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## EDITOR'S FORUM

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### RETHINKING PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

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The article identifies several rationales for university-level Pacific Islands studies programs and considers their implications for curriculum design and development. It discusses some fundamental conceptual problems associated with area studies generally, before advocating a new emphasis on interdisciplinary forms of scholarship and more-rigorous attempts to decolonize the field of study.

**IF THE RATIO** of university students and researchers to residents is anything to go by, Pacific Islanders are among the most studied people on earth. At the *Mānoa* campus of the University of Hawai'i alone, more than thirty regional specialists devote much of their time and energy to Pacific Islands-related research and teaching. Some fifty courses, with annual enrollments of more than two thousand, focus exclusively on the region or parts of it. At the Australian National University, at least forty faculty and a similar number of postgraduate students pursue Pacific Islands research interests. There are also significant concentrations of Pacific Islands resources at the University of Auckland, Canterbury University, Macquarie University, Brigham Young University-Hawai'i, University of the South Pacific, University of Papua New Guinea, and University of Guam.<sup>1</sup> Many other universities and colleges in the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Japan, and Indonesia have one or two resident regional specialists and include some Pacific Islands mate-

rials in their curricula (Crocombe 1987; Crocombe and Meleisea 1988, Quanchi 1993, 1989).<sup>2</sup>

Of particular interest is the recent proliferation of organized, interdisciplinary programs of study that allow undergraduate and graduate students to major in Pacific Islands studies. Until relatively recently, the only such program at the graduate level was the M.A. in Pacific Islands Studies, which has been offered by the University of Hawai'i since 1950. In the 1970s and 1980s several Maori studies masters degree programs were launched in New Zealand. In the early 1990s James Cook University introduced a Graduate Diploma in Melanesian Studies, the Australian National University approved graduate diploma and masters programs in Pacific Islands Studies to start in 1994, Canterbury University approved an M.A. program in Pacific Studies to start in 1995, and a masters degree program in Micronesian studies got under way at the University of Guam in 1994.<sup>3</sup> The number of undergraduate programs has also increased, and it is now possible to major in Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, the windward campus of Hawai'i Pacific University (formerly Hawai'i Loa College), Brigham Young-Hawai'i, and the Australian National University. Undergraduate minors in Pacific Islands studies are offered at the University of Waikato and the Hilo campus of University of Hawai'i. Hawaiian studies are offered at several campuses in the University of Hawai'i system, and Maori studies majors are available at most New Zealand universities.<sup>4</sup>

The proposals to create or expand each of these programs have, no doubt, emphasized existing library or faculty resources, an institutional commitment to a particular Pacific Island area or population, faculty and student interest, and perhaps even some comparative advantage over other institutions in the competition for external funding. More difficult to identify are the likely intellectual or academic justifications for organizing a teaching or research program around a particular geographic or cultural area, rather than on the basis of an established academic discipline. The promotional materials associated with these programs are rather vague on the question of purpose.<sup>5</sup> If nothing else, this vagueness presents practical difficulties for program planning and development. Without a clear sense of the intellectual underpinnings of the enterprise, how can appropriate curricula be designed, new faculty positions defined, or library resources evaluated?

The purpose of this article is to identify several possible rationales for Pacific Islands studies programs and to consider their implications for curriculum design and development. The focus is on programs at the graduate level, although the discussion may have relevance for undergraduate studies as well.

### **Pragmatic Rationale**

Some of the most active centers for Pacific Islands studies are located outside the region (at least as it is usually defined), in metropolitan countries such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. An important driving force behind their development has been a pragmatic need to know about the Pacific Islands places with which the metropolitan countries have to deal.

In the United States the need to know about foreign places, including the islands of the Pacific, became pressing during World War II, when area and language specialists were recruited to train military personnel in appropriate skills. According to Schwartz, this was "an enterprise designed to achieve an encapsulated understanding of the unknown areas of the world in which we suddenly found ourselves engaged" (1980:15). After the war, the increasingly global nature of U.S. economic and political interests encouraged the rapid expansion of area and language programs, many of them modeled on their wartime counterparts. With the onset of the cold war, international education in the United States became geared to the competition with the Soviet Union for global influence (Heginbotham 1994:35-43). Funding for area studies programs came in large part from private foundations and the federal government, rather than from the universities themselves (Pye 1975:10-13).

The early history of Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai'i reflects these broad national trends. Several of the "founding fathers" of the program were involved in training or intelligence activities in the Pacific theater during the war, and the establishment of the U.S.-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in Micronesia in 1947 provided an early boost to Pacific Islands research on the Mānoa campus (Quigg 1987:17). Until relatively recently, the program received much of its funding from external sources closely associated with the growth of area studies generally." A persistent theme in the applications for these grants is that Americans should know about this part of the world and that academic endeavors to this end are worthy of government and other support.'

Without this pragmatic rationale, characterized by Embree as "the need to know one's enemies and one's friends" (1983:14), it is unlikely that whole programs would have been constructed around geographic areas, thereby distinguishing them in fundamental ways from other academic fields of study which typically claim a more detached and universalist posture.<sup>8</sup> Fifty years ago the novelty of the area studies approach lay in the assumption that it is possible to understand other societies and even whole regions in their totality, that there are certain essential characteristics that, once grasped,

will lead to an adequate understanding of the whole. Although few scholars would subscribe to such essentialist notions today, the fundamental unit of analysis remains the area, and the basic idea is still to put a range of disciplinary tools and perspectives to work in regional contexts.

The structure and requirements of the M.A. in Pacific Islands Studies program at the University of Hawai'i are consistent with the pragmatic rationale as manifest in the idea of area studies. Students are encouraged to learn about the region as a whole, multidisciplinary is emphasized, and students must acquire a "good command" of the anthropology, geography, history, and current affairs of the Pacific Islands (Center for Pacific Islands Studies 1993:14-15).

Australia has always had good strategic, political, and economic reasons to learn about its Asian and Pacific neighbors, but its version of area studies is rather different from the dominant model in the United States. The tradition of direct government funding of academic institutions is much stronger than in the United States, and in 1946 the federal government created the Australian National University specifically to promote research and post-graduate training in subjects of national importance. A significant part of the overseas dimension of the national interest was represented by the Research School of Pacific Studies, one of the new university's four constituent schools (Crawford 1968). According to an official publication, the rationale for establishing the school was "essentially the growing awareness of the importance to Australia of a sound understanding of the problems both of the 'Pacific Island neighbourhood, and the near North, i.e. Southeast and East Asia'" (Australian National University 1990:1).

The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (as it is now called) has sponsored research on all parts of the Pacific Islands region, but there has always been a special focus on Papua New Guinea. This emphasis is not surprising given Australia's colonial involvement in Papua and New Guinea and its continuing strategic and economic interests there. During the late colonial period, key policy decisions were often based on reports commissioned from scholars based at the Australian National University. Indeed, a special New Guinea Research Unit of the university was established in Port Moresby in 1961 to conduct social and economic research in the territory (May 1976:7). After Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975, this role was assumed by a local entity, the Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research (which later became the National Research Institute), but close ties with the Australian National University continued for a number of years.

Unlike its American area studies counterparts, the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies has always been organized primarily by discipline or topic. For example, the school was recently reorganized into four main

divisions, each representing a discipline or cluster of related disciplines.<sup>9</sup> Some subunits, such as the Department of Political and Social Change or the National Centre for Development Studies, could be described as interdisciplinary in nature. But only a few entities, such as the Contemporary China Centre and the North East Asia Program, are explicitly organized around a particular area of the world. Nevertheless, the recent attempt to develop an organized, interdisciplinary program of Pacific Islands studies does not represent an entirely new departure.<sup>10</sup> The area-based and interdisciplinary New Guinea Research Unit is an obvious precedent. Furthermore, the Faculty of Asian Studies has been in existence since 1962, and interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate degrees in Asian studies have been offered for a number of years (Australian National University 1993).

The pragmatic rationale is clearly evident in the structures of the Australian National University's Graduate Diploma and M.A. programs in Pacific Islands Studies. Both programs require students to complete three core course-work units. One of these, "Images, Identities, and Issues," provides general background and discusses a range of contemporary issues, while the other two concern island economies and economic policy. Additional courses are chosen from existing Pacific-related offerings, and M.A. students must also complete a research essay. An appropriate mix of courses and a suitable research topic are identified in consultation with the adviser to suit a student's particular needs. The programs are advertised as "especially relevant for those who are seeking academic preparation for, or those who are engaged in a career requiring an understanding of the Pacific Islands region, whether in diplomacy, the public service, teaching, journalism or business" (*Pacific Islands Group Newsletter*, June 1993, 6).

New Zealand also has a long colonial history in the region and an ongoing Pragmatic interest in developments there. Like their Australian counterparts, New Zealand academics were influential in colonial policy making in Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau, and university-based research and teaching continue to inform New Zealand's foreign policy toward the region.<sup>11</sup> However, although public policy-oriented "think tanks" do exist within the state-funded university system, there is no New Zealand equivalent of the Australian National University. Canterbury University's Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies was established in 1985 at the bequest of a private individual, whose endowment continues to fund most of the centers modest budget.<sup>12</sup> The Centre for Pacific Studies at Auckland University was launched in 1985 with the help of funding from the Ministry of Pacific Islands Affairs and a private organization but has been funded entirely by the university since 1994. To date, its activities have been geared primarily to the needs and concerns of resident Pacific Islanders.

The powerful presence of the pragmatic rationale, with its implicit principle of national interest, does not necessarily render area studies an illegitimate part of the academy. First, the argument that there is a sharp distinction between "pure" and "applied" forms of scholarship is difficult to sustain. A more appropriate distinction might be between university programs that provide some sort of technical or professional training, including those structured mainly by pragmatic considerations, and those that emphasize research and critical inquiry. Second, the postmodern turn in the social sciences serves to emphasize, once again, that knowledge is never a neutral commodity that stands entirely free of the historical or political context in which it is produced. Finally, the assembled area studies resources are typically used for a wide variety of scholarly, political, and cultural purposes, many of which have no obvious connection to crass geopolitical concerns. Heginbotham argues that in the United States scholarship apparently unrelated to cold war concerns or even actively hostile to national goals has been tolerated by funding agencies, either as a concession to principles of academic freedom or in the belief that all in-depth knowledge of foreign areas is potentially useful (1994:35).

Nevertheless, some fundamental conceptual problems are associated with this form of scholarship. The first concerns the basic unit of analysis, which is by definition an area or region of the globe. As Edward Said (1979:4) and others have pointed out, these geographic sectors are not inert facts of nature, and there is nothing self-evident about them. When Professor Douglas Oliver noted in connection with a review of the University of Hawai'i's program in 1970 that the "Pacific Islands Area" was "an arbitrary and unjustifiable abstraction," he was referring mainly to the enormous cultural and geographic diversity contained within its boundaries (quoted in Quigg 1987:91). However, in another sense, the boundaries of such entities are far from arbitrary. Rather, they are historical constructs that reflect the strategic interests of hegemonic powers at particular moments in history. As Ravi Palat points out, the term "Southeast Asia" gained currency only after use to designate Lord Mountbatten's command in World War II (1993:9). The standard definition of "the Pacific Islands" is the region served by the South Pacific Commission--an organization established in 1947 to coordinate the activities of a handful of allied colonial powers with territories in this vast ocean (Fry 1994:136). When the Dutch lost their war with Indonesia over Irian Jaya in the early 1960s "the Pacific Islands" suddenly lost its second largest territory, and some 20 percent of its population, to "Southeast Asia."

Almost inevitably such constructs become reified when they are used to organize an entire field of study. The tendency is to search for or simply

assume unifying regional cultural characteristics, common histories and pre-histories, and shared contemporary issues and problems. An entity that was created at a particular moment in history takes on a timeless quality; one that was conceived in the context of colonial administration and control assumes a mantle of indigenous integrity. The issue here is not so much whether the unit of analysis makes sense in terms of some set of innate characteristics. If such units are always constructed (and always contestable), then the important question becomes who decides where the boundaries are drawn and for what purpose. The danger is that issues of power become obscured behind a bland facade of supposedly objective scholarship.

If the first problem with area studies scholarship relates to an undue emphasis on assumed internal relationships and continuities, the second concerns the related and opposite tendency to ignore or downplay external linkages and wider contexts. As Eric Wolf argued, if our basic units of analysis are endowed with "the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls" (1982:6).

Creating a billiard ball out of the Pacific Islands region makes it easy to disregard early connections with places to the west and, especially, to minimize the importance of later connections with Europe and other centers of Political and economic power. Analyses of economic development problems in the Pacific Islands for example, typically emphasize internal "barriers" or "impediments" to growth while managing to ignore the global forces that have structured island economies for centuries. Such a bounded conceptual Universe, with its inherent emphasis on insider-outsider dichotomies, can also distract attention from the complex patterns of accommodation and resistance provoked by colonial penetration and incorporation into a global economy.

### **The Laboratory Rationale**

An alternative rationale for studying the Pacific Islands was outlined by Douglas Oliver two decades ago: "I suggest that because of their wide diversities, small-scale dimensions and relative isolation, the Pacific Islands can provide excellent--in some ways unique--laboratory-like opportunities for gaining deeper understandings of Human Biology, Political Science, etc." (quoted in Quigg 1987:91). Western scientists have long recognized this opportunity and the results of their investigations have profoundly affected a number of academic disciplines. For instance, information from early European voyages of exploration forced the reconsideration of some of the

fundamentals of natural science (MacLeod and Rehbock 1988); the nature of Pacific Islands societies sparked debates about noble and ignoble savages which made their marks on European philosophy, art, and literature (Smith 1960, 1992). Perhaps the most sustained impact has been on anthropology, and Pacific materials have featured prominently in some of that discipline's most significant theoretical and methodological debates. The potential for this kind of work remains enormous. Studies of change by social scientists such as Ben Finney (1973, 1987), Bill Standish (1992), and Randal Stewart (1992) in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, or Fran Hezel (1989) and Don Rubinstein (1992) in Micronesia are important not only for what they can tell us about particular societies, but for their contributions to a more general body of knowledge.

The laboratory rationale has undoubtedly provided an important impetus for the development of all existing Pacific Islands studies programs. These programs have usually been built around cadres of regional specialists, most of whom remain based in "traditional" university departments and continue to approach Pacific Islands research and teaching activities from the perspectives of their respective disciplines. Most graduate students pursuing Pacific-related research topics continue to do so through discipline-based departments. Those that do not, for example candidates for the Pacific Islands studies' M.A. at the University of Hawai'i, are usually encouraged to frame their research projects in terms of questions of wider relevance.

In the laboratory approach, the region is no longer the primary unit of analysis, and some of the thorny conceptual problems associated with area studies disappear. However, other conceptual difficulties emerge. Douglas Oliver was enthusiastic about this type of Pacific scholarship, but he also felt that it was best pursued under the auspices of the established disciplines. If the laboratory rationale is the dominant one, the argument goes, there is simply no need for an organized program of Pacific Islands studies.

This position underestimates the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship. There is nothing preordained or inevitable about the current division of Western scholarship into a number of "traditional" disciplines. Rather, each specialty emerged under particular historical circumstances, often as a result of specific ideological differences between the leading practitioners of the day. Once established, however, each branch of the human sciences quickly adopted practices and invented a tradition that served to reinforce its differences from other branches. Wolf, among others, deplores the fragmentation of the social sciences and the resulting tendency to disassemble the human world into bits for study, without ever reassembling the totality (1982:7). Certainly, the field of Pacific Islands studies is replete with examples of anthropologists who emphasize "culture" at the



expense of "history" or "politics," or economists who fail to consider anything beyond a narrow conceptual world of money and markets (Hooper 1993).

The early advocates of area studies in American universities saw the advantages of employing a range of disciplinary tools to provide information useful for policy makers (Palat 1993:7). However, they were not interested in engineering the fundamental reintegration of the disciplines that Wolf and others have prescribed. The approach adopted in most area studies programs is better described as "multidisciplinary" than "interdisciplinary." M.A. students in Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai'i, for example, are required to take Pacific-related courses in a number of different disciplines, but they are not asked to synthesize what they learn in any coherent and sustained way. Research papers in the field typically borrow a fairly standard approach from a discipline (often history) and seldom venture far across established disciplinary boundaries.

To be truly interdisciplinary, a field of study would have to make a radical break with the past. As Roland Barthes argued:

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it's not enough to choose a "subject" (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one. (Quoted in Clifford 1986:l)

Developing such an approach would be challenging, to say the least. The "founding fathers" of Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai'i found their initial emphasis on interdisciplinary work difficult to sustain (Quigg 1987).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the time is ripe for another concerted attempt to come to grips with the interdisciplinary aspects of Pacific Islands studies. The interdisciplinary idea has gained considerable currency among scholars in recent years. In contrast to the 1950s and 1960s the impetus is coming from within the academy rather than from government bureaucrats or funding agencies and it is rooted in intellectual rather than geopolitical concerns. Influenced by the seminal work of French philosopher Michel Foucault, scholars and students throughout the social sciences and humanities are reconsidering the epistemological foundations of their disciplines (see, for example Rabinow 1984; Clifford and Marcus 1986; White 1973). Some, like James Clifford (e.g., 1988), are throwing off disciplinary constraints and pioneering innovative new approaches. Programs like Pacific Islands studies that operate beyond the institutional grip of the "tra-

ditional" departments are particularly well placed to further explore these new possibilities.

### **The Empowerment Rationale**

Both the pragmatic and laboratory rationales for Pacific Islands studies largely reflect the agendas and priorities of outsiders, and both bear colonial and neocolonial taints. In the pragmatic frame, on the one hand, the ultimate purpose has been influence rather than understanding. The laboratory mode, on the other hand, can easily reduce Pacific Islanders to mere objects for study. A prime example was the Harvard-based study of population biology that scrutinized and probed thousands of Solomon Islanders in the 1960s and 1970s in the esoteric interest of science (Friedlaender 1975).

The decolonization of the region remains incomplete, but it has already changed the nature of Pacific Islands scholarship. The research agenda has been altered to reflect the emergence of a whole new range of economic, political, and social problems and issues. Disciplines such as Pacific history have attempted to become more "island centered" and less imperial in their concerns and emphases. More important, the former objects of inquiry have acquired the political and educational abilities to speak up and answer back. As Vilsoni Hereniko put it, Pacific Islanders are no longer "content to allow representations of themselves in print to be the preserve of foreigners" (1994:413). This new political environment has given rise to a third **bundle** of justifications for Pacific Islands studies that can be called the empowerment rationale.

The politics of Pacific Islands scholarship are complex. Everybody agrees that more indigenous voices and perspectives are needed, but there is considerable disagreement beyond that. For some, indigenous participation on the basis of equal opportunity is sufficient. But for others, the field will not be decolonized until Pacific Islanders are fully in control of a curriculum and research agenda long dominated by foreigners. It is sometimes claimed that this view is articulated only by a few forceful individuals and is not widely shared. However, it has its proponents on all the major campuses in the region, and many more sympathizers may exist among the silent majority of regional students and faculty. For example, Haunani-Kay Trask's broadside (1991) against Roger Keesing for his "Creating the Past" article (1989) struck a responsive chord throughout the region, as did Epeli Hau'ofa's revisionist article (1994), "Our Sea of Islands."

Western-trained social scientists who believe they are working in the interests of Pacific Islanders are often puzzled--even hurt--by such rumblings and tend to dismiss the "activists" as misguided, ungrateful, or simply

power-hungry.<sup>14</sup> Yet the Pacific advocates of "indigenization" are part of a global movement whose rationale deserves further scrutiny.

For these scholars, the real problem is the way that social science is practiced in non-Western societies, by Western and indigenous scholars alike. They reject the notion that social science as developed and practiced in the West is a neutral and universal discourse, and deplore the uncritical adoption of Western concepts and methodologies by Third World scholars. According to Syed Farid Alatas, indigenous scholars too often become the intellectual prisoners of their Westernized training, unable "to be creative and raise original problems . . . devise original analytical methods, and alienated from the main issues of indigenous society" (1993:308).

Several responses to the so-called captive mind problem are possible. One is to deny that it is a significant problem and argue that Western social science is generally applicable in the Third World, albeit with a few conceptual or methodological modifications here and there. This view is probably dominant in Western universities but is unacceptable to most in the indigenization movement, who advocate much more radical reforms. A second response is to argue that social science is so steeped in Western intellectual and material culture, so thoroughly ethnocentric, that it must be rejected entirely. Powerful strands of this response are apparent in some of the writings of Haunani-Kay Trask, for example when she dismissed Roger Keesing's academic "mumbo jumbo" about the invention of tradition in the Pacific and indicated that Hawaiian nationalists have made a conscious choice "for things Native over things non-Native" (1991:159, 163).

The danger with an "either-or" approach to indigenization is that Western ethnocentrism, or what Edward Said calls "orientalism" (1979), can easily be replaced by indigenous ethnocentrism or "reverse orientalism" in non-western scholarship (Alatas 1993:313; see also Amin 1989; Moghadam 1989). For Said, whose earlier work did much to stimulate the indigenization debate, this outcome is unfortunate, condemning its practitioners "to an impoverished politics of knowledge based only upon the assertion and reassertion of identity" Instead he has suggested a third response to the problem of Western academic hegemony, one that seeks to create genuinely universal forms of scholarship. The ultimate purpose of such reforms, he has argued should be "the reintegration of all those peoples and cultures, once confined and reduced to peripheral status, with the rest of the human race" (Said 1991:24).

This reintegration involves not the wholesale rejection of Western scholarship, but its "selective adaptation" to the needs and circumstances of non-Western societies and cultures (Alatas 1993:312). At the very least it requires social science practitioners to question the appropriateness of all of

their activities in non-Western locations, including the identification of problems for investigation and the selection of concepts and methodologies. Of greater significance is the perceived need to create "systematized bodies of knowledge," rooted in indigenous histories and cultures, on which more appropriate forms of scholarship can be based. According to Alatas, "Such social sciences are not confined to the study of the civilizations of their origin but are extended to explain and interpret the whole world from various non-Western vantage points" (1993:309).

There are many obstacles to the indigenization of academic discourse, not least in the Pacific where the struggle against domination, especially cultural domination, is only beginning and questions of identity remain vital. However, these issues are being raised and pursued in the region, and the volume of "indigenized" Pacific Islands literature is likely to grow (see, for example, Hau'ofa 1975, 1994; Meleisea 1978, 1987; Wendt 1987; Kame'eleihiwa 1992). Meanwhile, the creative writings of Pacific poets, novelists, and playwrights are undoubtedly the richest sources of indigenous voices and representations currently available (see, for example, Hereniko 1994).

Mainly because of the dominance of other rationales, the older, established Pacific Islands studies programs are not particularly well placed to respond effectively to the new, more politicized environment. Some of the newer programs, especially the Hawaiian studies program at the University of Hawai'i and the various Maori studies programs in New Zealand universities, in contrast, are largely driven by empowerment criteria of one sort or another. Although Sidney Mead's proposed University of Aotearoa has yet to be realized, several degree-granting "tribal universities" have recently been established to promote Maoritanga and foster indigenous ways of knowing (Mead 1983:343-346; Hanson 1989:894-897). Auckland University's Pacific studies program, established primarily to serve the needs of resident (non-Maori) Polynesians, also falls into this category. The University of Guam appears willing to accommodate would-be decolonizers by promising research skills that allow students to contribute to knowledge of Micronesia and to respond "to problems and challenges encountered there" (*Pacific News from Manoa*, Sept.-Dec. 1993, 5). But there is no sign of an indigenization agenda of the type advocated for Hawaiian studies by Trask and Kame'eleihiwa, by Mead for Maori studies, or by Said and Alatas for non-Western studies generally.

### **New Directions for Pacific Islands Studies**

Each of the three rationales for Pacific Islands studies outlined here has its own constituency and its own legitimacy. While they are not necessarily

mutually exclusive, each has particular implications for program planning and development. A program designed to prepare professionals to do business in the region, for example, will be structured quite differently from one where the dominant aim is to liberate the minds of oppressed people. Nevertheless, there are three fundamental issues that need to be addressed when contemplating the future of any organized program of Pacific Islands studies.

First, there is the question of why the region, or a particular part of it, should be treated separately from surrounding areas. Whatever its origins, the idea of the Pacific Islands has assumed a certain reality over the last five decades through the actions of regional organizations, international agencies, and governments. Nevertheless, "the Pacific Islands" has only limited utility as a concept and is certainly too slippery to form the basis for most types of academic inquiry. For most purposes, it makes little sense to talk of Pacific Islands politics, culture, history, economics, art, literature, or anything else, because these formulations assume a nonexistent regional integrity. Rather than move toward more solid, much smaller, spatial categories, it makes more sense to make theme or discourse the primary organizing principle in program planning and curriculum development. Starting with thematic concerns does not mean that place is ignored, but that the appropriate geographic, cultural, social, or political unit of analysis is not predetermined by extraneous considerations. (Interestingly, for pragmatic reasons having to do with the end of the cold war, U.S. funding agencies also appear to be advocating a move away from regions toward themes [Heginbotham 1994: 36-37].)

Instead of the politics, history, or culture of the Pacific Islands, then, it is more useful to think and talk of politics or history or culture *in* the Pacific Islands (Denning 1989). In practical terms, this means first identifying fundamental questions of human concern, such as what are wealth and poverty, and how are they created? What is production, and how do people organize themselves to produce the material necessities of life? What is power, and how is it exercised? What is culture, and how is it expressed? What is identity and how is it constructed? What is gender, and how are gender relations determined? Only after appropriate sets and subsets of such concerns have been identified and refined can we begin to identify geographic or cultural sites and historical periods where they can usefully be explored.<sup>15</sup> (Not surprisingly, the themes identified as important for study by the U.S. funding agencies are more narrowly defined to reflect national interests and concerns.)

Second, there is the issue of interdisciplinarity and what it means for a program of study. If university work in the social sciences and humanities,

especially at the graduate level, is all about research and analysis, then questions of epistemology are unavoidable. Without a strong sense of how knowledge is acquired and verified, it is extremely difficult to evaluate other people's work, let alone design and conduct original research. Each of the "traditional" human science disciplines is based on certain epistemological assumptions, and its students can choose among a range of established approaches to inquiry, conceptual frameworks, methodologies, and so on. Students in these programs learn how to "do" anthropology, political science, or whatever, but how can students learn to "do" Pacific Islands studies?

One option is to argue that there is no satisfactory way of doing it and to direct students to discipline-based degree programs. Alternatively, one can deny that it is a problem and let students "muddle through" their research projects using whatever bits of discipline they pick up along the way. A third option is to require that entering students have an appropriate disciplinary grounding for their proposed research projects or that they acquire one as part of the degree program. A more rewarding option, however, which could make a real contribution to scholarship, is to guide and encourage students to develop approaches that are truly interdisciplinary in nature.

Interdisciplinary work is distinguished first, and most obviously, by defining its objects of inquiry without reference to established disciplinary boundaries. It acknowledges that societies do not fall neatly into segments or compartments with labels coinciding with the names of university departments. It sees the connections between political, cultural, economic, social, linguistic, or spiritual phenomena, rather than emphasizing their separateness. In the field of Pacific Islands studies, perhaps the most notable convergences have occurred at the boundaries between the disciplines of anthropology (or, more properly, ethnography) and history (see, for example, Hanlon 1988; Salmond 1991; Sahlins and Kirch 1992.) By putting back together two major disciplines pulled apart in the nineteenth century, works of political economy are also inherently interdisciplinary. In the Pacific Islands, such writings typically incorporate anthropological material as well (e.g., Brookfield 1972; Narayan 1984; Thompson and MacWilliam 1992; Buck 1993).

The postmodern movement in the social sciences has drawn attention to a second, less obvious, aspect of becoming interdisciplinary. This movement recognizes the key roles of creativity, subjectivity, and poetics in the "science" of interpreting and representing the social world. It encourages 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. A seminal work in this

genre is James Clifford's "Identity in Mashpee," which uses a variety of literary techniques to investigate the tribal claims of Mashpee Indians (1988:277-346). In the Pacific, the postmodern challenge has been taken up in a variety of ways by anthropologists (e.g., Lindstrom 1993; Thomas 1992; Gewertz and Errington 1991), historians (e.g., Neumann 1992), and literature specialists (e.g., Hereniko 1995).

Students in Pacific Islands studies ought to be introduced to the interdisciplinary approach in the same way that students in other programs are introduced to their respective disciplines. A course or seminar for this purpose would discuss the intellectual history of the approach, examine and critique existing works in the genre, and develop proposals for individual research projects.

Finally, there is the issue of indigenous voices, perspectives, and epistemologies, and how they can be integrated into the dominant discourses of Pacific Islands studies. In a sense, decolonization is an inherent part of the business of becoming interdisciplinary, in that this process requires the critical scrutiny of established modes of inquiry. This approach allows ethnocentric aspects of orthodox approaches to be identified and facilitates the incorporation of indigenous epistemologies and perspectives (see, for example, Kame'eleihiwa 1992; Diaz 1994; Hanlon 1993). At the least, students in Pacific Islands studies programs can be exposed to the growing literature on indigenization and encouraged to discuss its implications for their own academic inquiries.

Epistemology is not the only issue here. It is also important to select the agenda of themes and issues on the curriculum with care. Even selecting an appropriate list of "critical" issues to discuss is inherently problematic, as there are radically different perspectives regarding what is important and for whom. It is easy to revert to conventional laundry lists of regional issues and problems and to forget that these tend to reflect primarily the interests and concerns of external powers or regional elites. Since no list can be neutral or objective, the best we can hope to do is constantly to raise questions about whose interests are enhanced or threatened by particular events or trends.

### NOTES

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1. Most of these universities have established an institutional focus for Pacific Islands studies: the Centre for Pacific Studies at Auckland, the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at Canterbury, the Institute for Polynesian Studies at Brigham Young-Hawai'i, and the Institute for Pacific Studies at University of the South Pacific. In 1994, the Australian National University established the Pacific Islands Liaison Centre. The University of Papua New Guinea has no such institutional base. The National Research Institute (which combined the former institutes for Papua New Guinea Studies, and Applied Economic and Social Research) has an extensive program of applied social, economic, and cultural research.

2. Some of these have also institutionalized Pacific Islands studies. For example, James Cook University of North Queensland has a Melanesian Studies Centre; University of New South Wales has a Centre for South Pacific Studies; University of Oregon has a Pacific Islands Studies program within a Center for Asian and Pacific Studies; University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands has a Centre for Pacific Studies; Kagoshima University in Japan has a Research Center for the South Pacific; and University of Hasanuddin in Indonesia has a Center for Pacific Studies.

3. The Australian National University's programs did not get under way in 1994 as planned because of low enrollments. The strategic plan for Auckland's Centre for Pacific Studies includes postgraduate studies, but no programs have been formally proposed. A masters degree in Hawaiian studies (or possibly Polynesian studies) is being planned at the University of Hawai'i.

4. A major in Pacific Islands studies has been proposed for the community college in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia.

5. The M.A. program at the University of Hawai'i, for example, "is intended for students who desire a multidisciplinary degree focused on the Pacific region" (Center for Pacific Islands Studies 1993:14). The University of Guam promises its M.A. students an "interdisciplinary understanding" of Micronesia that will allow them to respond to regional "challenges and problems" (*Pacific News from Mānoa*, Sept.-Dec. 1993, 5). The Australian National University's M.A. and diploma programs are apparently designed to provide "academic preparation" for professionals operating in the region (*Pacific Islands Group Newsletter*, June 1993, 6).

6. Over the years, these sources have included the Carnegie Corporation, the Asia Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Information Agency.

7. Copies of all of the applications are located in the files of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, and Quigg discusses some of the earlier ones (1987). The narratives usually emphasize that it is the only such center in the United States.

8. For example, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Hawai'i tells prospective students that the purpose of the discipline is to gain "a basic understanding of the



origin and development of humanity," while the Department of History defines its task as "the study of change and continuity in human society over time" (University of Hawai'i 1993).

9. These are Political Science and International Relations, Society and Environment (which includes departments of anthropology, human geography, and linguistics), Pacific and Asian History, and Economics.

10. Informal networks based on common interest in the Pacific Islands have always existed at the Australian National University. The formation of a Pacific Islands Group, with its own newsletter, the creation of interdisciplinary teaching programs, and the proposal to establish a Pacific Islands Liaison Centre may be part of a defensive strategy designed to counter a new institutional emphasis on Asia. This new emphasis, reflected in the insertion of "Asian" into the title of the research school in 1994, in turn, reflects the increasing importance of Asia for Australia.

11. For example, I. G. Bertram and R. F. Watters, two academics based at Victoria University of Wellington, were commissioned by the government to report on New Zealand's relations with the smaller Pacific Islands countries (1984). Such topics are also discussed periodically by academics and policy makers at Otago University's annual foreign-policy school.

12. Macmillan Brown wanted his money used to train New Zealanders for colonial administration. The terms of the will were eventually altered by the courts to reflect changing circumstances, allowing for the establishment of the center.

13. The requirement that students choose research topics involving at least two disciplines was eventually dropped, as was the Interdepartmental Seminar series, launched in 1953 to promote cross-disciplinary research activities. The program's interdisciplinary emphasis was further relaxed with the introduction of the Plan B, nonthesis, option in 1974, which served to shift attention away from the problems and challenges of research. About 80 percent of Pacific Islands studies M.A. degrees awarded by the University of Hawai'i since 1974 have been earned via the Plan B route (Quigg 1987).

14. In his reply to Trask, for example, Keesing hastens to establish his political credentials on issues of "past colonial invasion (including missionary invasion), present neocolonialism and global capitalism, gender, and the struggles of Third and Fourth World people" (1991:168).

15. In a sense, this means moving away from the pragmatic rationale, with its implicit emphasis on region, toward the thematic concerns of the laboratory rationale. However, the region can still provide a general context for research and inquiry.

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