

*The “Sea of Little Lands”:  
Examining Micronesia’s Place in  
“Our Sea of Islands”*

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In the area formerly administered as the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, there began appearing during the mid-1970s T-shirts in assorted solid and primary colors with the following questions printed on them: “Where the hell is Yap?” “Where the hell is Ponape?” “Where the hell is Palau?” “Kusaie?” “Truk?” “Majuro?” Motivations and understandings varied among wearers and beholders. For some, these T-shirts were asking the larger question, “Where the hell is Micronesia?” and, by extension, “*What* the hell is Micronesia?” This is an essay that asks these same larger questions, “Where, and what the hell is Micronesia?” but in relation to the changing field of Pacific studies.

I would characterize Micronesia’s current place within the field of Pacific studies as one of relative absence or, at best, minimal inclusion. Micronesia certainly does not want for writings about it; the number of scholarly monographs, articles, and reports is considerable. In their edited volume *American Anthropology in Micronesia* (1999), Robert C Kiste and Mac Marshall described the larger history of anthropological research in the region. Their bibliography, descriptions, and participant rosters of post-war anthropological research projects and lists of doctoral dissertations in Micronesian anthropology indicate just how extensive that research has been. But these works constitute an archive or library apart. In his review of case-study citations in introductory anthropology texts for the Kiste and Marshall volume, Terence Hays wrote that Micronesia has only occasionally “captured the attention of authors and entered the mental worlds

of our students” (1999, 514). While the region receives mention in Pacific prehistory and in the voyaging histories that supplement that prehistory, Micronesia often garners at best a chapter in a book, a lecture in a semester-long course, or a footnote or two in an essay or article dealing with the larger region. The area called Micronesia does seem far and away from the focus of most Pacific studies. Margaret Jolly has written of “Cook’s Pacific” and notes Pacific studies’ deep, intimate, and ongoing connection to the voyages of the British explorer (2006). Kerry Howe has argued that the construction of the modern Pacific is in large part a consequence of Cook’s voyages and the centuries of scholarship that have followed in their wake (2000). Had Cook visited the region on any one of his travels, perhaps Micronesia would be more a part of this form of Pacific studies, though not necessarily for the better.

Colonialism and its legacies are in play here. The histories of different colonial regimes in the Micronesian geographical region and in the larger Pacific explain in part this relative absence or isolation. Scholarship tends to follow the colonial flag. It is no coincidence that most of the research on the former US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and the four Micronesian governments that emerged from it has been done by American researchers. The link between colonialism and the national identity of scholars is equally strong in the French Pacific and among Britain’s former colonial holdings. We have yet to fully acknowledge and interrogate the ways in which colonialism affects us all: Islanders, outlanders, and settlers. All of us need to be mindful, too, of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s still relevant caution that even criticisms of colonialism can be infected by that which they criticize (1985, 245). My ultimate concern, however, is with the place of Micronesia in the still decolonizing and larger field of Pacific studies—a Pacific studies that aspires to be truly regional, transdisciplinary in practice, attentive to both the landscapes and seascapes of Oceania, inclusive of local or indigenous epistemologies, and active in the recognition and promotion of all the ways knowledge from the region can be expressed. Epli Hau’ofa’s phrase “our sea of islands” best articulates this kind of Pacific studies (1994). I must acknowledge as well the difficulty of avoiding the term *Micronesia* when writing about the islands on which it has been imposed. A near-century of travel, ethnographic, and historical writings has made its avoidance impossible. Its persisting currency attests to the reifying power of colonial discourses. I employ the word *Micronesia* critically and in light of this history.

## NAMING BY ABSENCE AND IN ABSENTIA

A consideration of the “what” of Micronesia directs our attention to the absences—cultural and personal—that informed the naming of the region. I rely here on the works of Serge Tcherkézoff and Paul Rainbird. In the division of the Pacific into the three major cultural areas that still persist today, there was first Polynesia. Tcherkézoff reminded us that Charles de Brosses coined the term and applied it liberally to the many islands that his native France might exploit commercially (Tcherkézoff 2006). In de Brosses’s time, Pacific studies would have been called *Polynesian studies*, foreshadowing in a way the contemporary criticism that Polynesia dominates Pacific studies (Geiger 2007; Teaiwa 2005; Winduo 2003). Despite de Brosses’s advocacy, the term *Polynesia*, meaning most if not all of the Pacific Islands, did not gain widespread currency early on. It would be Johann Forster’s observations on Cook’s second expedition that, along with Dumont d’Urville’s later racially based distinctions between copper-skinned and dark-skinned people, mapped Polynesia in the ways it is often understood today: as a unitary region with historical, cultural, and linguistic linkages.

The term *Micronesia* came into being on 16 December 1831 in Paris (d’Urville 1832, 2003; Tcherkézoff 2003). There, in a speech before the Société de Géographie, French geographer Gregoire-Louis Domeny de Rienzi proposed the division of Oceania into five regions. Among de Rienzi’s designations for these five regions was a not-altogether legible word with the prefix *micro* that, following the editorial intervention of d’Urville in 1832, became *Micronesia* (Tcherkézoff 2006). In de Rienzi’s scheme of things, the many islands of Polynesia were distinguished not only by skin color but also by sexual license and the ritually sanctioned imposition of prohibitions—or taboo—on different material, personal, and cultural practices. Given these distinguishing features, de Rienzi’s Polynesia covered an expansive area stretching from Tikopia in the western Pacific to the South American coast, and including the Caroline, Gilbert, and Marshall island groups that are today a part of what is called Micronesia. De Rienzi’s Micronesia encompassed the uninhabited islands west of Hawai‘i, south and east of Japan, north and east of the Marianas, and north of the Carolines. Midway, Johnston, Wake, and the Bonin and Volcano island groups all belonged to de Rienzi’s Micronesia as well.

D’Urville, at a session of the Société de Géographie on 6 January 1832,

endorsed the general concept of a Micronesia but adjusted it geographically to encompass the Carolines, Gilberts, and Marshalls, and at the expense of de Rienzi's Polynesia (Tcherkézoff 2006). D'Urville justified his geographical regrouping with the argument that the Carolines, Gilberts, and Marshalls lacked both a common language and the practice of taboo; these generally small islands and atolls were therefore more accurately categorized as being Micronesian. For d'Urville, the balance of the islands in the southwest Pacific would be Melanesia. As Tcherkézoff noted, the interventions of de Rienzi and d'Urville not only created a Melanesia and Micronesia, but also resulted in a geographically narrower definition of Polynesia as a culture area marked by sexual license, tattooing, and taboo. Thus, Micronesia, whose inhabitants were described as light or copper-skinned like Polynesians, came to be distinguished from Polynesia by the absence of the practice of taboo and also by the lack of a common language.

There was also, wrote Rainbird (2003), another kind of absence at work in the making of Micronesia; this was d'Urville's lack of any extended contact or experience with the islands about which he wrote. In essence, Micronesia was named and described from a distance, and long before it was ethnographically researched. D'Urville had only landed at Chuuk and Guam. He drew his characterization of Palau largely from a popular account of the wreck of the English packet *Antelope* there in 1783. In other instances, d'Urville employed offshore impressions, fragments of recorded conversations, and colonial reports to fashion culturally descriptive accounts of the rest of the Caroline and Mariana Islands. Ethnographic extrapolation made possible the inclusion of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands. This personal distance allowed for generalizations that have taken on a persisting orthodoxy about a culture region that cannot be sustained as a single entity by any combination of archeological, linguistic, ethnographic, or local historical evidence (Hau'ofa 1994; Jolly 2007; Linnekin 1997; Kirch 2000).

Other observers, wrote Rainbird, could not see the cultural coherence that d'Urville imagined, though for reasons that were no less colonizing. Horatio Hale of the United States Exploring Expedition struggled to develop a general description and set of characterizations for Micronesia, while missionary Samuel Damon described Gilbertese or i-Kiribati as belonging to the same race of people as Polynesians. F W Christian, the anthropologist whose phrase "sea of little lands" titles this paper, struggled to reconcile the darker people of Yap and their "strange and barbarous

language” with the Polynesian infiltration he saw in the central Carolines (1899). His race-based imperial science focused on the Caroline Islands, their small size, and their racially diluted inhabitants. Christian viewed the Carolinians of the late nineteenth century as meager in talents and a far cry from their glorious ancestors who had come from elsewhere to build such imposing megalithic structures as those found at Lelu on Kosrae and Nan Madol on Pohnpei. Christian’s description of the Caroline Islands, however, came to stand for all of Micronesia. Carolinians were essentialized as the true and exemplary Micronesians. Their “Micronesian-ness” blanketed the rest of the region, covering difference and variation with an assumed but unsustainable cultural sameness. Christian’s phrase “sea of little lands” captured all of the prejudice with which Micronesia has come to be regarded, and was in itself a succinct argument for the colonization of the region.

Formal colonial rule and related anthropological research added weight to the concept of Micronesia as a culture area. The German Südsee expedition subscribed to d’Urville’s notion of Micronesia, generalizing freely about the forty-five different islands visited and researched in a nine-month period from July 1909 to March 1910. Japanese administrators did not use the term *Micronesia* during their colonial administration of the Caroline, Mariana, and Marshall Islands. The United States, however, did. Roger Gale wrote that Yale University’s Cross-Cultural Survey, later reorganized as the Human Relations Area Files, was placed in the service of the American war effort in the Pacific (1979, 74). George Murdock, the survey’s director, supervised the collection and analysis of all data on those islands identified as Micronesian. The series of pamphlets and handbooks produced in support of the US seizure, occupation, and administration of Japan’s former islands colony contributed to the making of Micronesia. American strategic concerns in the post-World War II period further reified the term *Micronesia* as both a cultural and geographic area, and with particular reference to the Caroline, Mariana, and Marshall Islands. The US Navy-sponsored Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA) recruited a total of forty social scientists and scientists to provide a detailed account of the island peoples recently liberated from Japanese colonial rule. As Rainbird noted, CIMA’s efforts gave additional currency to the term *Micronesia*, a currency further reinforced by the Scientific Investigation of Micronesia (SIM), which took place between 1949 and 1951, with nine anthropologists participating (Rainbird 2003, 44).

Not surprisingly, given this colonially informed history of naming,

Micronesia as a culture area has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism. More recently, debates over Micronesia as a definable and coherent culture area have shown themselves in the aforementioned volume, *American Anthropology in Micronesia* (1999). Editors Kiste and Marshall argued for the salience of the term *Micronesia*, at least in the Caroline and Marshall Islands, in terms of matrilineality, land tenure, a hierarchical system of clan ranking, and the prominence of chiefs. In his own chapter on kinship and social organization, Marshall identified the Caroline and Marshall Islands as evidencing the primary features of “Micronesianness” (1999, 108). Excluded from his generalizations are the Mariana Islands with their long, distinguishing and separating history of Spanish colonialism, the former British colony of Kiribati, and the former Australian colony of Nauru.

What is interesting here is the implication that different colonialisms or colonial histories determine inclusion or separation within a culture area. Marshall conceded that within the Caroline Islands there are exceptions to the distinguishing features of Micronesian culture—the most notable example being the caste system on Yap and its effects on residence patterns and resource access. Marshall also acknowledged exceptions to the pattern of localized property-holding clans on Pingelap, the Polynesian outliers of Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro, and among contemporary Chamorros and Kosraeans (1999, 108–109). Commenting on these exceptions, Rainbird added that matrilineality, a distinguishing feature of this “Micronesian-ness,” is found in Melanesia as well, stretching from Vanuatu in the south to New Ireland in the north (Rainbird 2003, 245). There exists, then, recognition of the limits of the term *Micronesia* in the Kiste and Marshall volume, and an accompanying concession about the increasingly questionable relevance of the culture area approach. Geoffrey Clark is more explicit in his view of Micronesia’s boundaries as arbitrary and not useful for purposes of cultural analysis (2003). For Clark, the term *Micronesia* does not begin to address the complexity and differences of the human groups that have resided within its artificial borders. Its only possible relevance is as an environmental zone characterized by unusual mobility and multiple colonization in times of earlier atoll emergence.

The justification of the term *Micronesia*, even for its defenders and advocates, becomes at best qualified. Nonetheless, the debate continues. Glenn Petersen has recently written in defense of Micronesia as a definable, concrete, and coherent ethnographic area (2006). In advance of a larger, soon-to-be-published study, Petersen’s article cites as evidence the

existence of a widespread breadfruit culture and a shared kinship system that centered on matrilineally ordered, conical clans. The spread of this breadfruit culture created a revolution throughout the region that effected major political and economic changes. Petersen points to evidence of this spread, and the shared cultural forms and practices it engendered, in the *sawei* exchange that linked the central and western Carolines, and in the similar forms of megalithic construction found on Kosrae and Pohnpei.

Petersen has crafted a bold, speculative, and exclusively text-based argument designed to justify Micronesia as a viable cultural entity that encompasses the Caroline, Gilbert, Mariana, and Marshall Islands; Nauru, usually included in conventional definitions of Micronesia, is not a part of Petersen's analysis. His is a broad-brush approach to history that minimizes the significant social, cultural, historical, and linguistic differences that separate the eastern and western regions of the Micronesian geographical area in favor of asserting their more significant and recent but largely unspecified similarities. Differences in rank, status, residence patterns, land tenure, settlement dates, and the complex interactions of migrant or immigrant groups with established peoples are not so easily or quickly reconciled across the region. Ironically, his emphasis on the conical clan brings into play a basic, widely distributed form of social organization that could expand the borders of Micronesia considerably and in line with de Rienzi's earlier and broader definition. Petersen insists on the dispersed nature of Micronesian matrilineal clans as being the feature that distinguishes them from Melanesian forms of matrilineality. What this dispersed nature actually means in terms of cultural practices and social forms goes largely unspecified. Despite the intensity of Petersen's conviction, it remains difficult to see Micronesia as a whole and unified culture area. What is especially intriguing about Petersen's argument is the evidence offered for a reconfiguration of the region into more localized zones of linked histories and shared cultures. Perhaps, then, the general artificiality of the term *Micronesia* helps explain its absence or minimal presence within the field of Pacific studies. If there is no Micronesia, then, how can we speak about Micronesia's place in Pacific studies?

#### AN ABSENCE OF LITERARY IMAGINATION

The absence of Micronesia is also an issue in Paul Lyons's *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination* (2006). Lyons noted that the United States was, for most of the nineteenth century, a dominant commercial

presence in the world's largest ocean area. In the twentieth century, the United States proved the most formidable colonizing force in Oceania. As a consequence, there exists a massive archive that generates and validates US views of the region to the exclusion of local or more indigenous ones. What results, in part, is a chronic mistranslation in which the strange and unfamiliar are written in terms of imperial languages, categories, terminologies, and understandings, rather than indigenous ones. Drawing from Bourdieu's concept of "misrecognition," Lyons wrote of a series of mutually confirming citations that are condensed into a collective heritage, archive, or cultural memory that functions selectively to secure needs in the present (2006, 9). Knowledges in the present are thus empowered and effective, and constituted by what they are institutionally sanctioned to ignore.

Lyons's term *American Pacificism* refers specifically to a wide variety of colonial forms of representation over time. The various forms of Pacificism, be they exploratory, commercial, military, strategic, developmental, or security-related, serve a variety of functions responding to the needs of a national narrative during a given historical period. Lyons noted that in the archive of American Pacificism, Micronesians are generally absent or collapsed into Polynesia. It is ironic, then, that a region of Oceania or the Pacific so profoundly affected by American colonialism is largely absent from the American literary imagination. There is, however, a way in which Micronesia—or, more accurately, representations of it—are affected by the American Pacificism of which Lyons has written.

Much of the archive of American Pacificism gets redirected toward tourism and becomes a form of literary tourism. Tourism, in Lyons's analysis, is not opposed to reality but is rather a state of knowledge and a specific set of material and economic relations that change over time. Following World War II, there occurred a convergence of touristic and scholarly writings that produced a particular cold-war scholarship. Borrowing from Teresia Teaiwa's concept of *militourism*, Lyons dubbed this conjunction of a public sphere-oriented scholarship and tourism *histouricism*; it works to promote a popular consumption of Oceania, and is driven by the need for a triumphant national historical narrative that celebrates liberation, freedom, economic development, and the opportunity for self-government, as the consequences of American engagement with the region.

An extension of Lyons's argument implies that much of the historical, anthropological, and social science writing on Micronesia evidences such *histouricism*. Central to perpetuating *histouristic* imaging is the neutraliza-

tion or denial of indigenous perspectives. The 1960s witnessed the beginnings of a writing back against colonial silencing in the regions called Melanesia and Polynesia; this local and creative literature has since grown and expanded. Micronesia remains largely quiet and unacknowledged in American literary imagings of the Pacific. More importantly, there exist precious few writings by the peoples called Micronesians. The reasons for the lack of a local literature are many, and include variation in the educational policies of the region's different colonizing groups. Of particular importance are the debates among US colonial officials in the 1950s and 1960s over the role of culture and vernacular languages in the Islands' elementary and secondary schools (Peacock 1990). These debates were resolved in favor of a flawed, predominantly English language-based curriculum that encouraged not creative expression but a basic, utilitarian competency. What remained paramount and consistent throughout were the strategic interests of the United States. The educational systems that have developed in the different political entities that now make up the region struggle with this colonial legacy. As Emelihter Kihleng of Pohnpei has noted in her recently published book of poetry (2008), *postcolonial* is not an adjective that can be used to characterize postsecondary education in the islands.

Things may be changing, however, with the emergence of more young writers in diasporic and educational locations beyond their home islands (see, eg, Luangphinit and Prasad 2006). As Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley have both reminded us, decolonization of the mind comes from within. Reflecting a deep skepticism for the term, Kihleng wrote in this excerpt from an earlier poem (2005):

Micronesian lacks concrete definition  
 An Inadequate  
 Insufficient  
 Identity  
 Misplaced  
 Bestowed Wrongly  
 Upon a large and diverse  
 Pacific Island Population  
 Who are not under one flag  
 Who do not speak one tongue  
 Who do not eat the same food  
 And most of all who  
 Do not want to be recognized as one.  
 (Emelihter Kihleng, "The Micronesian Question")

Mention of Micronesia figures prominently in another poem, one by John Pule that prefaces Lyons's volume and was originally published in Pule's book *The Shark that Ate the Sun* (1992). Pule's poem begins with a verse on the silencing in the Pacific that has resulted from the creation of a good part of the region as an American lake. Pule's litany of affected islands or island groups include Belau (Palau), Kwajalein, Truk (Chuuk), the Marianas, and the Carolines. The poem invokes former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's alleged indifference toward and dismissal of Micronesia because of the smallness of its population (reported in Hickel 1971, 208): "In Micronesia there are only 90,000 people, / who gives a damn?" (Pule 1992, 75). It remarks on the silence of the affected regions, and how the protest of the dead is louder than that of the living. The most immediate source of the silence that John Pule hears is American colonialism. Colonialism is most definitely not absent in the region called Micronesia. Colonialism's continuing presence, the various representational practices associated with it, and the silence it has imposed on the Islands have all contributed in profound ways to the isolation of Micronesia from the rest of the region. This isolation is another factor that helps to explain Micronesia's absence from Pacific studies.

### COLONIAL PRESENCES

Much has been written about the way colonialism has named, grouped, and mapped the region we call the Pacific (see Fry 1997). There has been no more colonially affected or represented region of the Pacific than Micronesia with its six different colonial regimes over the last century and a quarter. Having been named *Micronesia*, these islands would be further distinguished by proper adjectives that reflected more than three centuries of formal, varied, and changing colonial rule. Between 1668 and 1986, the Islands, at different times, would be described as Spanish, British, Australian, German, Japanese, and American. British annexation in 1902 gave a different colonial history to the Gilberts or Kiribati, while Nauru passed from Germany to Australia in 1914. Among the most dominating of these administrations has been that of the United States over the Caroline, Mariana, and Marshall Islands, an administration sanctioned by the United Nations and known until 1986 as the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

The culmination (some would say perpetuation) of an American presence in Micronesia rests in the compacts of free association between the

United States and the governments of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau. Other areas of Micronesia have been formally and intimately bound to the United States; these arrangements include commonwealth status for the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam's designation as an unincorporated territory. Despite their being touted as vehicles for independence, the compacts of free association seem to have offered Palau, the Marshalls, and the Federated States of Micronesia a constrained, almost neocolonial future through terms and conditions that compromise autonomy and national integrity in favor of continued financial assistance from the United States. These terms and conditions include mutual security pacts that serve as appendices to the compacts and that exist essentially in perpetuity, regardless of the future of free association. For the United States, free association then presented the opportunity of "staying while leaving" (Firth 1987, 49) and buying out of direct responsibility for its legacy of colonialism, including the consequences of nuclear testing in the Marshalls. Despite the powerful globalizing forces that flow through the Pacific region, the compacts of free association serve to direct the Islands east toward the United States.

The FSM and RMI compacts were recently revised and ratified in 2004. From the perspective of the George W Bush administration, the problems with the initial fifteen-year terms of the compacts lay not in the terms of supervision but in the implementation of that supervision. The recent renegotiations of the compacts focused in large part on the establishment of mechanisms whereby the United States could more effectively monitor and supervise the use of its money by the two Micronesian governments (Hezel 2003, 4–5). Reports of fiscal mismanagement, misuse, and corruption detailed in reports by the US General Accounting Office led the US government to be more exact and vigilant in the renegotiation of the FSM and RMI compacts of free association.

Particularly unsettling in the revised compact is the provision that establishes a five-person Joint Economic Management Committee, which meets each year to determine if the two Micronesian governments have complied with all US funding terms and requirements before releasing funds for the following year. As part of the process, the Federated States of Micronesia and Marshall Islands must submit their full national budgets for the next year to an oversight and evaluation team of eight Americans residing in Hawai'i and responsible to the US Department of the Interior. The team is charged with enforcing the fiscal controls that the United States has writ-

ten into the revised compact. Critics, including former FSM President John Haglelgam (2004), have called these oversight provisions an infringement on the sovereignty of the two Pacific governments.

The revised compacts continue to bind the region directly to the United States, thus limiting contact, communication, and exchange with the rest of greater Oceania. Especially noteworthy in both the earlier and revised versions of the compacts is the provision that allows for visa-free Micronesian migration to the United States and its territories. Extrapolating from earlier census data, Francis X Hezel, SJ, director of the Micronesian Seminar on Pohnpei, estimates there are now 30,000 FSM citizens living outside of the country in places such as Guam, Hawai'i, and the North American mainland; for the Marshalls and Palau, the estimates are 21,000 and 6,700, respectively (Hezel, pers comm, 2005). In effect, roughly one quarter of all Micronesians have left their home islands since the implementation of the compacts of free association. Projections based on current trends indicate that within ten years, more than half of the FSM and RMI native-born populations will dwell in places beyond the borders of their island nations.

The implications of this current and future movement for Micronesia and Micronesian studies are enormous. Given these figures and the ongoing history of colonialism in the region that they reflect, Lyons may well be right in suggesting that a critical American studies or a critical American Pacific Islander studies program can help liberate the people called Micronesians from the tradition of American Pacificism that has at once ignored and exploited them. The establishment of diasporic communities is changing the nature of Pacific studies (Gershon 2007). The articulation of Micronesian migrant experiences and the critique of the forces promoting that migration may well provide a voice for the region from within the empire.

## MICRONESIA IN OUR SEA OF ISLANDS

My concern in the last part of the essay is to focus on Micronesia's place in the changing field of Pacific studies. I do not mean here to revisit the debate on whether or not a Micronesia exists, although I have tried to indicate in this essay and elsewhere how problematic the term is intellectually, anthropologically, and politically (Hanlon 1989, 1998, 1999; see also Rainbird 2004). Current migration under the compacts of free association, as well as the voyaging that was so very much a part of the area's

deeper, precolonial past, also make it difficult to speak of Micronesia as a fixed and bounded place. There is too Hilda Heine's recent reminder to educational and service providers in Hawai'i about the diversity and difference that separate the different island communities understood simply as Micronesian (2005). At the same time, I in no way intend to deny the historical links and connections between different Island groups subsumed under the term. What I choose to focus on are recent studies from and about different parts of the region that offer more local and indigenous representations and critiques. What we may be witnessing through these studies is the destabilization or deconstruction of the term *Micronesia* in favor of more localized histories and ethnographies—a process that is consistent with Hau'ofa's vision of "our sea of islands."

Local conceptualizations or reconceptualizations of identity focused on the island environment, the past, and the larger ocean world, for example, suggest far more complex and diverse realities than the term *Micronesia* can accommodate. On Guam, according to Vicente Diaz and J Kēhaulani Kauanui (2001), Chamorros distinguish themselves from nonindigenous residents of the island through the use of the term *Taotao Tano* or "people of the land." The people of the central Caroline atolls refer to themselves as *Re Metau* or "people of the sea," a classification that is somewhat inverted by the occupants of Chuuk Lagoon's high islands who refer pejoratively to the atoll dwellers around them as *Re Faan*, "those from below." Among the Re Matau of the central Carolines, there is a further distinction between those who have remained resident on their home islands and those who traveled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Refalawasch, to help resettle the Northern Mariana Islands. Again, as Diaz and Kauanui remarked, the Refalawasch further identify themselves by the timing of the voyages that brought their ancestors to the Marianas and by the genealogical ties to the different central Caroline Islands from which they sailed.

Paul D'Arcy's 2006 book *People of the Sea* advocates a reconceptualization of the ocean environment and people's interaction with it in ways that have more salience for those who live within it, with specific reference to the western Carolines. Equally significant in this reconfiguration is the work of Diaz (1997), whose historical and contemporary studies of voyaging between Polowat and Guam remind us of a very different way of understanding the natural world and its oceans, a way called *etak* that, among other things, understands not the canoe but islands to be moving. Greater awareness of local epistemologies would include recognition of

the particular features of Chuukese *rong* or knowledge and the role of those individuals or *itang* who carry it. On Pohnpei, such epistemological sensitivity requires an appreciation of the different kinds of knowledge, and the ways in which all knowledge is personal, protected, contested, and localized still.

The reconfiguration of the area called Micronesia, then, is in large part about local self-definition and self-representation. We need to think much less in terms of culture areas and much more in terms of regional orderings such as *sawei*, the exchange system that stretched from Yap proper in the west to Nominuito in the central Carolines; Katau or Kachau, the regional alliance or network that may have linked what is today Chuuk, Kosrae, and Pohnpei; and Ralik Radak, an older, geopolitical division of the Marshall Islands. Recognition of these earlier groupings challenges the current mapping of Micronesia and invites a consideration of the linkages and interactions with other areas of Oceania.

Local histories will need to replace more established colonial ones, and this is in fact happening. While some may see Guam as the place where America's day begins, I find it to be the site of some of the richest and most exciting new scholarship in the field of Pacific or Oceanic history. Without meaning to elide the complex relationship, both historical and contemporary, between Guam and the rest of the Micronesia, I find the practice of history on Guam a possible model for the decolonization of history elsewhere in the Micronesian geographical region. While the histories to which I refer are locally grounded, they are by no means provincial. Vicente Diaz has written of the history of Catholicism on Guam not in terms of the enabling martyrdom of Jesuit missionary Fr Diego Luis de Sanvitores but in terms of Chamorro understandings and appropriations (forthcoming). Anne Perez Hattori's history of US naval health policies on Guam examines the effects of introduced health practices and technologies on Chamorro cultural values, class distinctions, gender relations, political struggles, and economic expectations (2004). Hattori wrote against a backdrop of national and international discourses on disease and about "the dynamics of cultural domination, resistance, appropriation, and adaptation" (2004, 10). Keith Camacho's study of the commemorations of World War II in the Mariana Islands argues that the complexity of contemporary intra-island relationships across the Marianas cannot be fully grasped without an appreciation of the varied and conflicting ways in which different groups of Chamorros experienced the war under separate and competing colonial regimes (forthcoming). There is also the work of

Lola Quan Bautista on different Micronesian immigrant communities on Guam (2001). While the focus of her work is contemporary, it draws on earlier histories of movement between the Caroline Islands and Guam.

As the above-cited studies suggest, the future of history in the region called Micronesia is not about islands apart or in isolation from the larger world. Complementing the focus on locality is attention to the flow of ideas, practices, technologies, and art forms within the larger Pacific region. In short, there is a need for awareness of the ways in which culture is not bound by colonial boundaries or the anthropological concept of a culture area. Culture *moves*, through performative practices such as dance. Katerina Teaiwa has studied dance in Kiribati and charted the ways in which particular body movements show themselves in a variety of different dance forms, and in island groups well beyond the borders of the area defined as Micronesia (2002). Islands move too, but not always of their own will or choosing. Teaiwa's multi-sited ethnography of Banaban phosphate concerns itself in part with the relations between islands and continents after the mining and transfer of island rock and soil to other areas of the Pacific region, including New Zealand and Australia. Greg Dvorak's multimedia tour of "betweenness" interrogates ambivalent notions of place against the multidimensional contexts of colonialism, war, nuclear testing, personal journeys, and the indigenous epistemology of Kwajalein Island in the Marshalls (2004). Like Teaiwa, Dvorak is not bound by the geography of Micronesia, but is expansive in the connections that he sees as linking Kwajalein to American and Japanese histories.

Linguists and archaeologists suggest the central and eastern Micronesian islands were settled by Lapita peoples from an area between the southeast Solomons and northern Vanuatu (Kirch 2000). A reconfiguration of Micronesian studies and its role in the larger region necessitates a critical reexamination of these historical linkages, as a way to reconnect parts of Oceania termed *Melanesia* and *Micronesia*, and against the Polynesian dominance of Pacific studies. The advantage of a critical Micronesian studies program, like a Pacific studies program, lies in its comparative dimensions; its strategic deployment of theory to open space for local voices, perspectives, and epistemologies; and its critique of colonialism and colonialist representations of the region and its people. Its most significant contribution, however, may well result from the subversion or destabilization of the areal designation with which it has been held hostage. This essay is not a simple plea for a greater inclusion of Micronesia within Pacific studies, but rather a call for the recognition of its absence.

This essay also argues for an awareness of how more locally focused historical and cultural studies would contribute to envisioning Oceania as a sea of linked, interacting, and vibrant islands, rather than regions defined and managed as Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. What is ultimately at stake here is not just the place of Micronesia in Pacific studies but the future of Pacific studies itself.

\* \* \*

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### *Abstract*

Paul Rainbird has written on the assumed absence of certain cultural practices that informed Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville's identification of Micronesia as a definable and major area of the Pacific. What followed d'Urville's misnaming was the ethnological reification of Micronesia as a coherent cultural entity. Colonialism, most recently and most particularly American colonialism, has contributed to the reification of this anthropological construct in politically significant and intellectually constraining ways. This essay reflects on a variety of linked histories—anthropological, colonial, and literary—that help explain the area's limited connections to the rest of contemporary Oceania and its related, more general circumscription from the field of Pacific studies. It also focuses on recent writings that destabilize the term *Micronesia* in favor of more localized histories, ethnographies, and literature—a process that is consistent with Hau'ofa's vision of "our sea of islands."

KEYWORDS: American empire, anthropology, decolonization, Micronesia, Pacific studies, Oceania