African American. Her sister, Theresa, was named for a Spanish saint, Theresa de Avila. My aunt is not Spanish. I am only a third-generation Catholic on my mother’s side. My grandmother converted to Catholicism as a young girl. Her parents were nonpracticing Protestants. Colored people. Converts.

The native is hybrid. Hybridity is essential. For the edge.

It has been ten years since my own formal entry into Pacific Studies. While I was a graduate student at the University of Hawai’i, I joined a contingent of emerging Pacific Islander scholars who made their debut at the Pacific History Association (PHA) conference in Guam in 1990. The Guam conference stands out in my memory for several reasons: it had been very well organized by Don Rubinstein, and I met Laura Souder, one of the pioneers of Pacific women’s studies, as well as Joakim Peter, who was just finishing his degree at the University of Guam, and we all went to the governor’s mansion for dinner—but the pig wasn’t cooked properly and was taken away before we all got sick from it.

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The adrenaline was high at the Guam conference. I remember the awe I felt when seeing Marshall Sahlins dribble a basketball with David Hanlon in the hotel lobby. I remember the rage I felt when Jackie Leckie tried to tell me what the correct analysis of the Fiji coup was. But more than anything I remember the power we felt we had as young Pacific Islander scholars—moving from session to session to give each other moral support or terrify the stodgy *palagi* presenters who had gotten used to not being questioned about their work by Islanders. No more. It helped us to have Vince Diaz—grounding our experience with his readings of the landscape of Guam (see Diaz 1993). Don Rubinstein heroically collected papers from this conference into a volume called *Pacific History: Papers from the 8th Pacific History Association Conference* (Rubinstein 1992).

PACIFIC

Where is the edge in the Pacific? Is it on a beach—à la Greg Denning? (1988). Is it on the horizon as Joakim Peter suggests? (2001). Is it on Vince Diaz's tectonic plates? (1996).

Is it on the rim? From the islands it looks as if everything that's worth having or doing is in Los Angeles, Seattle, Vancouver, perhaps in Honolulu, maybe in Brisbane, certainly in Sydney, undoubtedly in Auckland. All the hip cool happenings are on the edge of the Pacific.

From the edge, the islands look restricting. Look backward. Look embarrassing. Like FOB (fresh off the boat) or FOP.

From the edge you can take what you want from the islands—the colors, the food, the memories. You can leave what you don't want behind—the politics, the problems, the obligations.

From the edge, the islands can sometimes look liberating. Look exciting. Look promising. Like Fiji. Or the Solomons. From the edge you can see what you want to see in the islands—the heroes, the rebels, the freedom fighters. You can close your eyes to whatever you don't want to see—the jaded businesspeople, frustrated politicians, hopelessly unemployed men.

Is the edge always held at the edges of the Pacific? Is it possible to have an edge in the world's largest ocean?

Epeli Hau'ofa says *our edge is the ocean* (Waddell, Naidu, and Hau'ofa 1993). No other people have had their history shaped so much by an ocean. The islands of Kiribati and Tuvalu may not exist in thirty years' time. *The ocean has the edge.*

In 1991 the Association of Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) held a meeting in Kāua'i, and the Islander presence left much to be desired. I attended this conference with my good friend Jim Mellon: unlike Guam, where we had felt empowered to make critical contributions, Lihū'e made us feel like we were just two grad students with nothing to say that could be of interest to anyone of significance. One well-known anthropologist did deign to ask me what I was planning to do with my studies, and when I said I wanted to teach he replied, "Do you know why most of us become teachers? So we can hear ourselves talk." Despite our attempts to maintain a healthy skepticism while observing these anthropologists in their natural setting, getting to see "big names" like Roger Keesing, Margaret Jolly, and Nicholas Thomas in person impressed us. I cannot describe the strange thrill of discovering that Nicholas Thomas wore mismatching socks.

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In 1992 the Pacific History Association held another conference, this time in Christchurch. Organized by Mālama Meleiseā, who was director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at Canterbury University at the time, it seemed the number of Pacific Islander presenters was growing. But there was a tension between the Islanders and the *tāngata whenua*. At the *pōwhiri* (Māori welcoming ceremony), the Samoans presented a hundred-year-old mat to the local *marae* on behalf of all of the conference participants. 'Okusitino Mahina muttered that somehow the exchange was not equal, and someone else noted that the Samoans seemed to have a lot of hundred-year-old mats.

CULTURAL STUDIES

Interdisciplinary, politically engaged, culturally hip. *Cultural studies is the edge.*

Cultural studies has been shaped by dialogues between postcolonial, diasporic, and western intellectuals. *Cultural studies privileges migration, diaspora, exile.*

There is a movement within Pacific studies that is enamored with cultural studies. There are people who think no new work is worth much if it doesn't refer to Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, James Clifford, Homi Bhabha, Smadar Lavie, and others. *Cultural studies privileges theory, texts, and radical contextualizations.*

But there are also movements within the Pacific that construct cultural studies as the field for teaching students how to follow *fa'a Samoa, vakavanua, kastom*, and the like. This cultural studies teaches kids how to be native. *This cultural studies is not the cultural studies in Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge.*

The Native stands at the edge of cultural studies. It may be first in the configuration "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge," but even there it is on the edge. In fact the Native is on the opposite side of "the Edge." Why is the Native marginalized by cultural studies? Because cultural studies privileges migration, diaspora, exile. Why is cultural studies providing the cutting edge in Pacific studies? Because Pacific studies desperately lacks homegrown theory, and because there are problems with the Native.

Although there were more Islanders at the Christchurch meeting than in Guam, the scheduling was such that we couldn't all get to each other's papers. This was disappointing. J Kēhaulani Kauanui made her debut on the Pacific Studies scene. We met Melani Anae for the first time. And Vince became friends with Roger Maaka, one of the few Māori who attended the conference and presented a paper; the only other Māori presenter was art historian Jonathan Man -Wheoki, and both of their papers were subsequently published in *The Contemporary Pacific* (Maaka 1994; Man -Wheoki 1994). However, it was very much a Samoan conference—Tupuola Efi was the keynote speaker, and Samoans were everywhere. A German man gave a clumsy paper on the colonial period in Papua New Guinea, and Albert Wendt wouldn't let him get away with a comment he made that racialized dogs. "German dogs were fierce while PNG dogs were cowardly"—Albert Wendt wouldn't let him get away with that and tenaciously defended our dogs.

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In 1993 the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania had another meeting, this time on the Big Island; I didn't go, and I don't know many others who did. But that was the occasion for Epeli Hau'ofa's formulation of his "Sea of Islands" thesis (see Waddell, Naidu, and Hau'ofa 1993). That essay, I believe, is the most visionary piece ever to emerge in Pacific Studies. Although it made its debut in Hawai'i, and in important ways had an organic origin in the *'āina* of the Big Island, as well as having traveled extensively since, "Our Sea of Islands" was unmistakably engaged with and directed to the academic and intellectual context of Fiji and the University of the South Pacific.

ON THE EDGE

The tension between Pacific studies and Native studies has yet to be addressed by our scholars. If Pacific studies has space for diversity in focus and analysis, does Native studies distinguish itself by having a more limited agenda?

Over the years, interesting debates have raged about ethnographic authority and Who owns Pacific history? The occasion of a Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge symposium makes it timely to revisit Kerry Howe's idea of myopia in Pacific history (1979) and reframe the question as, What counts as Pacific studies in the twenty-first century?

Is it acceptable, for instance, for a paper on Hawaiian history or culture that does not refer directly to other Pacific Island histories or to texts authored by non-Hawaiian Pacific Islanders, to be included in a forum for Pacific studies?

What is the difference between Hawaiian studies and Pacific studies? Or Samoan studies and Pacific studies? What is the relationship between M ori studies and Pacific studies? Is the difference between Micronesian studies and Pacific studies one of scale? Is it geographic? Is there a political difference? Is the difference methodological? Is it philosophical?

What makes Pacific studies Pacific studies? Are there some topics that are more Pacific than Native? Are there some approaches that are more Pacific than Native? Pacific studies engages a range of intellectual traditions—colonial, native, and most of all, regional.

In 1994 the Pacific History Association held a conference in Tarawa, Kiribati. Not many people were able to attend because of the distance and the expense—an unfortunate effect of trying to move the conference away from more metropolitan centers. But those who attended enjoyed it, and what I remember hearing about most was how Vince wowed the historians with the phrase “messy entanglements”—which became the title of the collection of papers published from that conference (Talu and Quanchi 1995).

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In 1994 there was also the Inside Out conference—a landmark in terms of shifting the emphasis of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies' biennial conferences from student-based to professional. The surge of Pacific Islanders at this conference was overwhelming. Selina Tusitala Crosbie Marsh heralded a new phase in Pacific Islander feminist literary criticism, and Sia Figiel made her sensational debut. Don Long chided the field for being adult-centric, and reminded us that children's books provide the bulk of Pacific literature—something like two hundred books a year are published in New Zealand alone. Robert Nicole shared his critical understanding of francophone literature, and was the only one to acknowledge the presence of the Kanak writer D w Gorodey at that conference. The conference organizer, Vilsoni Hereniko, used the talking chief as his model for Pacific literary criticism, and Ropati, a Samoan participant with a full *tatau* stripped off his lavalava to declare “This is Pacific Literature” (see Hereniko and Wilson 1999).

BETWEEN EDGES: SANTA CRUZ AND FIJI

Although the origins of Pacific studies can be traced to amateur ethnographies from as early as the seventeenth century to orientalist-type scholarship in journals such as *Oceania* and *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, its consolidation as an academic field might best be identified in the foundation of the Pacific Islands Studies Program at the University of Hawai'i (UH), initiated by Norman Meller in the 1950s, and the establishment of the chair in Pacific history at the Australian National University (ANU) for J W Davidson in the 1960s.

The Pacific Islands Studies Program, which evolved into the Center for Pacific Islands Studies (CPIS) at the University of Hawai'i, has displayed a much more vigorous and innovative approach to the field than has the staid Australian National University, which suffers keenly from the devaluation of Pacific studies in the current Australian economic and political climate. Ironically, the characteristic realism and utilitarianism of ANU scholarship on the Pacific may have produced its downfall.

The University of the South Pacific (USP), in Suva, Fiji, is owned by twelve Pacific nations and has the largest percentage of Pacific Islanders in its student population; it would seem to be the logical home of Pacific studies. But its inexplicable ambivalence about Pacific studies (see Naidu 1998) has led to the field being dominated by Honolulu and Canberra for the last half century. Suva is on the edge—the outer edge—of Pacific studies.

Santa Cruz has an enigmatic role in the history of Pacific studies that has been outlined well elsewhere (Crocombe 1987). Since the demise of the Center for South Pacific Studies there in 1979, nothing has been written of the impact of scholarship from the University of California at Santa Cruz on Pacific studies.

In 1995 the Australians made a bid to push Pacific studies to the edge as well. Klaus Neumann organized *Work in Flux* at Melbourne University (Greenwood, Neumann, and Sartori 1995). What was unique about this meeting for me was that for the first time I interacted with Aboriginal and Māori scholars in an atmosphere in which they also claimed Pacific studies. I had gotten used to having *tāngata whenua* disclaim Pacific studies and retreat into their own academic *pā* (fortresses). We met Donna Matahaere and Sonia Smallacombe for the first time there, and the two of them have continued their interest in Pacific studies: Sonia also attended the *Contested Ground* conference later that year, both Donna and Sonia attended the 1996 PHA conference in Hilo, and Sonia went on to attend the association's 1998 conference in Honiara, where she was instrumental in organizing a caucus of indigenous scholars.

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In 1995 the Center for Pacific Studies at the University of Hawai'i reclaimed the critical edge by hosting the *Contested Ground* conference. Vince captured the spirit of the conference in his tectonic theory for Pacific historiography (Diaz 1995). David Gegeo's theorizing of "development" gave hope to young scholars (Gegeo 1998). And I became famous for crying while presenting my *yaqona* paper, though all my nonplussed respondent wanted to know was where my footnotes were (T Teaiwa 1998). The organizers of *Contested Ground*, Terence Wesley-Smith and Tisha Hickson, did not try to publish the papers from that conference themselves. Decisions about whether to publish or not are very interesting: to publish is to memorialize—and advance one's career; not to publish is to save yourself the headache . . . and resist academic imperialism?

Although there had been a few undergraduate students of Pacific Islander heritage enrolled over the years, after the closure of the university's Center for South Pacific Studies, Santa Cruz did not assert any significant impact on Pacific studies until Vince Diaz entered the History of Consciousness program in 1986.

Vince's radical reading of a Pacific island's history and landscape alongside cultural studies, postcolonial, and feminist theory was a first for Pacific studies. The reputation of Santa Cruz vis-à-vis Pacific studies has built over the years since I followed Vince to "Histcon," and then Kēhaulani Kauanui, Noelani Goodyear, and now April Henderson.

We all came to Santa Cruz in different ways. Vince via a Mike Shapiro-esque poli sci route from the University of Hawai'i, I through a David Hanlonian history path, also from that university. Kēhaulani came to Santa Cruz from an undergraduate base in women's studies and ethnic studies at the University of California at Berkeley and a Fulbright research fellowship in Mōri Studies at Auckland University.

Vince once described the motley group of Hawaiian, Chamorro, Fijian, Indo-Fijian, Samoan, Micronesian, and Filipino Pacific Islanders at Santa Cruz this way: "Like the fringing reefs and beaches of our ancestral islands, we are in constant motion with the tides of change and growth. We've caught different waves, all of us, only to find ourselves beached, temporarily, out here in Santa Cruz." Of course, there are many in Pacific studies who are unimpressed by History of Consciousness and Santa Cruz products.

In 1996 the ASAO meeting was held in Kona, and there were a lot more Islanders in attendance than at any of the previous conferences. Academics and museum professionals had encouraged their students and prot g s to come. Wilkie Rasmussen, a Cook Islander anthropology PhD candidate from Auckland came, and Tokelauan Fulimalo Pereira was there—later she was to coedit with Sean Mallon *Speaking in Colour: Conversations with Artists of Pacific Islander Heritage* (1997). Kēhaulani, Selina, and I had a serious talk, trying to figure out some strategies, ethics, and protocols for ourselves as young Pacific scholars.

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Later that year the PHA conference was held in Hilo. Lilikalā Kame'eiehiwa gave the opening keynote, presenting a staunch portrait of white racism in Hawaiian history. Greg Dening gave the closing keynote and warned against navel-gazing. Some Hawaiians took offense because the *pito* is sacred and they thought the term navel-gazing trivialized this worldview. The New Zealand-based Niuean artist and writer John Pule made his debut on the academic scene with a fascinating paper on the killing of a Niuean god—John had found his god in the basement of the Bishop Museum (see Pule 1997). The US-based Samoan playwright Dan Taulapapa McMullin also made his PHA debut. The numbers of Islanders presenting papers in Hilo was astounding. We gave ourselves a name, Tangilehua, and dreamed of a conference for ourselves—but our group did not survive long outside Hilo. Kēhaulani taught us the moves, and we all danced the macarena at Shooters.

Nevertheless, in addition to our work, Pacific studies has significantly increased its cache vis-à-vis Santa Cruz with the visits and residencies of diverse thinkers like Haunani-Kay Trask, Vijay Mishra, Rob Wilson, and Margaret Jolly.

Santa Cruz is on the edge in many ways. It is geographically on the edge of the Pacific. It has had a reputation of holding a theoretical or academic edge in cultural studies. And it sets a lot of people on an emotional or psychological edge—as a result of its own mysterious indigenous history. I was welcomed to Santa Cruz with the lore that when the early missionaries trekked over the hill from San Jose, they found the completely deserted and charred remains of a native village.

Being on the edge in Santa Cruz as a graduate student produced a very particular view of the Pacific for me. The Pacific I saw was shaped by Santa Cruz's romance with Hawaiian slack-key guitar and the local Hawaiian diaspora's hula festivals in the region.¹ Santa Cruz had no space in its imagination for my specific history in the Pacific. If I hadn't had a relationship, a history, of my own with and in Hawai'i, I might have resented having to identify with things Hawaiian in order to get people to understand what I wanted to say about the wider Pacific.

1 For a fascinating glimpse into a little-known dimension of the historical relationship between Hawaiians and California's central coast region, see Chappell (1997, 103). He notes an occasion when eighty Hawaiian recruits of anti-Spanish privateers raided and looted San Francisco and Monterey.

In February 1997 the ASAO held its meetings in San Diego. Islander participation always drops at continental US meetings of the organization, and its prescribed structure also discourages greater Islander participation. Kēhaulani and I attended this meeting together, and met up briefly with Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor and David Gegeo. Kēhaulani began to unpack for me the foundational role of Hawaiians in San Diego's settler history.

The Pacific Science Intercongress at the University of the South Pacific in July attracted some one thousand participants and a good representation of Islander scholars: Jojo, Sa'ili, and Asenati Liki shared an impressive panel; my sister, Katerina, made her debut with a controversial paper titled "Body Shop Banabans and Skin Deep Samaritans"; I bumped into Maile Drake, a Tongan cultural worker who would later be based at Te Papa, the National Museum of New Zealand. The unwieldy organization of the intercongress, however, did not encourage extensive Islander caucusing.

That same year, Vilsoni Hereniko convened the region's first film and video studies conference, *Featuring Paradise*. Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay gave the keynote address, and eccentric Fijian Hollywood veteran, Manu Tupou, was a featured speaker. Vince's documentary *Sacred Vessels* was premiered (Diaz 1997). An Australian-based Fijian academic, journalist, and cultural activist, Lili Tuwai came just to listen. The Māori presence at this conference was strong—given their history with the film and video media: Leonie Pihama and Glynnis Paraha gave compelling presentations.

Being on the edge in Santa Cruz also produced a very particular view of Pacific studies for me. My understanding of Pacific studies was profoundly marked by countercolonial discourses. Pacific studies had to be native. But I could see that my native was caught between specifics and the “Pacific.” My native could just as easily be “half-caste” as “pure blood”; my native was as much a homemaker as a traveler. This was an intellectual luxury that my location in Santa Cruz gave me. Away from the immediacy of nationalist struggles in Hawai‘i for instance, I could afford complex and theoretical formulations.

When I moved back home to Fiji in 1994 I began to lose the intellectual edge that being in Santa Cruz had given me—the edge of distance, detachment, of time for reading and reflection.

I’d like to take a moment to ponder the significance of these two locations. There is a strange linguistic resonance between Santa Cruz and Fiji, which some of you might be aware of. The English translation of Santa Cruz is Holy Cross. In Polynesian languages *viti*, *whiti*, *fiti*, now known as Fiji, refers to a site of “crossing”—*whitianga*, *vitiana*, “to cross” (Manoa 1996).

So if Santa Cruz, the Holy Cross, is at the edge of Pacific studies, where does that leave the University of the South Pacific and Fiji? I see the university and Fiji as sites of crossing, as critical crossroads for Pacific studies. As such, Pacific studies there bears different burdens from *estudios pacificas de Santa Cruz*; they also offer different promises.

In 1998 the University of Hawai‘i launched its Ford Foundation–funded Moving Cultures project. Coordinated by Terence Wesley-Smith and Geoff White, it was aimed at rethinking and bridging Asian and Pacific studies. Asian or cultural studies celebrities Arif Dirlik and Vicente Rafael were invited to speak to Pacific studies practitioners. The project unfolded with a workshop in Palau (see Wesley-Smith 2000), conferences in Honolulu and Los Angeles, and would have culminated in a technologically and pedagogically innovative pilot course being cotaught between the Universities of Hawai‘i and the South Pacific in 2000. Instead, because of political disruptions in Fiji, Hawai‘i collaborated with Canterbury University to successfully run a joint module.

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Pacific Representations at Canberra University in 1998 was convened by Elaine Chanter. The bigwigs at this conference were Epeli Hau‘ofa, Satendra Nandan, and Brij Lal. My sister presented a paper that she and I cowrote on the personalized dimensions of Pacific studies. My appearance at the conference was made via a videotaped segment that was surrounded by family photographs and ethnographic footage. Ours was the only presentation to use a multimedia approach in a conference that aimed to explore representations of Pacific peoples. To be honest, although we thought it was pretty clever getting two Teaiwas for the price of one, and I had the legitimate reason of not attending in person because I had teaching commitments in Suva, I was really quite relieved to send my sister to Canberra alone. I am still a little ambivalent about the potential for sibling rivalry in a professional setting.

Pacific studies at the University of the South Pacific is caught between a colonial legacy of devaluing indigenous knowledges and a post-colonial mercenary approach to knowledge production. The handful of academics who are genuinely committed to promoting the welfare of Pacific peoples and fostering learning communities in this regional institution are often overworked, undervalued, and encumbered with extracurricular social and community obligations.

After five years of teaching there, and having my intellectual and personal life become thoroughly articulated with the immeasurable demands of family and friends, I lost some of the edge—in my writing and analysis—that came from Santa Cruz. But I have gained a different edge from living and working in Fiji.

The edge that I gained from being away from the Histcon edge—the top of this Santa Cruz cliff—is that I have come, so-to-speak, to learn of the big and little currents, face to face. I have learned that Pacific studies must ultimately be about people (*he t ngata, he t ngata, he t ngata*, as the M ori proverb goes) and relationships (the *va tapua'i* for Samoans; see Wendt in Hereniko and Wilson 1999).

Pacific studies is not only an academic field; it is an especially intimate field that people enter, often with highly personalized stakes. Pacific studies contains awesome liberatory forces; perhaps that is why the institution and its twelve governments have been reluctant to give it a permanent home. But as long as Pacific studies continues to achieve its critical edge from the edges of the Pacific, its contributions to knowledge production will remain largely impotent, irrelevant, and unwelcome in the face-to-face realities of the islands.

In 1998 the PHA conference in the Solomon Islands was very well attended by Solomon Islanders. The conference was jointly organized by Max Quanchi of the Pacific History Association and Julian Treadaway of the USP Centre Honiara, who was so inspired by the conference that he organized a follow-up conference a year later. The Pacific Islands Political Science Association (PIPSA) conference was held in Christchurch that year. Tupuola Efi was keynote speaker again, and New Zealand-based Polynesian artist Michel Tuffery was feted by conference convener and Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies Uentabo Neemia.

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1999—a South Pacific Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (SPACLALS) meeting was convened in Suva by Professor Subramani through the Pacific Writing Forum at the University of the South Pacific. Hailed as one of the best conferences ever by those who attended, the conference's success was due in large part to the atmosphere of a festive reunion that the conference organizers fostered.

Pioneers of the first, second, and "niu" waves of Pacific literature: Albert Wendt, Marjorie Crocombe, Epeli Hau'ofa, Vanessa Griffen, Vilsoni Hereniko, Regis Stella, Sudesh Mishra, Sia Figiel, and John Pule, among others, were invited—not to give academic papers themselves, but to listen, enjoy, launch their own publications, and perform their work if they wanted.

This was the kind of atmosphere we had dreamed of in our Tangilehua moment. A gathering that was comfortable yet stimulating; on terms that were ours.

VITI KEI NA KAU VEILATAI—
FIJI AND THE (HOLY) CROSS

I am keenly aware of the trendiness of infusing scholarship with anecdotes, poetry, and indigenous words and concepts in the intellectual and academic currents that have culminated in this Native-Pacific-Cultural-Studies-on-the-Edge moment. I must admit I don't know what to do with the trendiness. Do I resist it just because it's trendy? Can I participate in it with integrity? Where do "we" go from here?

One of my deepest ambivalences about Pacific studies is the occasional attempt by well-meaning conference conveners to frame academic work as somehow sacred in a native context, as exemplified by the increasingly ritual invitation to have a conference blessed by representatives of indigenous communities. I shudder at any implication that the work we do is rarefied or *tapu*. Pacific studies, I firmly believe, must be *noa*—available to challenge, criticism, connection to all.

For me, Fiji and Santa Cruz embody this complicated tension between the *tapu* and the *noa*, the clifftop and the face-to-face.

I have no solutions to the questions and dilemmas posed by the academic, intellectual, political, and cultural configuration Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge. The answers must come from the dialogue that can and should take place in symposia, conferences, meetings, gatherings, such as those I have outlined on the other side of this page. If we do not have those discussions . . . can we really say we have met face-to-face?

Even those conference participants who were invited to present academic papers at the SPACLALS conference *Imagining Oceania* were to a large extent also returning to the University of the South Pacific for a reunion: Sina Va'ai from Sāmoa, Sandra Tawake from North Carolina. The academic component of the conference signaled the progress made since the last major Pacific literature conference held in Hawai'i five years earlier. And one of the characteristics of this progress was demonstrated by a stunning interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaborative presentation by Tarcisius Kabutaulaka and my sister Katerina. Moving forward from Epeli Hau'ofa's "Sea of Islands" idea, Tarcisius and Katerina visually, lyrically, and physically mapped intellectual histories in the Pacific that included the work and play of children, parents, grandparents, foreigners, and natives.

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Out of Oceania, convened by the UH Center for Pacific Islands Studies in October 1999, had the most explicit call for an engagement between Pacific studies and cultural studies up to that point. Focusing on Pacific migrations and diasporas, the conference drew some exciting participants from the traditional Pacific studies stomping grounds in Hawai'i, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, and attracted a new crop of scholars from the United States. There was a noticeable absence of participation from the University of the South Pacific. Whether *Out of Oceania*, as an academic moment, will significantly affect either Pacific studies or cultural studies is yet to be seen.

I close with an untitled, previously unpublished poem that I wrote in 1999. “Fiji” and “Santa Cruz” function in this poem not simply as places you can find on a map, but as signifiers of types of intellectual cultures and communities.

I share this poem here because it describes what I have experienced as some of the tensions of having to negotiate Pacific studies at and between the edges of Native and cultural studies. Others will have their own landmarks and markers of such fraught intellectual journeys.

*I came across from Fiji to Santa Cruz
Uncertain but hopeful*

*I return from Santa Cruz to Fiji
Tired and confused*

*From crossing to cross
And cross to crossing*

*A holy cross
Wholly crossing*

Unpacified

This ocean

Still

Has much to teach me

The University of the South Pacific was well represented at a special meeting of the Pacific History Association in the Solomon Islands convened once again by Julian Treadaway of the USP Centre Honiara in late 1999. Morgan Tuimaleali’ifano, lecturer in history and politics at the University of the South Pacific, who had been elected PHA president in Honiara the year before, ran a workshop on writing national and community histories with Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, USP continuing education coordinator. The emphasis at this conference, however, was on developing Solomon Islands historical scholarship—and we may yet see the rise of Solomon Islands studies in spite of the recent turmoil in the country.

* * *

This brings us to 2000—which, for Pacific studies, started quite literally “on the Edge.” I shall leave the commentary on and assessment of this symposium to others. But 2000 was a busy year for Pacific studies: in June the Pacific History Association met in Canberra with the ambitious agenda of *Bursting Boundaries*; in July Victoria University of Wellington hosted a conference on Pacific communities, titled *Waka*; and in September, Brij Lal expanded the Australian National University’s historical approach to Pacific studies by convening a conference on creative writing. In November the Center for Pacific Islands Studies celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with an almost gala conference that fittingly honored Director Bob Kiste. The PIPSA conference scheduled for December 2000 in Suva, and organized by USP’s Sandra Tarte, had to be canceled because of the political and social trauma Fiji is currently facing.

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Abstract

In this paper, I reflect on the evolution of Native Pacific Cultural Studies with a partial professional history of Pacific conferences over the last ten years. I ask what constitutes the edge for each of the components of Native, Pacific, Cultural Studies and whether such an aggregate is viable. There are unresolved tensions and conflicts between each of the components—Native and Pacific studies, Native and Cultural studies, Pacific and Cultural studies—which are highlighted in the paper. I situate my own work in this history and in these tensions, and discuss the changes in direction in my intellectual and theoretical approach to the Pacific.

KEYWORDS: Cultural studies, Pacific history, Pacific studies, representation