

Representations of cultural identities

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Like eunuchs, they grace the shoreline of Waikīkī. Coconut palms without coconuts. Symbols of lost identities. Exotic images as a backdrop for semi-naked tourists lounging on the beach.

Coconut palms have grown at Waikīkī since the first Hawaiians arrived in their magnificent canoes some two thousand years ago. Originating in the South-East Asian–Melanesian region, coconuts were carried in the canoes of early long-distance navigators of the Pacific Ocean. Coconut palms were much valued then—for the many different uses of their roots, trunks, and leaves, but mainly for their nuts, which provided a reliable source of sustenance. Coconut flesh was scraped and its cream used for cooking; coconut juice was refreshing and nourishing—ideal for a tropical climate. But all that has changed forever, at least at Waikīkī, where tourists now reign. There, coconut palms are merely decorative, essential to complete the picture of Paradise—a tropical world of pleasure and personal happiness. To maintain this illusion, coconuts are removed so that dreams of Eden may remain intact.

Robert Muldoon, a former prime minister of New Zealand, once referred to the Pacific Islands as having little to offer apart from coconuts. Likewise, in Auckland, where Polynesians are increasingly visible, the pakeha (white) population sometimes refers to islanders as ‘coconuts’, a metaphor with connotations akin to ‘nigger’. Migrants who return to the islands only to behave in a European fashion are also labelled ‘coconuts’ by their compatriots—like coconuts, they are brown outside but white inside. Despite such pejorative use, however, among Melanesians, Micronesians, and Polynesians the word *coconut* continues to evoke feelings of a shared identity.

Similarly, literature and art are symbolic expressions of cultural identities, embodying their creators’ visions of who they were, are, or could be. These

visions encompass one or more aspects of culture, such as ethnicity, geographical context, gender, and politics. Although foreign scholars tend to view each of these as discrete entities, Pacific Islanders regard all aspects of life as inseparable parts of who they are.¹ Although the focus here is primarily on the way literature and art embody and express cultural identities, I also discuss significant cultural, historical, or political events that have dramatically affected the formation of those identities. Just as explicit expressions of identity may or may not accurately reflect internalised notions of self at the personal level, our views of who we are may or may not coincide with other people's views of us. Our cultural identities are therefore always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive; who we are is not a rock that is passed on from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging. Yet, like Maui who tried to snare the sun as it journeyed across the sky (so he thought), I shall snare a metaphorical sun, hold it still for a moment that we may see it more clearly, then set it free again to continue its journey. After all, cultural identity is process, not product.

Signposts exist along the way to help us understand who we are. The oral histories, imaginative literature, and the visual and performing arts of the Pacific Islands indicate significant moments in the evolution of cultural identities. At the national level, these moments may or may not reflect what actually happens at the level of everyday behaviour in rural villages. However, because the ruling elite at the national level are in a position to impose on the people their official versions of the national identity (but not the other way round), their views affect national policies and influence international thought. Besides, the educated elite who live in urban areas or in metropolitan countries are becoming increasingly influential in shaping cultural identities in their home islands through remittances. Most of the indigenous sources I use, then, are primarily the views of the educated or ruling elite. It is their view of what makes them different from or similar to other groups of people—their cultural identities—that I analyse and discuss.

To help analysis and discussion, I divide Pacific history into three phases using a Rotuman standpoint that corresponds to the perspective of other Pacific groups: *ao maksul ta* (time of darkness), *ao taf ta* (time of light), and *ao fo'ou ta* (new time). These three phases coincide with the Euro-American categories of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. Although these two different ways of discussing history are similar in that they appear to use European intrusion into the Pacific as their basic point of departure for categorisation (missionisation in the Rotuman view; colonialism in the European), there is an essential difference. The Rotuman, or what I shall refer to from now on as the islander perspective, highlights the importance of Christianity in the shaping of Pacific cultural identities, revealing, in a nutshell, that cultural identity was contested during the time of darkness, transformed (with certain elements suppressed) during the time of light, and negotiable during the new time.



At the 1989 Festival of Marquesan Arts in Taioha'e, Marquesan drummers played Tahitian rhythms on Tahitian drums and wore tapa stained with 'ena (turmeric) and adorned with motifs associated with Marquesan tattooing. They also wore pandanus garlands and mother-of-pearl headdresses to which carved coconut medallions were attached. Guitar playing followed the drumming. (Jane Moulin)

Ao maksul ta: *Time of darkness*

Pacific Islanders shared a circular view of life. Donna Awatere has written of Maori notions in which 'past and present merge in the cyclic rhythm of nature and the ancestors' rhythm of life and death'.² Albert Wendt, the Samoan poet and novelist, referred to this period in history as the time of 'Pouliuli, the Great Darkness out of which we came and to which we must all return'.³ This circle of life has no beginning and no end, and each living thing is part of that circle. At the centre are the gods of the ancestors. These gods maintain the unity of the circle from within, as well as attract attention from the periphery. This non-linear view of life contrasts with the Western view of the evolution of civilisation, marked by development and progress. Using this yardstick as a way of judging Pacific cultures, the *papalagi* (skybreakers) regarded the islanders as 'primitive' or 'uncivilised', at the low end of the civilisation continuum. Further, this linear perspective designated the time of darkness as one that was relatively static and simple. Such a view is not shared in the oral histories of the islands.

Darkness in Polynesian conception was fluid and ambiguous: Hine Nui te Po (literally, the Lady of Darkness) was originally the Lady of Light, an

embodiment of double identities, with a vagina that is the site of birth and the locus of death.⁴ Such ambivalence is evident in many of the creation myths, including the Hawaiian *Kumulipo*, which includes both natural and supernatural forces in its evolutionary account of creation.⁵ Further, many of the myths, legends, chants, and songs of the Pacific contain complex accounts of sea exploits and navigational feats that suggest a dynamic period of contact between islands, conflict, and settlement. For example, the oral history of Pohnpei in Micronesia reveals conquests by successive groups of people from outside, with accompanying changes in social practice and the introduction of new skills and knowledge. 'Polynesians' in Pohnpei and Kosrae in perhaps the twelfth or thirteenth century produced enormous changes in social structures, introducing *kava* and other Polynesian elements, and leaving the islands with massive stone ruins that are a notable tourist attraction today.⁶ On Pohnpei, attempts were made to extend domination island-wide; the same was true of Samoa and the Marshall Islands.⁷ New Caledonia was deeply divided, with 'warring tribes speaking mutually unintelligible languages',⁸ and on Santa Isabel in the Solomon Islands an extensive military capacity was reported by the first Spanish explorers.⁹

This phase in Pacific history produced some of the most dynamic and imaginative art forms, testimony to a time of fervent attempts to understand the universe, religious preoccupation, and territorial expansion, particularly within island entities. Witness, for example, the elaborate and magnificent war clubs, spears, canoes, carvings, statues, and ceremonial objects of this period that still exist in museums and private collections around the world. This artistic excellence was most marked in the larger continental or volcanic islands of Melanesia and Polynesia, where tribal conflict was a dominant feature. Instead of hindering artistic production, political rivalry and conflicting ideologies probably acted as catalysts for the production of art. Contemporary developments in the Pacific indicate that during times of conflict, the artists and the arts become a focal point for cultural and spiritual sustenance.

Drawing from their surroundings, artists created objects or songs and dances that served practical or religious purposes. The weaving of fine mats for ceremonial exchange, the carving of ritual objects, the building of spirit houses, the preparation of costumes for dramatic performances—all these and many more activities embodied 'aspirations, visions, fears, hopes and dreams',¹⁰ not just of the immediate and known environment, but of the lands and peoples beyond the seas. For example, Micronesian art reveals influences from Indonesia and Melanesia. Evidences of contact include the loom weaving of the Caroline Islands, the dance masks from Satawan in the Mortlock Islands (Chuuk), and pearlshell inlay in Belauan bowls.¹¹ Many songs, dances, plants, and fruit trees maintain the names of islands whence they came. Some plants and fruit trees in Rotuma bear Tongan or Samoan names, and accounts of Samoan storytelling performances attribute the

existence of rats, thornbushes, nettles, and noxious weeds to Fiji.¹² Such evidence indicates much borrowing from other islands and an awareness of cultural difference—that which makes individuals or groups distinct from each other—long before European or American ships appeared on the horizon.

The arrival of Europeans was not a total surprise to the islanders. For example, a seer in Tahiti predicted the arrival of foreigners who would possess the land and put an end to existing customs;¹³ a prophet in Hawai'i recounted a revelation from heaven and the subversion of the *kapu* of the country;¹⁴ a prophet from Kwaio of Malaita and John Frum of Tanna also foretold the arrival of Americans.¹⁵ Though prophetic, these warnings of European or American colonialism and hegemony could not have anticipated the onslaught on island cultures that was soon to follow, brought ashore by 'skybreakers' or 'ghosts of the open ocean', white men who came in sailing ships carrying guns, weapons, diseases, iron tools, and strange ideas.

Ao taf ta: *Time of light*

Explorers, whalers, and beachcombers arrived in the sixteenth century. Islanders' reactions to these early Europeans ranged from fascination to indifference, from fear to adulation, from envy to contempt. The missionaries who followed saw many of their compatriots revelling with the 'natives' in the 'darkness'. For example, many of the whites on Pohnpei in Micronesia 'smoked, drank, cursed, had several wives, and were generally indifferent to piety in all its forms'.¹⁶ The missionaries saw these Europeans as having succumbed to the 'pagan' life of the islanders, which they associated with darkness and therefore saw as needing to be dispelled by the Light, Jesus Christ and his teachings. A 'cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness' ensued.¹⁷

Many of the cultural practices of the Pacific Islanders were relegated by the missionaries to the time of darkness and therefore had to be eradicated. The complex past of island life became a simple struggle between good and bad, Christian and pagan, light and dark. A new sense of order was introduced, with the ancestral gods banished and the Christian God instituted in their place. Converts relinquished 'heathen' practices that contained overt violence, sexuality, and joy: in short, 'natives' were converted to an alien culture and religion, and adopted new customs such as the wearing of clothes, hymn singing, and sexual restraint. With their backs to the old ways, islanders focused on a new identity based on Christian values. A strict code of morality reinforced by promises of an uncertain afterlife in heaven or hell ensured that islanders were constantly sinning and forever seeking redemption. What Oppenheim has written of the Maori is typical of what

happened in the rest of the Pacific: 'The introduction of Protestant Christianity, with its values of suffering, vicarious atonement, sin and forgiveness and its customs of moderation, thrift, prudence and deferred gratification—above all its nonviolence and sexual prudishness—presented the antithesis of almost everything that Maoris valued'.¹⁸ As missionaries steered islanders further along the path of progress, a linear perception of history replaced the cyclic view of the past. In time, islanders came to think of their history in terms of 'the time of darkness' and 'the time of enlightenment'.¹⁹

From 1840 to the end of the nineteenth century, European countries scrambled for colonies. Ill-prepared for another onslaught from a more developed technology and a radically different philosophy of life, most island cultures submitted to colonial government. Working hand in hand, Christianity and Western capitalism almost succeeded in reducing Pacific Islanders to caricatures of the colonisers—be they French, American, German, British, or Spanish. From the arrival of the missionaries in the nineteenth century to World War Two, Pacific Islanders were taught to emulate the dress, language, behaviour, and customs of the colonisers. Missionary teachings and education were devoted to 'civilising' the islanders, to cutting them away from the roots of their cultures, 'from what the colonisers viewed as darkness, superstition, barbarism, and savagery'.²⁰ For many, this process of 'castration'²¹ or 'physical and spiritual dismemberment'²² meant the loss of dignity and pride.

Along the rocky road of piety, many islanders satirised Europeans and the new religion even as they appropriated it and refashioned it to suit their social and political needs. Numerous accounts reveal that Europeans were often mocked or satirised in comedic performances.²³ Donald Sloan wrote of *fale 'aitu* (houses of spirits) comic sketches that parodied European behaviour;²⁴ Richard Dana described *oli* (chants) by a noted Hawaiian improvisator that derided Americans and Englishmen;²⁵ James Chalmers wrote of young Rarotongan men parodying military manoeuvres and engaging in drunken orgies to flout and undermine the church.²⁶ Apart from these symbolic representations, more dramatic ways of resistance were found: millenarianist movements in Samoa and Aotearoa, cargo cults, military rebellions, and armed resistance to European encroachment in various places, including Papua New Guinea. In Rotuma, for example, religious wars between Catholics and Methodists in 1871 and 1878 created further and new divisions among the people; some of the negative effects of these wars are still evident today. Christianity's impact varied from island to island, although uniformity was apparent in the way islanders accommodated what the colonisers imposed yet resisted it at the same time, by infusing it with cultural elements that made it an indigenous institution, different from its foreign counterpart.

In his novel *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, Albert Wendt has explored the

effects of this complex process of colonisation on the individual and on the community.²⁷ Pepe refuses to 'sell' his soul to the Christian faith and to emulate his father, who madly pursues the way of religion and the *papalagi*. Pepe dies, alone and without friends, but at least with his self-respect intact—he was true to himself. On the other hand his father, Tauilo pepe, spends a lifetime manipulating the church, his village, and his people to prop up his ego and his insatiable materialism, only to lose it all to Galupo, a more Westernised, calculating young upstart. As he dies Tauilo pepe hears his son Pepe shouting 'Guilty!'. In pursuit of the 'dream' Tauilo pepe and his followers had 'pushed the bush back to the range'; they had also 'forsaken things pagan, things belonging to the Darkness before the coming of the Light'.²⁸ In their place, a Samoan version of Christianity (as taught by a Solomon Island pastor) was installed.

The Christian church, like most social or cultural institutions, is both restrictive and malleable. In the early stages, the restrictive nature of Christianity maintained a stranglehold over converts in order to clearly differentiate them from their 'pagan' compatriots. This did not last long, however. A religious revival swept the Pacific some years after islanders had bowed to Christianity, causing them to seek a type of religion that embraced Pacific symbols of expression and Pacific sensibilities. Thus Aiavao of Samoa wrote of a happy marriage between Samoan culture and Christianity.²⁹ He noted that traditional meetings in Samoa always end with some reference to God or some examples from the Bible; he also described Christian services that featured Samoan music, Samoan dancing, and formal presentation of food and Samoan fine mats. In both Samoa and Tonga, buffoonery has made its way into church-related activities, as both entertainment and a means of criticising the church and its clergy. In the Cook Islands, *nuku* (biblical pageant) day is held once a year. Hundreds of children dressed in colourful costumes meet to perform biblical pageants, march around with banners, and sing songs. In short, islanders recognised the malleability of Christianity and the need to modify Christian practices to suit their cultures. In Samoa, as in many other parts of the Pacific today, Christianity is regarded as an integral part of life.³⁰

World War Two helped transform the ambivalent views of Europeans and Americans about the Pacific and its inhabitants, though there is some evidence that islanders occasionally exploited stereotypical images of the 'native' or 'savage' to their advantage.³¹ For example, war narratives on Santa Isabel contain 'an ironic mixture of humorous self-deprecation and superior cunning . . . the image of "savage" is accepted on one level to be denied on another, establishing an ironic counterpoint characteristic of much of the war's oral literature'.³² Further, the war forced soldiers from Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States to experience the difficult terrain, climate, vegetation, and tropical diseases such as malaria and yaws. In the tropics, foreigners were ill-prepared. As Papua New Guineans, and

elsewhere Fijians and Solomon Islanders, helped them to overcome their difficulties—by acting as soldiers, carriers, riflemen, stretcher bearers, or guides, and as human beings struggling together to win a war against a common enemy—‘fuzzy-wuzzy devils’ became ‘fuzzy-wuzzy angels’. The success of the Maori Battalion during the same war also enhanced the prestige and pride of Maori.³³ Firsthand experience with islanders helped in a small way to dispell ignorance, fear, and prejudice, particularly among soldiers.

Representations of Pacific Islanders from the eighteenth century to the 1980s became the domain of Europeans, whose views of the Pacific and its inhabitants were ethnocentric at best and racist at worst.³⁴ The general trend during this time had been for fiction writers such as Somerset Maugham, Jack London, Herman Melville, and James A. Michener to portray Polynesia as a paradise where simplicity, beauty, and innocence reigned, and Melanesia as a dangerous jungle where death and evil lurked. Polynesians were usually depicted as light-skinned and beautiful, Melanesians as black and inferior specimens. Missionary and anthropological accounts were usually just as distorted, revealing ‘*papalagi*’ fantasies and hang-ups, dreams and nightmares.³⁵ These representations of islanders are important because they shape attitudes of foreigners about the Pacific and its inhabitants. Negative or positive stereotypes reduce islanders to two-dimensional figures, not fully human, resulting in the erosion of the self-esteem and dignity of the colonised. They must then contend with identities that are not of their own making but nonetheless become regarded over time as their distinctive characteristic, that which makes them different from others. A stereotypical cultural identity, once stuck, is almost impossible to shake off completely.³⁶

The period after World War Two, until independence, was one of cultural reconstruction and political development. Western education was becoming more and more important. High schools were established, followed by colleges. The University of Papua New Guinea opened its doors in 1966, and its students, with the help of Ulli and Georgina Beier who arrived from the University of Nigeria in 1969, started writing imaginative literature. The university’s language department also encouraged creative writing, and soon poems, stories, plays, and novels were being written in English.³⁷ No longer were Pacific Islanders content to allow representations of themselves in print to be the preserve of foreigners. Many saw it as their mission to restore full humanity to their people.

Colonialism was the pervasive theme in those early works from Papua New Guinea. Those writing in the 1960s were born in the 1940s, and had suffered from the imposition of a foreign view of the world and themselves. Sensing that the possibility of self-determination was in sight—former British colonies world-wide were either fighting for or had gained independence—these early writers became fearless. A university education (either overseas or at home) had restored their pride and raised their confidence.

Now that they had acquired the tools of their oppressors, they were suitably armed for psychological and intellectual combat. No longer content to remain oppressed, these Western-educated islanders condemned the injustices within Christianity and Western capitalism in their writings. Their ultimate goal was political and cultural independence.

The most powerful metaphor for the effects of the colonial experience on the indigenous Pacific peoples is that of a forced and unequal marriage, the subject of a play by Leo Hannek of Papua New Guinea.³⁸ In *The Ungrateful Daughter*, Ebonita, a young Papua New Guinean girl adopted by an Australian couple, is forced to marry an Australian against her wishes. Her compliance leads her to the altar, where she suddenly reverses her marriage vows and screams 'I don't!', tears off her white wedding dress to reveal her grass skirt underneath, flicks her hips, and dances a tribal number. Accompanied by wild drumming and similarly attired dancers, she and her troupe chase away the Australian wedding guests who flee off-stage. The University of Papua New Guinea thus led the way in what may be termed the creation of protest or resistance literature and theatre.

Two years after that university was established, the University of the South Pacific enrolled its first students. By bringing future leaders into contact with one another, and through its Pacific Week programme and the influence of individuals such as Albert Wendt, Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, Epeli Hau'ofa, Konai Helu-Thaman, Pio Manoa, Subramani, and Raymond Pillai, the university began to produce imaginative literature. Albert Wendt started teaching creative writing classes in 1975, and the South Pacific Creative Arts Society started publishing the best of the new writing that was being produced within the region covered by the university. Creative writing workshops were also held in Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands; the best from these workshops were published in local publications such as *Faikava* (Tonga), *Moana* (Samoa), *Sinnet* (Fiji), *Pacific Islands Monthly*, and later on in *Mana*, the literary journal of the South Pacific Creative Arts Society.

As in Papua New Guinea, a lot of the writing generated at the University of the South Pacific was anticolonial and anti-European. Most of these writers straddled two worlds: that of the rural villages in which they grew up, and the urban world in which the colonisers' values and customs reigned supreme.³⁹ Marginalised from their own societies and feeling their loss and alienation acutely, their literary attempts were suffused with anger and a rejection of Christianity and Western values, as evident in this poem by Albert Leomala of the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu):

*Cross I hate you
You are killing me
You are destroying*

*My traditions
I hate you Cross . . .*

*Cross run away
Run away from me
I hate you
Take your ideas
And your civilisation
And go back to where you belong.⁴⁰*

The same or similar sentiments are echoed by other Pacific writers. For example, in Vincent Eri's novel *The Crocodile* (the first Papua New Guinean novel), the protagonist Hoiri 'wasted' all his years 'carrying the white man's cargo'.⁴¹ Makiuti Tongia of the Cook Islands ended his poem entitled 'Missionary' with these lines:

*Today I think of my Maori identity
and wonder if I should stay in this
Christian land.⁴²*

In Vanessa Griffen's short story 'The Concert', Miss Renner takes a group of Fijian schoolgirls from a rural village to see a quartet in the city in the hope that they will 'become more cultured'.⁴³ But the girls either fall asleep or clap at the wrong places, leaving her very disappointed. On the way back to school in the bus the girls sing spontaneously and beautifully. 'But then,' thinks Miss Renner, again with that same feeling of regret, 'they're only Fijian songs.'⁴⁴ These early examples were symptomatic of a growing wave of resistance to colonialism and Western values, as islanders sought cultural identities that were more in tune with their ethnic heritage.

The sense of loss that is a direct result of Western education is aptly captured in the poetry of Konai Helu-Thaman of Tonga. One of her most popular poems, 'Reality', is about an educated boy who graduates from school only to find that there are no available jobs. As he ponders what to do with his life, an old man close by whispers:

*Come fishing with me today
For you have a lot to learn yet.⁴⁵*

A Western education often results in alienation from the land and the community, an erosion of an identity that is rooted in the indigenous culture. Many islanders educated overseas discover on their return home the need to learn or re-learn traditional skills in order to become part of a community again and re-attain an indigenous identity.

Christianity, like formal Western education, endeavoured to impose values and beliefs that were supposed to prepare islanders for life in a modern world. Although islanders often appeared to have totally rejected certain

ancestral beliefs that came under censure by the missionaries, this mask was often thin. At times of crisis, many reverted to the ancestral spirits for assistance. Albert Maori Kiki's observation in 1968 that many of the Orokelo people are 'Christian and church-goers, but they put the Bible aside on week-days'⁴⁶ is still valid today, though the degree of reliance on the old gods and remedies continues to vary from place to place, depending on the impact of missionisation and the effectiveness or otherwise of Christian faith.

The cultural reawakening of the 1960s and 1970s was not confined to literature. In their attempts to mould a nation-state, island leaders organised national art and craft festivals to encourage the revival of art forms that hitherto had been suppressed. The tourism industry was also taking a keen interest in the revival of local dances and crafts. As a result of better transportation by land, sea, and air, more and more artists were gaining access to new tools, raw materials, and ideas. The missionaries relaxed their strict rules on dancing and similar customary practices, even as islanders infused Christianity with Pacific images and symbols that were no longer offensive. The culmination of this cultural renaissance was the first South Pacific Festival of Arts (now Festival of Pacific Arts), held in Suva in 1972.

The Suva festival was a turning point in the restoration of dignity and pride for all Pacific countries, except Guam and Tahiti, which did not participate (but joined the second festival four years later in Rotorua, New Zealand). Individual and isolated attempts to revive local art forms—particularly in the visual and performing arts—were brought together in an arena where they were celebrated. The result was a cultural explosion on a scale previously unheard of in the Pacific. Islanders became aware of the essential differences between themselves and their neighbours, as well as what they have in common. The success of the first festival reverberated far and wide; since then, this festival brings together artists of all kinds every four years—to dance, sing, laugh, learn from one another, and celebrate their Pacific identities.

Today, some Pacific islands are independent, some are self-governing, and some islanders are minorities in their own countries. In Hawai'i, New Zealand, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, the shackles of colonialism still hold fast. In all these islands, however, Christianity has shed its 'light' for at least a hundred and fifty years; elements of local cultures that are being revived are therefore usually those reconcilable with Christian beliefs. These reconstituted forms that fuse selected elements from the time of darkness and the time of light have become, over the years, traditional. In line with the Western view of development and progress, Pacific cultures—including arts—are continually evolving and taking on more and more elements from European, Asian, American, and other Pacific cultures. The final mix is therefore quite different from 'the real ways of life that prevailed

in the Pacific on the eve of European invasion'.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, these new identities are valid and necessary, as Pacific Islanders continue to struggle towards self-determination in all spheres of their lives.

Ao fo'ou ta: *New time*

A selected and politicised synthesis of the past and present is characteristic of contemporary expressions of identity in the period that Euro-American scholars call post-colonial. The term *post-colonial* is problematic as there are evidences of neo-colonial practices even in independent or self-governing nations. In the French colonies, New Zealand, and Hawai'i, where indigenous people are still struggling for sovereignty in their own land, the term is meaningless. The Rotuman word *fo'ou* is a more accurate description of this new phase in history. It is an adjective that means 'new', suggesting strangeness and unfamiliarity. In Rotuma, it is usually used in the context of shifting allegiances between foreign and local ways. Someone who behaves in an 'un-Rotuman' fashion may be mocked for having 'sold out' to foreign ways and ideas. Sometimes the same term is used to justify certain kinds of dress or behaviour, to impress on others the realities of living in the present and the evolutionary nature of culture. These uses of the word *fo'ou* to censure or to justify dress or behaviour suggest that in the contemporary Pacific, cultural identity has become negotiable.

A century or more of foreign domination, missionisation, depopulation (in the case of Hawai'i, New Zealand, New Caledonia, and the Marquesas), urbanisation, money economies, intermarriage, Western education, and mass tourism have irreversibly altered the social and cultural fabric of Pacific life. Attempts to preserve traditional cultures have led to charges of 'invented traditions' and 'inauthenticity' by Western scholars.⁴⁸ As may be expected, these 'outsider' views are met with counter-arguments, by both Pacific Island scholars and non-indigenous academics.⁴⁹ Quite often the focus of these arguments is blurred, for the wrong questions are being asked, and the answers offered are muddled and unhelpful. More and more, indigenous scholars prefer that outsiders refrain from pontificating about indigenous identities. It is unlikely, however, that non-indigenous scholars will stop writing about the constructions of identity among political activists and nations in the evolving Pacific; a more realistic approach would be for all concerned to focus on issues that will lead to the restoration of equality and human dignity between races. To understand the cultural, historical, and political reasons for the essentialist stance that present-day political movements have taken, and the reasons for the projection of selected images and symbols that highlight cultural differences, is more important than whether or not these symbols are 'authentic'. Seeming inconsistencies or contradictions in the way islanders symbolically represent or express

their cultural identities are symptoms of the multiplicity of competing cultures and ideologies in contemporary society.

Personal identities

Once colonised, the mind can never be truly decolonised. Education continues to be in the language of the coloniser ('because it is the only way to progress'), while lip-service is paid to the teaching of Pacific languages. The literature taught in schools and at university level is still predominantly European or American. For example, Shakespeare is still being forced on Fijian and Indian students as they prepare to take their places in the sugarcane fields or the cassava plantations. Many parents, teachers, and others in a position to influence still believe that what is foreign is best. In such a climate, the oral and written literature and the visual and performing arts of the Pacific are either yet to be introduced or taken seriously as worthy of a place in the school curriculum. As might be expected, those who graduate from such institutions know much more about the history, geography, and cultures of Europe, America, Australia, or New Zealand than they do about their own or those of the rest of the Pacific Islands. The trend towards an education more relevant to islanders is developing slowly.

In its early stages, the University of the South Pacific showed great promise as a leader in the restoration of pride in being Pacific, yet more than two decades later, its Literature and Language Department on the Suva campus has yet to teach Fijian, Samoan, or any Pacific language. The majority of the university's largely expatriate (and even local) staff are rarely seen at cultural events, and students who spend time preparing for their cultural presentations often express resentment that their contributions make no difference to their grades. In fact, the ones who benefit most academically are those who choose not to participate in cultural matters, which they view as a hindrance to their studies. 'The Pacific Way' ideology has yet to filter into and permeate the education system—which holds the key to a mental revolution. Unless there are radical changes in education—beginning from kindergarten—unless politicians, teachers, and lecturers are prepared to introduce sweeping changes in school, college, and university curricula so that they are infused with local content and the local languages are used as mediums of instruction, true decolonisation of the mind will remain a dream.⁵⁰

The cultural chasms that exist for Pacific Island students studying at tertiary institutions are also real for islanders who live in urban centers and hold white-collar jobs. They feel Pacific (for example, in their love of laughter and generosity of spirit, emphasis on people rather than things) yet speak English, wear Western clothing, and pay rent or mortgages. Torn between being traditional (which usually means behaving and holding the same values as their rural counterparts) and being realistic (adopting certain European or

American manners, certain kinds of dress and values), they are often unable to reconcile these seemingly conflicting notions of identity. A way out of this impasse is to realise that there is nothing shameful about having two or more identities, or an identity that is a composite of multiple cultural backgrounds. In fact, in a world that is increasingly becoming aware of the validity of multiculturalism, the individual who is competent in two or more languages or cultures has a distinct advantage. The secret is the ability to adjust to changing circumstances, as Rotumans are prone to do.

In Rotuma, a Rotuman male usually answers the question 'Who are you?' by mentioning his name, parents, and village. Rarely is the question of identity asked directly because it is considered rude. Instead, people usually whisper to each other, 'Who is that person there?' Since Rotumans do not customarily take on their father's name as their surname (although many Rotumans now follow the European custom), a person's name does not usually mean anything unless both parents' names are mentioned. Sometimes this is adequate, otherwise mention of the village suffices. This 'consocial'⁵¹ identity reflects an emphasis on the value of kinship and the importance of the extended family. This view of personhood is true of other Pacific islands as well. As Lieber said of Kapingamarangi, 'The person is not an individual in [the] Western sense of the term'. Instead, the person is 'a locus of shared *biographies*: personal histories of people's relationships with other people and with things'.⁵²

Outside one's island of birth, identity becomes variable and more susceptible to manipulation. For example, if asked the same question 'Who are you?' by a Fijian, the same Rotuman is likely to say that he is Rotuman; if asked the same question in Hawai'i by a stranger, he may say he is Fijian, since constitutionally Rotuma is part of Fiji. If asked the same question in England, he will usually claim the Pacific Islands as his place of origin. If the questioner is another Polynesian staying in England, he will respond by saying that he is from Fiji, or Rotuma, depending on whether or not the questioner seems to know the geography. If he wants to establish some affinity with Polynesia, he might claim to be Polynesian. If the questioner is Melanesian, he is likely to say he is from the Pacific. The motivation for the variations in defining identity is to try and be inclusive, particularly if the forging of a common background is desirable. No Rotuman I know wants to be identified as a Fijian if the association will not bring credit. Thus identity for Rotumans, and for other Pacific Islanders, is 'situationally variable' and is a 'continual reconstruction—process rather than structure'.⁵³

The process of negotiating a shared identity, however, is problematic in relation to whites, whose physical appearance and values (apart from being regarded as members of the colonising group) make islanders only too aware of cultural difference. Instead of a better appreciation of Euro-American values, the effect is usually the opposite, as evidenced by the number of educated islanders in colleges and universities who are among



Young girls in Rotuma perform a Rotuman version of Cook Islands dancing, mak Ravotonga, in 1992, wearing natural leaves and flowers as well as manufactured fabric. The wrap-around cotton garment (ha'fali in Rotuma, lavalava in Samoa) is seen throughout the Pacific, especially Polynesia. (Alan Buckley)

the most assertive about an ethnic or cultural identity rooted in the past. Although these islanders may work in professions that have more in common with the dominant cultures, they deliberately and consciously cultivate symbols that express their cultural roots. In these situations, these symbols of cultural identity are signifiers of difference and resistance to certain values of the dominant cultures.

For political purposes, members of the dominant cultures may be useful and desirable to islanders. For example, *haole* (whites) who support the struggle for Hawaiian sovereignty are welcomed by Hawaiian political activists. White Australians or New Zealanders at the East-West Center are included in its Pan-Pacific club. Geography and the need to increase numbers play a more important part in the inclusion of 'white' Pacific Islanders from the dominant cultures. In this context, both the indigenous islanders and the 'white islanders' stand to gain from the union. In their desire to resist being swamped by the large numbers from East and West, this alliance is politically expedient and necessary. Howard aptly described this process: 'As once-distinct peoples increasingly come into contact with one another, as their lots are cast together within (culturally) arbitrary political

units, the possibilities for alliance and disengagement are multiple and shifting'.⁵⁴

When asked about their identities outside their islands but still within the Pacific, educated Pacific Islanders usually respond by naming the island of their birth. Yet should these individuals return to their islands or villages, they may feel just as alienated as the New Zealand-educated protagonist in Wendt's *Sons for the Return Home*.⁵⁵ However, there are islanders who are able to switch from a pakeha (white) way of behaving to a localised Pacific one. Among them are educated islanders who are willing to return to their home islands regularly, and to invest money, time, and energy in maintaining their links with migrant communities from their island wherever they find themselves. These dual or multiple identities, consciously and deliberately cultivated, are best suited to life in the contemporary Pacific. Keri Hulme, a New Zealand writer of Maori and Lancashire English ancestry, sees this as a joy and advantage because she can be on both sides of the fence, as well as having 'more than one set of ears . . . more than one set of eyes'.⁵⁶ Wendt explores a variant of the same idea in the character Galupo in *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*.⁵⁷

Galupo returns to Sapepe to find a village perched precariously between the old and the new ways of life. Taulopepe—the most powerful chief in the village of Sapepe, reared on the belief that the European values of thrift, hard work, and money are the keys to success—had propelled his village towards a path of modernisation. Through manipulation and exploitation, Taulopepe's selfish ambitions are being realised. But the cost in terms of community cohesion and human dignity has been enormous. Galupo arrives and commits himself to saving this community from self-destruction. Unlike the protagonist in *Sons*, who flies back to New Zealand rather than face the challenges at home, or Faleasa Osovae, the old chief in *Pōuliuli* who fails to reconcile the opposing forces in his village, in *Leaves* Galupo succeeds in reconciling the world of 'lions and *aitu*' with the world of the *papalagi* (whites). His secret: he is well versed in the ways of the Samoan and in those of the *papalagi*, and confident about his own identity and his place in history. Further, the community see him as their ally, a benevolent leader committed to the restoration of justice.

Unfortunately, few Pacific Islanders today have such a clear and confident vision of who they are and their place in modern society, or are as committed as Galupo to political action that will unite their people and restore their pride. Although they pay lip-service to a Pacific identity, they have only a vague idea of how such an identity translates into concrete actions. Everyday behaviour and responses to questions of identity are therefore misleading—they claim to be islanders and deny their colonial heritage. If Galupo is to be the model for the new Pacific Islander, then European or American culture and what it has to offer—its methods, perspectives, and technology—has to be harnessed creatively to suit changing

circumstances even as the individual remains firmly grounded in a cultural centre and is not afraid to criticise and resist institutions or ideologies that perpetuate oppression. Only then will islanders have a chance of succeeding in their attempts to confront the legacies and challenges imposed by the dominant cultures.

National identities

The creation of national unity is difficult, particularly when colonialism's implicit policy was one of divide and rule. In the coral atolls or smaller volcanic islands, national unity is generally easier to achieve, although the tendency is to put kin-group and faction interests first and national interests second. For the larger islands of the Solomons and Papua New Guinea, where geographical and linguistic barriers are legion, the forging of a national unity is a major preoccupation. Fiji faces the same problem: it has a large Indian population with a cultural identity extremely different from that of the Fijians. Divisions also exist within both the Fijian and the Indian communities. For these newly independent nations, the quest for national unity often involves the selection of cultural symbols of the more dominant political group. A small Western-educated elite usually defines these symbols, which may or may not be effective or acceptable to the majority. Whether the symbols chosen are slit-gongs, pigs' teeth, and decorative leaves as in Vanuatu,⁵⁸ the bird of paradise of Papua New Guinea, or the flag of the Federated States of Micronesia, the intention is the same—to create a feeling of identification and pride in one's nation. At the best of times, such symbols are accepted as inevitable by the local population; at other times, rumblings of resentment rise to the surface.

Contemporary architectural designs for important national buildings constitute one of the most obvious ways in which Pacific nations try to assert their distinct identities. The rebuilding of Maori meetinghouses complete with Maori designs in New Zealand and the parliament buildings in Samoa and Papua New Guinea are good examples of national architecture that uses modern tools to construct a distinctly local design. The result is magnificent buildings that derive their strength and beauty by drawing on the best in the foreign and the local cultures. However, as national symbols, these buildings are sometimes criticised for favouring a particular political group at the expense of others. For example, although the building of Parliament House in Papua New Guinea has been met with criticism, from without and within,⁵⁹ it still stands as an excellent example of what can be achieved when a nation (or individual or region) is not afraid to fuse the best from modern and local cultures. These symbolic structures represent an ideal in the minds of those in power and serve to evoke, confirm, or build a national identity, if not in the course of everyday political or social life, then in the imagination.

For island peoples who are still struggling for sovereignty, symbols that emphasise an ethnic identity serve a dual purpose: they unite even as they create divisions within. After the 1987 coups in Fiji, there were rushed attempts to establish a distinctly Fijian presence in the civil service and commerce. The most powerful symbol of this assertion of Fijian rights is the new parliament building modelled on a Fijian *bure* that will replace the British-style government buildings erected by the colonial government. Whereas formerly the colonial government building projected a neutral position in regard to Fijian-Indian power relations, the new building reinforces an unmistakably Fijian bias. Other examples of symbolism designed to affirm a cultural identity rooted in ethnicity include the wearing of gourd helmets by Hawaiians in front of the Federal Court Building in 1976,⁶⁰ the revival of the tattoo in Tahiti,⁶¹ the use of the vernacular language to address a predominantly English-speaking audience, and the practice of certain rituals (such as the Maori *tangihangi*) that serve as a focus for the assertion of indigenous practices in the face of pakeha hegemony.⁶² By clearly signifying difference, individuals and nations are making cultural and political statements that will further their pursuit of supremacy or the right to self-determination in their own land.

Perhaps the most potent symbol in the quest for self-determination is the revival of indigenous languages. In New Zealand, Maori has now been elevated to the legal status of English and is taught in a number of schools. 'Language nests' where pre-school children can be immersed in a Maori-speaking environment are also beginning to effect changes at the national level.⁶³ The Hawaiian language has made significant inroads into the education system, and in February 1992 the State Board of Education approved 'a policy allowing public school students to be taught almost entirely in the Hawaiian language through high school'.⁶⁴ A range of courses taught by the Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai'i ensures that Hawaiian history, culture, mythology, and language are taught to Hawaiians wanting to learn about their cultural heritage.

Through film, issues of national identity and concern to Pacific Islanders are raised and disseminated. Merata Mita's *Patu*, Albert Wendt's book-made-into-film *Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree*, and Puhipau and Joan Lauder's documentary *Act of War* present a Pacific perspective on history and Pacific politics that eclipses the romantic images on celluloid that pervade South Seas cinema from the 1890s to the 1990s. In their struggle for self-determination, islanders are now realising that film is potentially their most powerful weapon; the documentary film is likely to be the most exploited medium for political purposes in the twenty-first century.

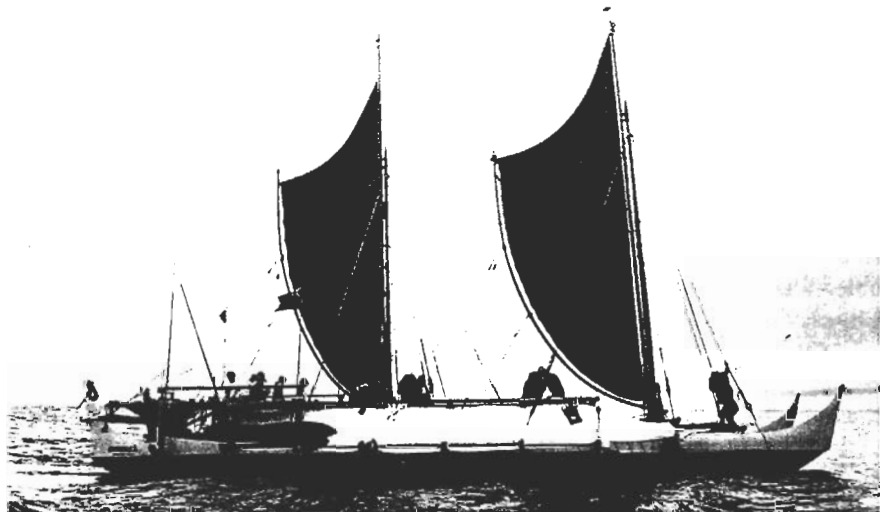
Meanwhile, a national identity is most clearly expressed in imaginative literature. Maori writers such as Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace, Keri Hulme and, most recently, Alan Duff continue to present a Maori world-view of events and situations that bring to the fore the values of Maori society, the

racial prejudices of the pakeha, the tensions inherent in Maori society, and the effects of colonialism on the land and the Maori race.⁶⁵ Contemporary writing in Papua New Guinea tends to focus on issues of identity and desirable aspects of life in post-independence Papua New Guinea.⁶⁶ Many stories explore the consequences of living in urban centres and having to deal with the legacy of colonialism and the post-independence experience. Among these writers, Russel Soaba's novels *Wanpis*⁶⁷ and *Maiba*⁶⁸ and Nora Brash's plays⁶⁹ appear to best capture the realities of contemporary life in Papua New Guinea. A few collections of poetry and short stories from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have also been published. Worthy of note are Grace Mera Molisa's collection of poems entitled *Black Stone*⁷⁰ and Jully Makini Sipolo's *Civilized Girl*,⁷¹ both of which focus on female issues of identity, the oppression of women by men, and culture. Like writings from the rest of the Pacific, these stories and poems invariably are set in the writer's country of birth and deal with national issues. These writings act as 'counter-histories' to those written by members of the dominant cultures.

In Micronesia, the corpus of published material is relatively small. In these islands, a coordinated effort to encourage or facilitate the publishing of creative literature is just beginning. Communication of local sentiment still remains largely in the more ephemeral realms of oratory, dance, or dramatic performance. Hezel reported, 'In Yap church history was danced; in Truk it was sung in a number of hymns, each composed by a separate island group; and in Pohnpei it was dramatized in a series of humorous tableaux. . . . Each of the island groups had its history, presented in an art form that best suited its genius'.⁷² Here, as in most other parts of the Pacific, a sophisticated and rich sense of history—as embodied in performance as well as oral historical narratives, past and present—serves as an effective retort to outsiders' constructions of local histories.

With regard to national representations at arts festivals or promotional visits to overseas countries, the usual tendency is to project images of a static culture. For example, the emphasis of arts festivals is primarily on the revival of art forms of earlier times, to look back at the past rather than look ahead to the future. Vigorous attempts to revive canoe-building skills in preparation for the 1992 Festival of Arts constitute one such example. Again, these symbolic representations of culture tend to minimise the element of change, partly because of a cyclical view of history, but also because of the need to assert cultural roots that have changed but little and to symbolise cultural autonomy, real or imagined.

In the matter of religion, a contradiction emerges: the majority of islanders have no intention of resurrecting the old gods of their ancestors. Instead, Christianity and its practice are regarded as traditional. Most important ceremonies therefore include Christian prayers and hymns in the native languages. At a 1991 tourism conference held at the Sheraton Waikiki in Honolulu, for example, Tongans living in Honolulu sang an ensemble of



The Hawaiian voyaging canoe Hokule'a en route to Rarotonga in 1984. The canoe's voyages to Tahiti and Aotearoa have fostered renewed contacts and awareness of the common culture throughout Polynesia. (Hawai'i Maritime Center)

Christian hymns as their contribution to the evening's cultural programme. When a visiting intellectual learned from a fellow Tongan that Christian hymns were planned, she responded: 'That's good. Keep the culture alive!'⁷³ This statement was interpreted literally by the fellow Tongan, though the respondent, who shared this 'joke' with me, was being ironic. This instance illustrates that not all Pacific Islanders hold identical views on what are appropriate representations of culture or tradition; it also highlights the co-optation and indigenisation of Christianity by Pacific Islanders.

In multicultural societies such as Fiji or Papua New Guinea, national unity is projected through images that highlight diversity or multiculturalism. Sometimes there are attempts to create productions that combine elements drawn from various ethnic components, as has been the practice with Papua New Guinea's *Raun Raun* theatre. In this kind of community theatre—a similar project has been developed in the Solomon Islands—local people are involved at the grassroots level, and cultural expression is therefore less tied to the interests and needs of the ruling elite or foreigners, particularly if it is for home consumption. For export, negative images are often left out in an attempt to attract tourists and investment. Most nations have a tendency to project favourable stereotyped images, creating discrepancies between these romantic images and the modernisation of the national character. In the contemporary Pacific, this search for images that

will capture the complexity of contemporary modern island life and also unite diverse groups as well as promote a sense of national identity is a constant challenge.

Regional identities

Whether individuals who work at the three hundred or so regional organisations in the Pacific see themselves first and foremost as regionals is debatable.⁷⁴ At the University of the South Pacific, students have a tendency to eat, play, dance, and sing with other students from their own islands. They are not unaware of a shared identity with other islanders—through the common experiences of colonialism, smallness, and a love of laughter and merrymaking. Now that the Pacific Cultural Programme (formerly known as Pacific Week) has been carved up into separate weeks for each of the islands, heightened awareness of differences from each other is likely as each island group attempts to make its programme bigger and better than the others. The most important aspect of this programme is the opportunity for students who have come from relatively insulated backgrounds to experience the cultures of their Pacific neighbours and to become better informed. When these students leave for their home countries to take up positions in the professions or in government, they will take with them firsthand experiences of having lived and interacted with other Pacific Islanders.

Some of the friendships established by university students during their undergraduate days last forever. Islanders who work in regional institutions such as the South Pacific Commission, the Forum Secretariat, the Pacific Conference of Churches, or the University of the South Pacific tend to see themselves as 'pan-Pacific' or international persons,⁷⁵ with a commitment to the Pacific region, although they may still strongly identify themselves as belonging to a specific ethnic or cultural group.⁷⁶ These individuals are usually the products of multicultural experiences. Educated overseas and used to a more liberal and stimulating atmosphere, they are attracted to regional institutions where there is more room for differences in opinion and more tolerance of different values. The pressure to conform to societal expectations once they are out of their home environment is reduced, and they are freer to pursue individual interests. However, immigration restrictions and neo-colonial attitudes sometimes act like water on fire, dousing commitment to a regional ideal and chasing many of these islanders away to metropolitan countries.

The South Pacific Games (which include the French territories and Micronesia) are another context in which a feeling of regionalism is promoted, even though athletes compete for their island nations. Like the Festival of Pacific Arts, it allows a rare opportunity for islanders to meet, share, and compete in a friendly atmosphere. For the host country, it

provides an avenue for fostering co-operation among diverse and competing cultural groups. This opportunity was not lost on Papua New Guinea, the host of the 1991 games. A spectacular display of its diverse and rich cultural heritage was enacted to portray a united country in the face of widespread fears that law and order (as in the Bougainville case) were breaking down. Such large-scale celebrations or competitions help to promote national as well as regional identities.

In recent years, the islands in the North Pacific that were known as Micronesia are beginning to identify themselves with their South Pacific neighbours. For example, when the University of the South Pacific was established, its member countries were confined to Melanesia (except Papua New Guinea), Micronesia (Kiribati, Nauru), and Polynesia (excluding the French territories and Hawai'i), but now the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands are contributors to its financial management. A handful of students from these islands are now studying at the university, participating in its Pacific programme, and sharing their cultures with a student population that was previously ignorant of them. However, south of the equator there is still a vacuum of information about the North Pacific and a need for the rest of the Pacific to foster closer ties with these islands.

Because membership of the South Pacific Forum is confined to independent or self-governing nations, the French territories, Hawai'i, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Palau, and Easter Island (which is a territory of Chile) are excluded, an indication that these islands are not closely aligned with the rest of the Pacific. In fact, Australia and New Zealand are more involved, as evidenced by their membership in the Forum. In non-independent or self-governing islands, the question of a national identity is of more pressing concern than regionalism. Political activists in these territories—or state in the case of Hawai'i—are now fighting for independence and their right to self-determination. Once self-determination at the national level is achieved, these islands are likely to be more closely integrated with the rest of the Pacific region. A clearer articulation of a cultural identity rooted in the past, with affinities to the rest of the Pacific islands, will follow.

The emergence of ideologies such as *fa'a Samoa* or *Maoritanga* are partly the result of reactions against white colonial values that threaten to marginalise core values in island societies. These include concern for kin and the land, generosity, hospitality, feasting, merrymaking, and reciprocity. For islanders to be able to maintain their cultural identities and participate in white colonial society, however, a new synthesis is necessary, and elements from the dominant cultures are sometimes incorporated into new cultural constructions of identity. Many Pacific women have embraced Western feminism as an important part of their search for an identity that is free of both colonialism and male oppression. For example, Maori women are becoming increasingly

assertive about female identity; their involvement in contemporary protest movements implies a rejection of the 'authenticity of the male elders so intrinsic to Maori culture, where to be young and female is traditionally a liability'.⁷⁷ The same trend is also noticeable in Hawai'i, Fiji, and Guam.⁷⁸ This new resistance to male oppression is best exemplified in the previously quoted poem by Grace Molisa of Vanuatu (page 370).⁷⁹

On the other hand, in places such as Tonga and Samoa, there appears to be a strong anti-feminist movement among women intellectuals. Regardless of the different positions women take in relation to feminism, they are likely to play an increasingly powerful role in forging regional organisations based on gender, circumventing the barriers of race, nation, and patriarchy.⁸⁰

Similarly, innovation and creativity are evident in the work of many contemporary Pacific artists, challenging Western constructions of the 'primitive' in art.⁸¹ Refusing to adhere to the constraints of purity, tradition, and authenticity, artists such as Aloï Pilioko of Wallis Island (needlework tapestries using brightly coloured wool), Tanya Whiteside of Fiji (Pacific-inspired motifs on fabric), and Iosua Toafa of Western Samoa (blockmaking and painting) are producing works that depict Pacific motifs and themes in original styles using modern materials and media. Even more innovative in style are the works of Papua New Guinea artists such as Akis, Jakupa, and Kauage. What Narokobi says of recent developments in artistic expression in Papua New Guinea is applicable to the work of many young contemporary Pacific artists, particularly in New Zealand, who use modern tools or technology. Their creations are 'symbolic of a society in change, in transformation'.⁸²

In literature, a complex but distinctly Pacific sensibility that encompasses a regional consciousness is manifest in Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs* and *Kisses in the Nederends*.⁸³ His works, as well as the writings of Albert Wendt, present a Pacific world that is full of manipulation, contradiction, political intrigue, and, in Hau'ofa's case, comic laughter to combat this mish-mash of madness and confusion. For example, in 'The Wages of Sin' Ti Pilo Simini, 'a weedy little man who smokes continuously', wakes up in the middle of the night, gropes in the dark, and finds a page from a book which he rips, lights, and smokes. Then he dreams of 'Moses, the lawgiver of Israel' and 'his trusted friend Joshua' who accuse him of sacrilege. They force a stick of dynamite in Ti's mouth, light the fuse, and disappear. The dynamite explodes, and Ti wakes up screaming. At dawn he discovers his sin: he had smoked a page from the Bible, the one containing the Ten Commandments! In his attempt to seek redemption he commits one sin after another, until he learns the secret of forgiveness: he had to commit two sins simultaneously, 'one the equal and opposite of the other'.⁸⁴ This incident highlights two things about Pacific identities: first, the pervading presence of Christianity and the sharing of common Christian values throughout the Pacific; second, that islanders have always been and still are

active agents in their struggles to maintain their dignity, even as cultural bombs are going off all around them.

A final example from Hau'ofa: In 'The Glorious Pacific Way', Ole Pasifikiwei—collector of oral traditions—discovers that there is money to be had for the work he is doing. He learns how to play by the rules of the game and after six years has received a total of \$14 million. Further, his name has become famous in influential circles in cities such as Paris, The Hague, New York, Tokyo, and Moscow, 'as well as in such regional laundry centers as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Suva, and Noumea'. He commits himself totally to development through foreign aid, 'relishing the twists and turns of international funding games'.⁸⁵ Here we see an individual who is content to be a 'first-rate, expert beggar', a condition that afflicts many individuals and nations in the Pacific. Ole's dictum for happy living is the advice offered by Bagarap, a veteran of this game: 'They set the rules and we go along trying to bend them for our benefit'. Under the constraints of an imposed and oppressive system, Pacific Islanders in contemporary society are faced with the challenge of negotiating their identities to achieve their wishes for equality and self-determination, for themselves and their children's children.

Conclusion

In general terms, the *ao maksul ta* (time of darkness) was a period of *contested* identities, marked by a great deal of indigenous exploration and trade. Then came the *ao taf ta* (time of light), when missionisation *transformed* cultural identities of Pacific Islanders by converting them to a new religious order while suppressing certain cultural practices. However, as islanders embraced Christianity, they infused it with their own cultural symbols and ways of worshipping that reflect their cultural heritage. Then came World War Two, decolonisation, and independence movements. In their quest for a cultural identity at the personal, national, and regional levels, islanders sought ways to reconcile indigenous culture, Christianity, and Euro-American values of materialism and progress. A wide range of possible fusions ensued, creating different identities from which to choose and multiple ways of symbolising each particular one.⁸⁶ In the contemporary phase, which Rotumans refer to as *ao fo'ou ta* (new time), cultural identities are *negotiable*.

In islands where political autonomy has been won, anticolonial feelings have been tempered by more pressing internal matters such as the forging of national unity or the search for a collective identity among diverse cultural groups. In these independent or self-governing nations, key cultural symbols that the majority of the population can relate to have become 'icons of collective identity'.⁸⁷ For New Caledonia, Hawai'i, and New Zealand, where

the indigenous peoples are a minority, the search for collective symbols of identity at the national or regional levels that will motivate the majority (including non-islanders) to political action has yet to bear fruit. Meanwhile, the coconut trees along Waikīkī best symbolise the destructive effects of colonialism on these cultures.

According to legend, the Pacific coconut tree was a special gift from an eel, a token of sacrificial love for Sina, that ubiquitous female in Pacific lore who epitomizes beauty and symbolises the land. The eel died, but it left Sina and her descendants a gift that was binding and enduring. Brown on the outside and white on the inside, the coconut became a symbol of islanders whose values are those of whites. Such an analogy is too simplistic: identity for Pacific Islanders has never been a clear 'black and white' issue, as evident in the words *contested*, *transformed*, and *negotiable*. Who we are is always in process, constituted within, yet continually being modified or affected by external factors such as other people's prejudices, negative or positive. In this sense, the Rotuman *tābroro* is a more apt symbol of identity in the contemporary Pacific.

To make *tābroro*, a green coconut is husked and its juice sucked through a hole at the top. Thin strips of coconut flesh from other nuts are then inserted through the hole, and salt water added. The hole in the nut is then corked (with a rolled-up strip of brown banana leaf) and the coconut allowed to stand for several weeks until the salt water acts to reduce the white flesh of the coconut to a fermented sauce that can be used to enhance the flavour of all kinds of foods. This transformation from white flesh to an amorphous, fused concoction symbolises the diversity of elements that constitute Pacific identities. Such a fusion of different elements is not 'inauthentic' or an 'invention' of tradition, but necessary for the creation of identities that enhance dignity and pride in Pacific cultures and yet are capable of confronting the challenges introduced by Euro-American cultures. Brown on the outside, a myriad of colors inside—this is the Rotuman *tābroro*, a symbol not just of Rotuman identity but also of the fluid nature of present Pacific identities.

To produce a good *tābroro*—one that does not have a bad smell—is an art. The secret is in the quality of the ingredients and the careful handling of the coconut during the fermentation process as the various elements fuse and act on each other. Similarly, the present search for cultural identities rooted in the past but relevant in the present has to be carefully conducted, if self-determination for individuals, nations, and the Pacific region is to be a reality. The challenge is in the art of selection and negotiation.

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Notes

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- 4 See also Paul Sharrad, 'Imagining the Pacific', *Meanjin* 49 (4, 1990): 597-606.
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