FROM ROMANCE TO REALITY: AN EPILOGUE

Niko Besnier
University of Amsterdam

IF WE HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING from intellectual debates of the last half century, it is that representations are political acts, even when (and perhaps particularly when) they are deployed in the most innocent ways. Beyond this simple recognition, however, lies a host of complexities: Whose politics? Politics for what purposes? How does this politics fare when representations change hands, are exported to different contexts, are recycled and reclaimed by different agents for different purposes? Some representations have extraordinary longevity, clinging to the places, peoples, and things they are supposed to represent like a parasite. Others travel though time and space but can undergo sometimes surprisingly radical transformations. Those who are represented can appropriate the representations of which they are the object and turn their political meaning on their heads, but this can also backfire.

The contributions to this special issue explore various aspects of these complex dynamics in the context of the Pacific Islands, the last major area of the world that, historically, Europeans were largely ignorant of until the famous voyages of exploration of the late eighteenth century took place as the old continent was in the thick of the Enlightenment but Romanticism was beginning to critique some of the fundamental assumptions of this revolution. As is now well-known, the images, texts, and even people brought back by these voyages created a sensation in European courts, salons, and theaters, presaging two centuries of Western fascination with the Pacific Islands, a fascination whose emotional underpinnings have been as diverse as they have been consequential for all involved (Dening 1980; Smith 1989). But Europeans

were not the only ones to engage with the newly "discovered" Others. Once the pale strangers appeared in their odd-looking sea crafts, with their equally odd and unpredictable behaviors, simultaneously friendly and hostile (Lepowsky), they became the object of islanders' puzzlements, imaginings, and hypotheses. White people, after all, do not have a monopoly on representing others.

Pacific Islanders had not waited for Europeans to barge onto their shores to nurture consequential engagements with one another. Their ocean has long been a "sea of islands," to use Hau'ofa's (1994) memorable phrase, a vast network of people, things, relations, and histories for which the ocean was a conduit rather than an obstacle. This network was informed by its own politics of representation, which for centuries and millennia informed and set the course of interisland relations. As Salmond (2008) has demonstrated, during many early contacts between Western travelers and islanders, the white sailors were often relegated to the status of bystanders while islanders whom the ship captains had taken on board as pilots were the ones who conducted the negotiations with the inhabitants of the islands where the ships called, conversing from one Polynesian language to another. Even though the Western navigators later would later take the credit for them, these encounters were being conducted as part of an ongoing conversation among islanders, which had been ongoing since before the arrival of the European ships. Even after contacts between Westerners and islanders had ceased to be a novelty, these dynamics did not stop: islanders, whether captured, as Sunday and Monday were by Benjamin Morrell; "inveigled," like Jack Woahoo and Tomme Otaheite; or willing adventure seekers, like Garry Garry, continued to act as important agents in the early emergence of a global Pacific (Lepowsky).

Then as now, islands stand for deeply seated anxieties in the modern Western imagination, such as the end of civilization, be it through Malthusian overpopulation, irresponsible depredation, conflict (witness Diamond's [2005] exceedingly problematic version of Rapanui history), nuclear annihilation (with its repeated rehearsals in the Marshall Islands and French Polynesia), or global warming. Popular representations of flooding, disappearing islands, and primitive populations living in harmony with nature but being forced to relocate, all of which have deeply problematic relationships to the lived realities concerned, invoke doomsday scenarios that strike a deep chord in the Western imaginary (Flinn, Kempf). Interestingly, they bring together in complex ways two images of islands, one of radical alterity, the other of profound identification, a complexity reminiscent of the problem of alterity and identification in both classical anthropology (Douglas 1966) and psychoanalysis (Kristeva 1982).

The forces with which representations are associated have a determinative effect on their visibility (or hearability) and longevity. While some representations are backed up by tremendous structures of power, giving them ascendance on both the represented and the competing representations, others have no army and navy, and no money, to help them claim and retain a voice. Thus, big-budget Hollywood productions that claim to represent the political realities in Hawai'i, but are sanitized of all significant politics, command large audiences worldwide, while films by indigenous filmmakers that foreground the struggles over Hawaiian sovereignty often disappear immediately after their initial release (Schachter, Lipset).

Representations can become lost in the darkness of time for many reasons. They may not benefit from the potential longevity that literacy can bestow on them. They may be expressed in languages that are generally unnoticed in the world's centers of domination, as was the case of nineteenth-century ethnographic works about the Pacific by Jan Stanisław Kubary, who wrote in Polish, and Nikolai Miklukho-Maclay, who wrote in Russian (Webster 1985). Alternatively, representations may be ignored because they emerge from the bottom of the social ladder; thus, we know little about what the "unofficial whites" of the colonial era knew and thought about Pacific Islanders, whose lives were intermingled with their own in many cases (recall Stoler 1995 and Gouda 1996 on better-known parts of the colonial world). Alternatively, some representations can fall victim to the vagaries of history. Thus, we know little about relations between Japanese and Micronesians during the two-and-a-half decades of Micronesia's Japanese administration (Carucci, Flinn), other than that they left a deep imprint on islanders, because the post–World War II US military administration actively obliterated all signs of Japanese presence, a process in which the large number of American anthropologists and linguists who descended upon the area were actively complicit.

In other contexts, information technologies have engendered a proliferation of representations that prior to the age in which we live might have died a quiet death. Blogs, Web sites, and other materials found in cyberspace have added voices to traditional print media, which reiterate clichés and romantic depictions, potentially contributing to the "museumification" of culture. Thus, the representation of Pollap navigational knowledge on travelers' and Peace Corps volunteers' Web sites as timeless tradition to be preserved before it disappears overshadows problematically the fact that islanders use this knowledge in their active engagement with real-life circumstances (Flinn). In another context, television ends up having the opposite effect, disrupting the genealogy of received ideas and challenging their self-evidence, to the great displeasure of some (Pearson). If we anthropologists are to develop an

understanding of the "history of the present" (Lutkehaus), we must contend with these representations, which compete with their own more nuanced understanding of islanders' lived realities, and go beyond simply "debunking" them as incorrect or ideologically laden.

Representations travel unpredictably, not only through time but also across genres and from one voice to the other, in a pattern strikingly reminiscent of Bakhtinian dialogism (Bakhtin 1981 [1930s]): utterances passing from one voice to another or from one genre to another and potentially acquiring, at each stage, different intentions and relationships to context. The most egregious example is plagiarism, illustrated here by Edgar Allen Poe's plagiarism of Benjamin Morrell (Lepowsky). More subtly, the Sawau Fijians' performances of fire-walking in tourist resorts, which are accompanied by the emcee's predictable repetition of tired old clichés about the performers' alleged cannibalism and savagery, distill an entire history of colonialism, state formation, and commodification of authenticity but also the necessity to make a living, all of which are coconstructed by performers, emcees, and tourist audiences (Pigliasco). Tropes can become entirely reified to the point that they can take on a life of their own, representing the represented without even alluding to it, and not even need the reality of what they are supposed to represent because they are in dialogue with other realities: such is the classic case of Orientalist painters and poets dialoguing with one another while painting or rhapsodizing about market or harem scenes in Cairo or Damascus (Said 1978). Alternatively, tropes can be transformed through dialogic repetition, and because control of these dynamics is singularly elusive, the transformations themselves can take unpredictable paths.

It is along these paths that the boundaries between "romance" and "reality," between fiction and history, and between the real and the imagined lose their self-evidence. One kind of representation invokes another kind, as works of documentation are based on works of fiction, and vice versa (Lepowsky, Lutkehaus), and as romance may be closer to islanders' lived realities than works that purport to represent "the facts" (Carucci). The result is a blurring of boundaries, reminiscent again of Bakhtinian dialogism and demanding that the act of knowledge production be the focus of close attention, as anthropologists in the 1980s urged us to consider (Clifford and Marcus 1986). But here the contributors to this special issue go much further than simply remarking that all representations are partial; they invite us to explore the relationship among different representations, their uptake by those whose lives are represented, the paths along which representations travel, and the politics that generate them and that they engender.

It is not only representations that travel but also the people who are represented. They are never stuck in place but rather migrate, relocate, and

regroup, generating new social formations consisting of migrants of different origins that find strength in their commonalities, as Pacific Islanders do in such migrant locations as New Zealand and Australia (McGavin). In these efforts, dominant and enduring representations of Pacific Islanders, such happiness, generosity, and being in the habit of wearing flowers in one's hair, are co-opted as badges of emerging identifications and new forms of solidarity. Representations thus are not "owned" but instead operate as floating signifiers, available to different agents for different purposes.

But these agentive moves are not without potential problems. The obverse of the image of the friendly guitar-strumming islander is that of the frightening and violent warrior, an image that is all too common in the mainstream imagination in New Zealand and Australia, where it offers a facile explanation for the alleged violence of immigrant and indigenous underclasses. Similar images emerge in some manifestations of the indigeneity movement in Hawai'i, in which men seek to regain the "warrior masculinity" of which two centuries of colonialism and half a century of the tourism industry has robbed them, replacing it with undulating hula girls draping flower garlands around the necks of hotel patrons (Tengan 2008). We find them, in circumstances of lesser political tension, on T-shirts worn in the islands, depicting tattooed and loin-clothed island warriors of hyperdeveloped muscularities, brandishing whatever accoutrements are iconic of the local context (pig-tusk necklaces, clubs, tattoos, etc.), and posing menacingly under the announcement "Samoan (Tongan, Fijian, Hawaiian) warrior" or "pride" or "native" (Besnier 2011: 197–99).

When these images are recycled and glamorized in yet other contexts, who represents whom is no longer a straightforward question. Such is the case of the deeply controversial emergence, since the 1990s, of the "sport haka," vigorous display of muscular might through a Māori choreographed performance that opens rugby matches involving New Zealanders (mostly performed outside New Zealand). Samoan, Fijian, and Tongan rugby teams soon followed suit with their own "traditional war dances." In the case of the New Zealand All Blacks, this spectacle of warriorhood, ostensibly designed to intimidate the opposing team, is performed by a mixture of Māori, Pacific Islander, and Pākehā (white) athletes, so who is the subject and who is the object of representation are profoundly equivocal questions. (In fact, if the Ngāti Toa tribe's claim that the haka in question is their property is substantiated, the probability of anyone being self-represented by its performance on the rugby pitch is virtually nil.) To complicate matters, the incorporation of these performances in the panoply of rugby teams' self-representations is the result of corporate strategies that see in them a particularly successful way of selling images to a global public.

But then these representations can backfire in sometimes surprising ways. When a New Zealand reality television program depicts young Māori transplants in Australia as ordinary trans-Tasman migrants, indistinguishable from other New Zealanders, trying to make a living on Australia's touristy and glittery Gold Coast, the show sparks a flurry of accusations (Pearson). These are "plastic Māori," badly tattooed and mostly interested in money, sex, and their appearance, rather than being interested, as Māori people should be, in traditional dancing and singing, speech making on the *marae, te reo* (the Māori language), and other iconic aspects of *Māoritanga.* Who, then, decides when a Māori person is plastic or real, and on what basis? Is realness forever prisoner of a highly reified and ahistorical representation of indigenous identity, which itself is the joint creation of indigenous revivalism and Western representations of indigeneity?

What this case illustrates vividly is that representations not only are the product of politics but also generate politics. Such is also the case of representations of Pacific Islanders as poster children of global warming—the fact that rising sea levels may endanger more populous areas of the world, such as Manhattan, Tokyo, and Bangladesh, notwithstanding. These representations generate complex entanglements within the societies being represented. In low-lying Tuvalu, a favorite focus of works like the *World Atlas of Climate Change* (Kempf), the representation of the country as a "victim" of global warming (which often views it as a single island instead of a group of nine) has been met with surprisingly diverse reactions (Besnier 2009: 59–63). Some have embraced the discourse of victimhood in the face of the imminent disappearance of their homeland due to global warming to promote agendas that precede the emergence of global warming as a world problem (e.g., labor migration that is seriously impeded by stringent visa requirements). Other Tuvaluans react impatiently to Westerners' obsession with global warming, emphasizing that what Tuvalu needs is better health care, better interisland transportation (the two are connected: better transportation to ensure that breached births are not fatal), better sanitation, and better access to education opportunities. What is interesting is that these conflicting uptakes have little or nothing to do with the intentions of the compilers of works like the *World Atlas of Climate Change.* Again, the politics of representation undergoes radical transformation as the context changes.

This special issue offers a model for an anthropological engagement with the complexities of representation, which pays equal attention to form, politics, and the relationship of representations to regimes of truth, conventions of fiction, and the imagination. The contributors demonstrate that multiple parties are involved in any act of representation and that their entanglement

can take on unpredictable qualities that deserve the kind of ethnography we have come to call our own: a recognition of the multiplicity of perspectives, an understanding of culture as porous and complex, and an approach to people's lives as informed by social, cultural, historical, and political dynamics.

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