

## Obituary: Epeli Hau'ofa (1939–2009)

In January of this year there died in Suva Professor Hau'ofa, a fine scholar, and the South Pacific's most attractive and distinguished intellectual and creative thinker of his generation. For he has been deemed to be worthy to rank alongside earlier towering figures of great vision respected around the Pacific littoral, like Sir Peter Buck, from New Zealand, or Sir Thomas Davis, of Raratonga, the amazing sailor-doctor and worker in space research medicine and ambassador extraordinary, he later to become the Pacific Islander of the Century.

The late Epeli Hau'ofa, a Tongan, was born to missionary parents then working in Papua New Guinea, where he would—early on in his career—do some powerful research on the impact of sudden 'civilization' on a peaceful, and hitherto very isolated, coastal village. Career-establishing further research took place, as well as in Fiji, in Australia and Canada—the latter training involving a thesis with field work in the Caribbean. And he would also do significant research work in Tonga, where he was for a brief period the 'Keeper of Palace Records', a task which fitted well with his fascination with all the Pacific's traditional lore. Yet, arguably, Australia—and his Australian-born wife, Barbara and research companion—also contributed much to his temper, from his time in residence in the University of New England, and his early studies there in English literature, as well as in the University's History Department near Russel Ward who was also a mentor in the College to which both belonged.

After various duties in both historical and contemporary studies in Tonga he would join the University of the South Pacific, to serve first as a teacher, and then as Head of the Department of Sociology, Head of the School of Social and Economic Development, and Professor of Social Anthropology. And he would plan for cultural emancipation for the peoples of the great Ocean, and so see the fledgling institution spread out to embrace the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Nieuwe, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Vanuatu and Samoa. Meanwhile, in 1997, he would found the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, heading it for the rest of his life, as well as developing ever-closer ties with the Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai'i, and the East-West Center there.

Interviews with him/reflective essays by him appear in many countries' intellectual and literary journals, especially in: *Landfall* (New Zealand), *New Literature Review* (Australia), or in *Ariel* (Canada). Like the numerous web pieces, they are all marked by wit, compassion, and a

kind of sparkling quality that is both fresh and wholly convincing in its limpid thinking.

He was always a persisting, fluent and remarkably influential writer, some of his best-known books being:

*Anthropology and Pacific Islanders* (Port Moresby, 1975);

*Our Crowded Islands*: Suva (1977, 1980, etc.);

*Corned Beef and Tapioca: A Report on the Food Distribution Systems in Tonga* ANU Development Centre, 1979;

*Mekeo: Inequality and Ambivalence in a Village Society*,<sup>1</sup> (ANU, 1981);

*Tales of the Tikongs* (University of Hawaii, 1979, and many reprints);

*Kisses in the Nederends* (1995, and many reprints);

'The Writer as Outsider/ Oral Traditions and Writing' (1990); as well as

the fine paper for the Human Rights and Democracy Movement's Convention in 1992, entitled 'The Social Context of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Tonga', from the shrewd and persuasive text of which we now quote :

The voracious appetite for [new] knowledge remains today, and has in fact earned for our people a reputation among our other fellow islanders. In the past three decades in particular a rapidly increasing number of ordinary Tongans have received higher level education and have therefore acquired a greater awareness of the world, and their potential to excel, as well as a growing confidence in their ability, and their new place in the evolving society. To try to force these people to keep to their ascribed place into which they were born, as some have tried to do, is to act with self-delusion because that is another place, another time.

Yet this paper was also surprising, in that it moved on to an appeal to recognize the aristocracy's value as affording the finest continuity with the past, and so Tonga would continue to need them for—

Like their ancestors past and present, they serve the nation in ways that no one else can; and therein, I believe lies their great and continuing importance. They are the foci of our culture and our identity as a single

<sup>1</sup> This text would be constantly revisited by scholars, as in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (Jan. 1997), or in *Oceania* (November, 2007).

people, as well as the signposts of our historical continuity as a nation  
...

We have travelled together with our aristocracy for over a thousand years, and their leadership has given us reasons to be proud of our history, our heritage and ourselves as a nation. We will still travel together with them albeit along new and yet uncharted routes into the end of this century and into the next millennium.

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He had also edited (with two others), *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (1993); and produced the later—

*Our Sea of Islands*, Duke University Press, (1994/5);

*Tales of the Tikongs* (1995, and many later editions);

his essay, 'The Ocean in us', published in *The Contemporary Pacific*, 10.2 (Fall, 1998), 391, ff.; and

the essay in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Policy and Identity in the New Pacific*, published in the USA by Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield in 1999;

while he would call all his later writings 'Project New Oceania', the most influential of these being his *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (2008, published that year by the University of Hawaii)—all of which were concerned for the emergence of a stronger and freer Oceania, able to engage with the forces of globalization, not least since all these people are the proud custodians of the Pacific, the vast area of which constitutes the world's largest body of water. Perforce their thoughts, like their lives, will ever be outward-looking, exploratory, each and every one navigating out across the great bounty of Ocean.

As he has written of all the cultures he sought to empower again,

All our cultures have been shaped in fundamental ways by the adaptive interactions between our people and the sea that surrounds our island communities,

and then he added for reflection that

... for a new Oceania to take hold it must have a solid dimension of communality that we can perceive with our senses... a creation of

countless people in all walks of life. Artists must work with others, for creativity lies in all fields, and besides, we need each other

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All those who knew Epeli—or read his work—long ago realized him to be compassionate, courageous, delightfully enigmatic and someone who would always speak to and for them. In short, he was and will long be remembered for his fine certitudes and wonderfully well communicated passion for the Pacific, which he preferred to call, in the spirit of pan-Pacific co-operation and inclusiveness, quite simply, Oceania.

However, he is best known to the world and loved for his book on the Tikongs and for his *Kisses*, and so it is imperative that there now be quoted from *Landfall* some of its comments on the glorious *Tales*:

A joyride along the rocky road of island politics, love, corruption, religion, culture, dependency, and foreign aid. Tiko, a tiny island in the Pacific Ocean, faces a tidal wave of D-E-V-L-O-P-M-E-N-T, which threatens to demolish ancestral ways and the human spirit. From Sione, who prefers to play cards with his secretary during work hours, to Ole Pasifikiwei, who masters the twists and turns of international funding games, all of the characters in these pages are seasoned surfers, capable of riding the biggest wave to shore. These are not stories of fatal impact so much as upbeat tales of ingenious responses to cultural and economic imperialism.

The tone of this engaging book—one witty, compassionate, hilarious, and remarkably stimulating—is so clearly derived from oral storytelling, that genre now serving wondrously to create a distinctive South Pacific tone of voice and personality. That was the effect he had on his student fellows and Armidale friends from many nations in the 1960s—as is recorded elsewhere in this issue—and that is certainly the impact which he and all his thoughts have had on ever more of many of his fellow Pacific Islanders reached by the unique power of his rippling and reaching-out thought.

For the man and his writings were—and will remain—so wonderfully deflating of the pretentiousness, and compassionate towards the apparent vulnerability—of so many new and tiny ‘nations’. Yet their peoples are now for-armed by the content of the many cultural and folkloric courses, Epeli- suggested and encouraged, at the University of the South Pacific that explain to the tiny nations their historical identity, their discrete culture, and yet their magnificent common heritage.

For they all look outwards, and are even inspired by their traditions and ancient cultures, deriving their strength—like the great Polynesian navigator, Maui—from the vast, emboldening and nurturing ocean.

J.S. Ryan

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## Obituary: Carmen Blacker (1924-2009)

Dr Carmen Blacker, the eminent British folklorist, died in Cambridge, England, on 13 July, 2009, having been born in that country, in the county of Surrey.<sup>2</sup> She had served from 1982-1984 as the President of the Folklore Society in London, as well as receiving many scholarly and formally academic honours from around the world, e.g., the Order of the Precious Crown from the Government of Japan, a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1989, and an Honorary Fellowship of (the long time intellectual women's college), Somerville College, Oxford, in 1991; and the Minakata Prize in 2007, for her rare and vastly extensive knowledge of Japanese culture and literature.

She is also well known in Australia for her many fine appraisals of the enduring/ accessible aspects of (traditional) Japanese culture, and for her generous friendship to Oxbridge graduates working in Australia, even as here she was even more respected for her remarkable ability to take comparative/folklore scholars into the surprisingly accessible—and meaningful—world of the greater motifs in that same culture.

Without listing her writings in excessive detail, particular mention should be made of

- a) her role as the senior editor of the magnificent volume, on the northern hemisphere women scholars of folklore of the 19th and 20th centuries, *Women and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists*: Carolina Academic, 2000;

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<sup>2</sup> There is a short 'In Memoriam' note on her by Dr Venetia Newall in *Folklore*, 120 (December, 2009), 327.

- b) *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* 1999;
- c) her interest in various aspects of the depiction/ role of animals in folklore;
- d) her co-editing, with Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, of the essential work, *The Hero in Tradition and Folklore*; and
- e) her internationally available and incisive papers in *Asian Folklore* over many years.

Of like quality are the famed special lectures which have done wonders for both world folklore scholarship, and for the acceptance of (like) motifs in 'speculative' fiction, e.g.

'Animal Witchcraft in Japan'; or

'The Folklore of the Stranger: A Consideration of a Disguised Saint'; and

'The Exiled Warrior; The Legend and its Ramifications in Japan'.

In short Carmen Blacker was one of the finest world scholars of folklore in the later part of the twentieth century, ranging the continents and cultures, and a most worthy successor to the seen as now splendid earlier and more recent group, many of which she so rightly grouped in the standard collection, *Woman and Tradition: A Neglected Group of Folklorists* (2000).

J.S. Ryan

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