FROM ROMANCE TO REALITY: IMAGES OF PACIFIC ISLANDERS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

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Beginning with Bougainville's and Cook's accounts of their voyages to the South Pacific, westerners have been beguiled by a plethora of images, exotic, erotic, and otherwise, that western explorers, traders, travelers, and missionaries created depicting the people and places they encountered as they traversed the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. From the pioneering work of the Australian art historian, Bernard Smith, in his *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768–1850* (1960) and *Imagining the Pacific* (1992), who first argued that westerners' representations of the Pacific world they encountered were a blend of romanticism and science (Beilharz 1997, 75) to the impact of globalization on contemporary Pacific art and literature (Hereniko et al. 1999; DeLoughrey 2007; Brunt 2012), both western representations of Pacific peoples and places and Pacific Islanders representations of themselves are the result of these different cultures' entanglements with one another over time. Yet we continue to see permutations—sometimes strikingly ingenious and original (Brunt 2012) but just as often "retreads" of tired tropes and cultural clichés. What accounts for the staying power of these hackneyed images? The authors in this issue present various explanations, ranging from the power of the commodification of culture to

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the hegemonic morality of western mass media (Lipset; Pigliasco; Pearson). For today's generation of students for whom social media produce constantly new intersections of the visual and the verbal, the articles in this issue illuminate the historical significance of representations that still circulate in various media today—and their contemporary complexities.

This collection is the first issue of studies of the origins and permutations of western tropes and stereotypes written primarily by anthropologists. Although the topic has been written about before, earlier studies have been mainly the purview of literary scholars, film scholars, or cultural historians. For example, in her book *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific* (2006), perhaps the best example of a recent publication that deals with one aspect of western representations of Pacific Islanders, the cultural historian Patty O'Brien has surveyed the history of the western stereotype of the exotic Pacific Island woman in colonial literature and its legacy in film and photography. In a similar manner, although in *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities* (2003), Lee Wallace suggests that it is the male body rather than the female form that initially engaged westerners' erotic attention, this study too is by a literary scholar and focuses on just one topic—that of sexuality.

The papers in this issue complement scholars' focused analyses of one specific Pacific trope—the exotic female (or male) Other (Creed and Hoorn [2001], Jolly [1997a, 1997b], O'Brian [2006], Wallace [2003])—with their attention to a range of diverse images that have come to signify Pacific Islanders, such as the diametrically opposed images of the "savage " and the "innocent," the "immoral" and the "childlike." Continuing the discussion of colonial contact between westerners and Pacific Islanders produced by anthropologist Nicholas Thomas in his study *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (1991) and literary scholar Vanessa Smith in her volume *Intimate Strangers: Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters* (2010), in her piece, Maria Lepowsky has elaborated upon the concept of "culture contact" through her discussion of the trope of a "culture of maritime contact" between westerners and Pacific Islanders. Her piece is also a contribution to the burgeoning scholarship that focuses on transpacific (Hoskins and Nguyen 2014) and transoceanic connections (Igler 2013; Thomas 1994; Eperjesi 2005).

Several of the other papers (e.g., Lutkehaus; Kempf; Schachter; McGavin) develop new insights regarding another maritime trope, that of the Pacific as "a sea of islands"—first articulated by Pacific Island anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa (1999) in his now classic analysis of the contrast in point of view between Pacific Islanders and westerners with regard to the vast expanse of the Pacific (the "ocean in us")—and now receiving renewed attention from

literary scholars such as Elizabeth M. Deloughrey (2007) in her comparative study of postcolonial literary tropes concerned with space and place in the Pacific and the Caribbean islands.

In a similar comparative move, John R. Eperjesi, in *The Imperialist Imaginary: Visions of Asia and the Pacific in American Culture* (2005), and Lanny Thompson, in his study *Imperial Archipelago: Representation and Rule in the Insular Territories Under U.S. Dominion after 1898* (2010), have examined textual as well as historical photographic representations of Caribbean and Pacific Island cultures that appeared in popular and official US publications after the Spanish–American war. Thompson's focus on colonial-era photographs and their accompanying text leads him to tease out connections between these representations—with their racialized discourse of "childlike" islanders—and the hegemonic political rule established by the United States in these regions at the turn of the century. His study of visual material, as well as that of scholars such as Quanchi (1997) and Webb (1995), provides a useful historical background to several contributions in our issue (Lipset; Flinn; Schachter; Pearson) that focus on more recent forms of mass media as important sources of both old and new tropes. His work also underscores another theme apparent in several of the chapters in this issue: that of the origins and perpetuation of US imperialism in the Pacific and the manipulation of representations of Pacific Islanders as a means of US hegemony in the region. Although not a dominant focus of analysis, the chapters by Carucci, Lutkehaus, and Schachter all add insight into the historical creation and contemporary perpetuation of Pacific Island tropes with political implications. For as Niko Besnier reminds us in his epilogue: "If we have learned anything from intellectual debates of the last half century, it is that representations are political acts." As he also points out, it is the complexities of "whose politics?" and "politics for what purposes?" that the articles in this issue interrogate.

Although earlier works like Thompson's, as well as Hereniko and Wilson's *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999), tend to concentrate on one genre, or two, as in John R. Eperjesi's *The Imperialist Imaginary: Visions of Asia and the Pacific in American Culture* (2005), that considers literature and film, the essays in *From Romance to Reality* recognize the current flexibility in definitions of "media." Thus, as well as elaborating upon both old and new tropes, the present issue examines forms of media production such as television and the Internet. Older depictions have not vanished—and literature remains a remarkable evocation of identity—but we show the adaptation of those depictions in the context of the proliferation of technological change and diffusion. Even recent studies of film, like Jeffrey Geiger's *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and the US Imperial*

Imagination (2006), follow the trend of concentrating on one medium and, in that case, on one region of the Pacific. In her book, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (2012), Adria L. Imada points the discussion of representations in another direction, describing the impact of the circulation of hula on American conquest in the Pacific, as did Desmond's early study of hula (1999). The present issue expands the reconsideration of representation in Imada's book by engaging with a wide landscape of "media worlds" (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002), including performances, festivals, atlases, and documents that inscribe multiculturalism in a visual format.

Yet there are striking examples of enduring images, even as media and performances incorporate change. Several of the essays in our collection examine the iconic trope that renders the Pacific Islands a paradise, epitome of primordial perfection (Flinn; Schachter; Pearson). In each instance, the notion of paradise intertwines with constructions of identity—both indigenous and settler (Pearson). These essays share a theoretical framework with Miriam Kahn's *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard: Power, Place and Everyday Life* (2011), in which she delineates the links between portrayals of a paradisiacal place and fluctuating negotiations of identity. Like earlier work, however, her book concentrates on one region of the Pacific, in this case Tahiti and French Polynesia—prime embodiments of an imagined Eden.

At the same time, the diversity in our collection shows how pliable the concept of paradise can be, and has been, from one end of the Pacific to another. Sites range from the Marshall Islands of Micronesia to urban enclaves of Maori, Hawaiians, and New Guineans living in New Zealand, the United States, and Australia. Thus, this issue offers both historical and geographic breadth as well as a comparative perspective on the development, manipulation, and reinvention of representations of Pacific Islanders in the region as a whole. In doing so, it also contributes to a growing interest among scholars, politicians, nongovernmental organization workers, and Pacific Islanders themselves about the origins and spread of a global Pacific, a region of the world that is quickly coming to play an increasingly important role in world affairs.

Even if they are not presently working as anthropologists themselves, all of the authors, including the one media scholar in the issue, have a background in anthropology, and one is a Pacific Islander herself. The importance of this is that they have all lived and worked in Pacific Island societies, many of them in the specific cultures that form the basis for revised interpretations of stereotypical imagery. Unlike many works about the Pacific written by western scholars, these essays are based upon firsthand knowledge and extensive involvement with Pacific Islanders and their cultures. Each piece

adds insights and understandings to analyses of enduring tropes, as well as providing information about the appropriation of these representations by Pacific Islanders.

Origins, Diffusion, and Transformations of Representations of the South Seas as Paradise

Images of the South Pacific as a paradise on earth and of the Pacific Islanders, especially their women, as sensuous and sexually alluring have a long history in the west that reaches back at least to the French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1772), Captain Cook's voyages (1769–1778), and the eighteenth-century period of exploration (Jolly 1992, 1997a, 1997b; O'Brien 2006; Wallace 2003; Creed and Hoorn 2001). As Margaret Jolly has demonstrated through her important historical work that takes a sweeping look at several hundred years of western representations of Pacific Island women, exoticism and eroticism were intimately connected in these early explorers' accounts of their encounters with Polynesian women in particular (Jolly 1997a). She has delineated how representations of island women's sexuality were inextricably related to issues of racism, power, and western colonization of the Pacific. Her work has explored such questions as why the connection between Pacific Island women's sexuality and western dominance have continued over time despite the changing political statuses of Pacific Island societies and their relationship to the west.

Although Jolly's analysis of western representations of Pacific Island women ends in the 1950s with her discussion of the musical *South Pacific*, articles in the present issue by Schachter, Lipset, and Pearson bring the analysis of such images up to the present day through their consideration of representations of Pacific Island women (or lack thereof) in western film and television. Moreover, articles by Lipset, Lutkehaus, and Pearson broaden the discussion of the erotics of the representation of Pacific Islanders bodies to include male as well as female bodies. Thus, we find that the connection between Pacific Islanders' bodies and issues of politics, racism, and moral agency present in western representations of Pacific Island women's bodies are similarly present in western images of male Pacific Islanders' bodies and the discourse surrounding them.

Although contemporary anthropologists and literary scholars have discussed the origins of many of these representations (cf. Lamb, Smith, and Thomas 2000; Manderson and Jolly 1997; Jolly 1992, 1997a, 1997b) in the early journals written by British and French explorers, sailors, missionaries, and sea captains, less attention has been given to the creation and perpetuation of similar images by American traders, whalers, and missionaries. In her

piece, "Anthropophagi in New-York and Other Voyagers," Maria Lepowsky reveals new insights into nineteenth-century American representations of Pacific Islands and Islanders. Based on original archival research, Lepowsky analyzes the journals and travel publications of three American seamen published in the early nineteenth century that describe two closely related voyages, both involving one Captain Morrell. In doing so, she has developed an important argument that elaborates on the point that contact was never simply one way, with only westerners traveling to the Pacific. Pacific Islanders were also brought to the west, where a broader segment of the population had the opportunity to see these islanders first hand and Pacific Islanders observed western cultures and societies. Lepowsky's article adds to the work of recent historians of the Pacific who emphasize that this two-way movement of Pacific Islanders and westerners contributed to the globalization of the Pacific at a much earlier point in time than scholars had heretofore acknowledged (Iger 2013).

Nancy Lutkehaus's paper about Jack London's 1909 voyage to the South Pacific, reported in *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911), continues the historical exploration of the dissemination and transformation of these stereotypical representation through a focus on yet another Pacific Island trope: that of voyaging and the sea. London supported his voyage across the Pacific by publishing articles in magazines and newspapers in the United States and England as he sailed from island to island and illustrated the articles with photographs he and his wife Charmian took. Thus visual images complement verbal accounts in a dynamic that persists into the twenty-first century with new forms of media (Smith 1960; Webb 1995; Flinn, this issue). London's volume also exemplifies an early twentieth-century modernist stance of irony, a perspective from which London frequently bemoans the loss of "paradise" and "authentic primitive" Pacific cultures—such as that of the Marquesans depicted by Herman Melville in *Typee.* London read the novel as a child, and it fueled his romantic desire to voyage through the islands of the Pacific. However, the "reality" of the Pacific Islanders and Pacific cultures that London encounters leads the socialist in him to criticize the western imposition of colonialism that he sees as the cause of the Pacific Islanders' undoing.

Adding both geographic breadth and ethnographic depth to works such as American Studies scholar Jane Desmond's *Staging Tourism: Bodies on Display from Waikiki to Sea World* (1999) and Adria Imada's *Aloha America: Hula Circuits through the U.S. Empire* (2012), several papers deal with tourism and the ways in which tourists in the Pacific have perpetuated and reinvented these stereotypes. The intrusion of tourism coincides with western colonial practices in places like Fiji (Pigliasco) and Australia (McGavin) and culminates in accounts by peace corps volunteers and divers who travel to

Pollap and record their descriptions on websites (Flinn). Pigliasco, in particular, with his description of Fijian fire-walking demonstrations for tourists presents a very detailed and nuanced analysis of the prevalent practice in many Pacific Island societies of both the invention and the commodification of tradition, or "kastom" as it is often referred to in Oceania (Jolly 1992).

The permutations of these often romantic representations give rise to the realities of contemporary representations to which our collection's title refers. For example, two of the chapters (Kempf and Schachter) complicate our understanding of stereotypes by showing how the politics of Hawaiian sovereignty (in Schachter's case) and global warming (in Kempf's case) have given rise to counter-representations of the South Seas as paradise. In a similar manner, Carucci's comparison of three texts written by different observers at different historical junctures, who each see the Marshallese through a western "eye," demonstrates how one cannot make assumptions about the truth or reality of a particular textual representation of Pacific Islanders based simply on the background of the author or the genre in which they are writing. In the cases Carucci investigates, more "real" representations may be transmitted in fiction, whereas more "romantic" images may be put forth in nonfiction accounts.

"The Savage Slot"

Closely related to the theme of the origins of stereotypic representations of the South Pacific is the broader anthropological theme of the problematic persistence of what anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot labeled the "Savage Slot," a discursive and visual space once reserved for anthropology's study of the "Other" (Trouillot 1991). As we know, this same Savage Slot is also intimately entwined with the western development of modernity, both as a source of reflection for western critiques of modernity and as an actual place of refuge. This is perhaps most evident in the well-known example of the painter Gauguin and his choice of Tahiti and the Marquesas for his escape from the decadence of Europe (Barkan and Bush 1995; Kahn 2011; Edmond 1997).

Although in reality, times have changed and the distinctions between western and nonwestern cultures and peoples have become increasingly blurred, this change has not always been reflected in the ways in which particular nonwestern peoples such as Pacific Islanders are represented, either by certain westerners (e.g. the tourist industry), media, or, in some cases, by Pacific Islanders themselves. Several chapters in the collection discuss the reasons why Pacific Islanders sometimes choose to assume or manipulate stereotypical representations of themselves as savage or as adhering to

traditional practices, ways of dress, and beliefs long ago left behind. Issues such as the "commodification of culture," the political uses of cultural identities, as well as the tensions between multiple identities, are analyzed in papers by Pigliasco, Schachter, McGavin, and Pearson. Moreover, in discussing the Fijian fire-walking ritual as evidence of both the commodification of culture and westerner's desires for a particular type of spectacle that conforms to their expectations of the bizarre behavior of "former" savages, Pigliasco also touches upon another important issue, that of "the invention of tradition," that has been more broadly of interest to scholars in other historical periods and regions of the world (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

A New Version: "The Indigenous Slot"

In her piece, "Romanticism and Reality Clash on *The GC*," Pearson contributes another concept to the discussion of representations. Analyzing a popular New Zealand TV series, Pearson describes the controversy over the show and its grounding in contested portrayals of "authentic indigeneity." Her argument indicates how persistently a romanticized notion of true identity ignores the "real" situation in which, in her case, Maori leave their ancestral land for better prospects in Australia. The show rejects the association of indigeneity with an unrecoverable past and connection to nature, avoiding the temptation to replace savage with indigenous slot. The controversy over *The GC* also suggests how valuable a reference to authenticity can be in a global environment.

The potential value in reiterating essential identities comes up in ceremonies designed for tourists and in films made by Pacific Islanders. Against this grain, filmmakers as well as writers and scholars emphasize the significance of syncretism—the Hawaiian Creole called Pidgin (Schachter) and the anti-language lexicons used by Pacific Islanders in New Zealand—as a consequential marker of new Pasifika identities (McGavin). Here we see how Pacific Islanders are actively reshaping aspects of their colonial legacies to create new postcolonial identities, as Schachter notes in her discussion of the documentary film *Pidgin*.

Eschewing at once the savage slot and the indigenous slot, both carrying colonial overtones, McGavin demonstrates in her paper how many Pacific Islanders, especially those living in multicultural urban centers such as Brisbane, Australia, often find themselves occupying a "liminal space" in which they move between different identities depending upon the social context in which they are located. These various identities, which McGavin labels as "panPacific" versus "ethnocultural," demonstrate how Pacific Islanders use, manipulate, and modify existing stereotypes for the purpose

of claiming an identity. Her piece provides a more complex understanding of how people move between multiple identities, as well as the tensions engendered by these multiple identities. As Pearson shows, these tensions dramatically impinge upon TV programs that attract vast audiences.

Additionally, from different perspectives—that of westerners versus that of Pacific Islanders—Lutkehaus and McGavin describe the role that material objects play as visual markers of Pacific identities. Although often overlooked in discussions of cultural representations, from the very beginning of western contact with Pacific Islanders material culture has played an important role in the creation of western images of Pacific Islanders as tangible and transportable evidence of the "exotic" and the "different" (Thomas 1991; Thomas and Losche 1999; Brunt et al. 2012). As Lutkehaus explains, when Jack London was disappointed in not finding authentic Marquesans to match his romantic images of them, objects such as carved wooden statues and calabashes, spears and clubs, substituted for a former historical reality no longer in existence.

New Forms of Media

As the art historian Bernard Smith first brilliantly demonstrated in *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960), the origins of western representations of Pacific Islanders are to be found in the texts, drawings, and paintings published and exhibited in Europe and, soon after, distributed throughout Europe and the United States with increasing frequency from the eighteenth century on. In this issue, we explore the perpetuation and manipulation of these iconic representations in new forms of media and performance such as film—both dramatic and documentary—(Lipset, Schachter), television (Pearson), the Internet (Flinn), and tourist performances (Pigliasco). These essays show that, as the media of representation shift and new forms of image making become widely available, challenges are posed to earlier disciplinary interpretations and to our readings of the "west" and the "rest." In particular, both Pearson and Schachter show how media representations that disseminate new self-images of Pacific Islanders can lead to unsettling reverberatations within the settler populations of New Zealand/Aotearoa and Hawai'i that cause them to reflect on the precarious nature of their own identities. Although as scholars of colonialism such as Stoler (2002) and others have shown us, the colonial enterprise was built upon white rulers' knowledge of the tenuousness of their hegemonic position. In the postcolonial era of the twenty-first century, it is still often surprising to see the tenuous nature of white dominance in Pacific Island societies.

The political implication of circulating images remains crucial, therefore, and several pieces point to the impact of changing depictions on the ways in which either colonial administrations or postcolonial states monitor a population. For example, Lutkehaus points out the use the American administrator charged with overseeing the leper colony on Molokai hoped to make of Jack London's favorable impression of the conditions there to appease critics of the government's policies. In his piece, Wolfgang Kempf links the material in the issue to current controversies over climate change, reiterating the issue's emphasis on the role images play in relationships between the powerful (the "settlers"—or, in Kempf's case, the technologically advanced nation-states of the world) and the powerless (the "suffering", the "victims"). As anthropologists have noted, it is this latter dichotomy—that between the powerful technologically advanced nation-states of the world and the powerless victims ("small islands in peril") or "the suffering" as Joel Robbins (2013) observes— that currently replaces "savage" versus "innocent" or "romantic" versus "real." Thus, it is with these "representations of disaster" and the current discourses concerning climate change and displacement in the Pacific that we come full-circle and find ourselves once again uncovering new permutations on the maritime images of which we first spoke with reference to Hau'ofa's "sea of islands." Just as Kempf's analysis of "representations of disaster" cautions us to think twice about the implications of today's "new" images of Pacific Islands and Islanders that we unwittingly perpetuate, so too do the other articles in this issue give us pause to reconsider the often unconscious ways in which images of the past get repurposed in the present—both for better and for worse—and the implications the juxtaposition between romance and reality has for Pacific peoples and places in the future.

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