

From Pacific Way to Pacific Solution: Sovereignty and Dependence in Oceanic Literature

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In terms of Melanesia's foreign relations, we are perhaps some of the most exploited people on earth, whether by colonial powers ... or by foreign donors.

Martyn Namorong, 2014

I. Introduction¹

DEBATES ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S POST-2001 REFUGEE DETENTION POLICIES HAVE GIVEN rise to much critical thought on new configurations of sovereignty, international law, and human rights obligations.² Yet, given that to date Australia has primarily sent its asylum seekers to detention camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, such policies also demand a reconsideration of the country's regional Pacific relationships.³ The goal of this essay is not to parse the legal or human rights implications of offshore processing centres, but to situate the

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² For a summary of the arguments regarding human rights violations, see Jane McAdam and Fiona Chong. For cultural-political analyses of Australian sovereignty and border security policies, see Suvendrini Perera and Nikos Papastergiadis.

³ Following the 2001 Tampa affair, the Howard government set up a detention centre on the tiny island nation of Nauru, where asylum seekers were taken and detained. Subsequent refugees arriving by boat were taken to another detention camp set up on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Between 2001-2008, just over 1600 people were taken to the centres and detained; some 700 eventually settled in Australia. Although both centres were closed for several years after much criticism, they reopened in 2012 under a Labor government headed by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

'Pacific Solution' as part of a longer story of postcolonial sovereignty in Oceania.⁴ It examines the *necessary and prior constitution* of Pacific Islands as potential external detention sites through the lens of colonial history, decolonising desires and contemporary regional relationships. In short, this essay attempts to understand the 'Pacific Solution' in terms of the history of coloniality between Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

In it, I depart from the predominantly legal and policy-oriented approaches to the refugee problem. Instead, I take a literary and theoretical approach that addresses 'the political imaginations of a world after colonialism' (Hansen and Stepputat 297) as expressed in several fictional texts from Oceania. First I consider the groundbreaking but today little-read novel by the Papuan novelist and political figure Vincent Eri, *The Crocodile* (1970), followed by a collection of short stories from well-known Tongan academic and writer Epeli Hau'ofa, *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983). Finally, I look at Papua New Guinean writer Nash G. Sorariba's gripping short story, 'Escape from Jayapura' (1997). Each text deals with the colonial or neocolonial relationships of Oceanic peoples and their larger neighbours: that between Australia and Papua New Guinea in *The Crocodile*; between Australia, New Zealand and a fictional Pacific Island in *Tales of the Tikongs*; and Western Papua and Indonesia in 'Escape from Jayapura'. Read for the way literature can constitute a counter-archive to official histories, these texts provide us with an alternative figuring of Australia and its regional relationships. As such, they express and make visible certain transformations of sovereignty, namely, how a territorialised, legal and cultural authority gives way to a deterritorialised and economic authority in the postcolonial period. I argue that such a shift is necessary to account for the current configurations of nation, territory and security that have aligned to produce the body of the asylum-seeker as a new form of twenty-first century global currency. The purpose of this essay is thus to show, from a literary perspective, how the expanding form of offshore detention catches hold of—in a salient and tragic way—the unevenness of sovereignty across those nations involved in the 'Pacific Solution'.

II. The Crocodile and the *Kiap*

Vincent Eri's *The Crocodile* (1970) is a remarkable text, not least for being the first published Papuan novel. Born in 1936, Eri was of the first generation of indigenous Papuans to rise through the colonial education system. In 1970 he graduated from the newly established University of Papua and New Guinea and

⁴ Like other scholars on Pacific history and culture, I use the term Oceania to distinguish the island nations of the region from the larger countries on the Pacific Rim. Oceania stresses a 'world of people connected to each other' (Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean* 50) rather than mere 'dry surfaces in a vast ocean' (31).

subsequently became a school inspector, member of Parliament, high commissioner to Australia, and Papua New Guinea's Governor-General from 1990-91 before his death in 1993.

Set primarily in the 1940s, Eri's novel is the coming-of-age tale of Hoiri, a member of the Toaripi coastal people of the Gulf District, who reaches manhood against the backdrop of Australian colonial rule and the Japanese attacks on Papua and New Guinea in World War II. In a 1973 review of *The Crocodile*, Nigerian critic Kalu Uka identifies many tropes familiar to African postcolonial writing and praises the novel for its faithful representation of 'the traditional, transitional and modern life of the community in Papua' (93). In particular, the novel dispels the 'mythical diet about bizarre black folk on those islands' (91) by giving 'the foreigner encyclopaedic information about commerce, education and history of the tribe, about the vegetation, and village life; about marriage customs and rituals' (93). Indeed, much of the narrative is devoted to providing the reader with a thick description of Toaripi customs and practices based in the village of Moveave. We witness a death, mourning customs, a courtship, marriage and birth, and—not least—a major sea voyage of the village *lakatoi* (canoe) that initiates Hoiri into the adult male world of trading routes and intertribal relationships of the Papuan Gulf District. Other reviewers have similarly noted—as both a strength and weakness of the novel—its ethnographic authenticity with the presentation of Papuan 'beliefs as they are believed' (Wilding 235) and 'Papuan village life as a whole' (Koll 66).

Yet Eri's novel is much more than a fictionalised anthropological account of Toaripi life. Like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (to which Uka and several other critics have made comparison), *The Crocodile* gives dramatic form to the devastating entry of white man's civilisation into the Papuan universe, and 'presents us with a society at the verge of disintegration' (Stella 176). As in Achebe's text, the narrative proceeds along two arcs: one relating to the tribal laws and their internal contestations and the other, the decomposition of those already fluid social mores by Australian colonialism. The first arc revolves around the mysterious death of Hoiri's young wife Mitoro, presumed to be taken and killed by the eponymous crocodile, and involves the complex actions and motivations of sorcerers—*mesiri* men—thought to be tribesmen from a neighbouring clan. The second arc consists of the hardships endured by the Papuans under the Australian colonial government. They are exploited as domestic workers in Port Moresby and as labour for government officers—*kiaps*—who regularly patrol the interior in the effort to 'pacify' and 'civilise' the natives. Later, with the spread of the Pacific War, Papuans work carrying cargo for the Australian troops fighting against Japan. The literary tension produced by the two narrative arcs constitutes the novel's profound critique of the effects of colonial rule.

Notably, this is a novel where the enchanted world shares narrative space and ontological reality with Euro-Australian colonial and capitalist realities. In its most commented upon scene, Hoiri wages an attack on the evil sorcerer-crocodile, where 'literal and metaphoric crocodile are somehow the same' (Stella 177). But having only injured the crocodile/sorcerer, Hoiri remains confused about how to deal with the *mesiri* he holds responsible for his family member's death. He cannot pursue a 'traditional' course of action both because of his father's deaconship—the church frowns upon such 'superstitions'—and because white *kiap* law forbids 'primitive' payback law. Later in the novel, Hoiri questions an elder uncle about white opposition to traditional authority:

'But why should the missionaries and doctors be annoyed over this? After all these magicians are as helpful as the doctor or the missionary. Look at what has happened. The Government and Christian missions have frightened them away. And yet they can't replace the services these magicians gave to the people. The Government and the missions are ineffective in dealing with the tragedy that occurred in our family.' (Eri 123)

As such, it is the *incomplete and partial* penetration of Australian colonial law and religion that proves most problematic and confusing for Hoiri; the new white authorities '*can't replace* the services these magicians gave to the people'. The point of the novel is thus not merely to catalogue Toaripi customs or protest the exploitative, racist behaviour of the *kiaps*. It is, rather, to demonstrate how the encroachment of colonial systems—via Christianity, forced labour, and *kiap* justice—irrevocably erodes the cultural-legal authority of the Toaripi way of life. The literary result, as one critic notes, is a 'glum deprivation [that] pervades the book', and a protagonist 'to whom baffling things happen' (Griffin 455). In such light, we may understand the novel's self-consciously anthropological descriptions as a *narrative symptom* of the struggle over competing sovereignties and ontologies. Only by attempting to present a complex, whole village life—a universe with its own competing agents and values—can Papuan sovereignty be imagined and asserted against white rule.

Significantly, Australian colonial laws are not the only authority Hoiri encounters. Despite Hoiri's suspicion of white ways, he comes under the spell of the white man's commodity culture on a visit to the colonial capital of Port Moresby. After a successful sago trading trip with the Motu people of Hanuabada, Hoiri stops at a provisions store with his father and uncle.

The goods in the shop were just fascinating. It was unbelievable that human beings could make such wonderful things. ... If only the shiny pots on the shelves could be bought for bundles of sago, they would rather buy these than clay pots from the Motu. (Eri 44)

His father and uncle buy clothing and some canvas sail, in the process suffering racial harassment from the white store clerk. The episode reveals both an enchantment with gleaming commodities and resentment at the racist colonial environment, such that Hoiri concludes, 'spending the money was as much of an ordeal as earning it' (45). Hoiri's uncle, meanwhile, astutely perceives the underlying relationship between things and labour in a colonial economy: 'White people are very clever aren't they? They bring all these wonderful things here and also make the money that one needs to buy them. We've got to work for them to get the money to buy them with' (45). The money economy thus functions to erode traditional trading and labour practices and deepen colonial authority. The destructive nature of the white economy is further confirmed when Hoiri is dragged into the war working for ANGAU (the wartime Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit). He receives tobacco and £11 as payment for the three years he is forced to work as cargo carrier, while the nearly £50 he earns selling hand carvings of canoes to U.S. soldiers is confiscated by the Australians. At the end of the war, the exhausted Hoiri is returned to his neglected home village, a man defined by loss. In addition to losing his mother and wife, his father has died while working as a carrier for another army unit, and Hoiri is left alone with his small son to care for.

There are two claims I want to make regarding Eri's novel. First, the tale vividly limns a concept of colonial sovereignty that is, in essence, about controlling and organising *bodies, territory and production*. Unsurprisingly, Australian rule is figured as the 'supremacy of power or authority' or 'power beyond accountability' (Brown 52); its everyday modes are the power to enforce '*kia*p justice', control mobility, and introduce a money and wage economy in the service of creating a modernised, Australianised Papuan populace. My second claim is that we recognise *The Crocodile* as a novel that looks both backward and forward. In anticipating the independent nation that Papua New Guinea would become in 1975, *The Crocodile's* loose *bildungsroman* form can equally be read as 'a political document, ... a major contribution to the growing body of writing which expresses a specifically Papua and New Guinea identity' (May 59). It not only archives the destructive modes of colonial authority of the 1930s-40s, but presages Nuigini's coming sovereignty through articulations of native law and culture, especially in scenes where the Toaripi people meet and find common ground with other Papuans (Deloughrey 132).

The Crocodile is thus a work that aligns with the ideology of the Pacific Way (and its subcategory, the Melanesian Way), a locally-based movement that arose in the decolonising 1970s. Coined by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, but most fully

articulated by Ron Crocombe in 1976,⁵ the Pacific Way posited a broadly common regional identity as the basis for ‘Pacific people to ... be actively involved to the fullest possible extent in shaping *their own future*’ (Crocombe, ‘Seeking’ 1, italics added) in the move beyond colonialism. It was envisaged as both a process of alternative regional development and a way to reinvigorate Pacific cultures by encouraging ‘native communal and familial values, consensus building, reciprocity, indigenous arts, and inter-island cooperation and unity’ (DeLoughrey 128). *The Crocodile* powerfully anticipates the expected transition from colonial dependence to decolonisation and self-determination. And yet, the novel’s tragic and unresolved ending foreshadows the difficulties that a postcolonial Oceanic sovereignty will face.

III. Sovereignty in Oceania

Before contrasting Eri’s novel with Hau’ofa’s stories, let us briefly consider the historical configuration of sovereignty in the region since colonisation. Recall that after several centuries of imperialist land grabs by the Spanish, British, Germans, French and Americans—and the fact that many islands were *multiply* colonised—the Pacific was subject to the League of Nations Mandate System following World War I. The system was established to lead ‘peoples not yet able to stand by themselves’ (Article 22, League of Nations Covenant, qtd. in Anghie 120) gradually to independence by the guidance of approved regional powers. By this logic, the three former German colonies in the Pacific—New Guinea, Nauru and Samoa—could not rule themselves and came under Australian and New Zealand control. The two Dominion Powers in the Pacific ‘were intent on annexing the former German territories and were placated only partially by being appointed mandatories over those territories’ (Anghie 121). Greg Fry notes that for the two former British colonies, experience in ‘managing’ their own domestic natives—the Australian indigenous peoples and the Maoris—authorised them to deal with these other natives, assuming their ‘special right to manage, steeped in old racist premises’ (‘Framing’ 56). Control of Papua New Guinea’s strategic territory and Nauru’s rich phosphate resources thus fulfilled longstanding imperialist desires toward the Pacific that have been called Australia’s ‘first foreign policy’ (Thompson 2). In sum, the Mandate and ensuing post-World War II UN Trusteeship systems helped consolidate the ‘second-order colonialism’ (Landsman 3) that elevated Australia, in particular, from British colony to colonising nation.

Amidst the worldwide fervor for postwar decolonisation—including Kruschev’s famous 1960 condemnation of Australia at the UN—Australia was compelled to

⁵ See Crocombe’s *The Pacific Way: An Emerging Identity*.

grant independence to Nauru in 1968 and Papua New Guinea in 1975. David Kavanamur *et al.* note, however, that at independence in Papua New Guinea there was little unity and ‘no charismatic leaders in the vein of Gandhi, Sukarno or Nkrumah’ to produce a populist nationalism capable of driving out colonial powers (2). Australia’s ‘hasty departure’ left a ‘vastly underdeveloped new nation’ (Kin 218) whose major industries—coffee, copra and rubber—remained in the hands of Australians (219). In Nauru, aggressive Australian and British strip-mining of its phosphate resources left the island with serious environmental degradation, unsustainable debt and a dubious economic future.⁶ Consequently, compared to other regions of the world, the transition from colonial territory to postcolonial nationhood in Papua New Guinea and Nauru has been especially marked by the structures of neo-colonialism and dependence. Founded in Canberra in 1947, the South Pacific Commission (now renamed the Secretariat of the Pacific Community) simultaneously coordinated both the region’s decolonisation *and* its development ties. To quote Matt Matsuda: ‘As island nationalists agitated for self-determination, colonial governments promoted commonwealth plans: political independence within treaty frameworks of representative government and special trade and development agreements’ (303-04). Hau’ofa similarly notes, ‘unlike other colonial regions of the world, our political independence ... was largely imposed on us. It also came in packages that tied us firmly to the West’ (*Ocean* 47-48). By 1977, when the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in Asia finally included Oceania, many individual states had ‘become even more dependent on Western funds, Western technology and Western priorities for the region’ (Haas 8). Moreover, from the mid-1970s to 1989 the Pacific was treated as a Cold War security region; following the U.S.’s lead in other parts of the world, Australia quadrupled its aid to the region ‘as a the key to keeping the Soviet influence out of the region and creating a pro-Western order’ (Fry, ‘Our Patch’ 82).

In thinking about the preconditions to today’s Pacific Solution, then, we must understand the *longue durée* in which both Papua New Guinea and Nauru have been repeatedly and thoroughly instrumentalised, first in the ‘Pacific resource adventure’ (Landman 227) under Australia’s ‘second-order’ colonial rule, and then in relationships whereby aid packages, development support and preferential trade agreements flow in a configuration that continues to be dictated by the former metropole. As Hau’ofa explains of the latter:

⁶ The level of environmental degradation at independence was such that the Australian government actually offered to relocate the entire population to an uninhabited island and start afresh. See ‘Paradise Well and Truly Lost,’ *The Economist* 22 December 2001.

For what they [Australia and New Zealand] give out in aid they receive in return a great deal more in the forms of export earnings and repatriation of profits on investments. It may be said that as far as the regional relationships are concerned, if the words 'aid' and 'help' are to be used at all, they should more correctly be used in terms of the small islands 'aiding' the two big neighbours. (*Ocean* 20)

The phenomenon is well known in development studies and has appropriately been termed 'boomerang aid'. The point is that colonial era economic and political hierarchies were never superseded in the post-independence era, but have been actively rearticulated through neocolonial dependency. In other words, one set of boundary markers is simply substituted by another: the categories civilised/uncivilised; European/native; modern/traditional are now recast as developed/undeveloped; aid donor/recipient (Escobar 5-6).

To bring us back to our original inquiry, I argue that literary texts are capable of expressing the complex shifting modalities through which imperial exploitation in the Pacific is coded. In Eri's *Crocodile*, it is ordered around a colonial political sovereignty that seeks to civilise native bodies and territory as modern and *productive*, training bodies to work on patrols, plantations and in war, and is expressed in Eri's attempt to both archive the violence of colonial authority and imagine an indigenous counter-sovereignty. In the post- and neocolonial 1980s background of Hau'ofa's stories, to which we now turn, Pacific islands may have gained nominal sovereignty but remain as dependent on their former colonisers as ever. The emphasis shifts to *financial and economic authority*, undertaken through the mechanism of development aid, and correspondingly takes on a new aesthetic form.

IV. Islands of Debt and Dependency

Epeli Hau'ofa is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking work on Pacific culture and regionalism in his essays 'Our Sea of Islands' (1993) and 'The Ocean in Us' (1997). He is also the author of the raucous 1987 novel *Kisses in the Nederends* and *Tales of the Tikongs*, a collection of satirical short stories set on the island of Tiko, usually regarded as a fictionalised version of Tonga. Hau'ofa himself grew up in Papua New Guinea to Tongan parents, was educated in Australia and Canada, taught at the University of Papua New Guinea and then for many years at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, a biography reflecting his complex Oceanic identity.

The unique literary form of Hau'ofa's pithy *Tales of the Tikongs* draws from oral tales, the Christian sermon and the tall tale (Wilson 129), and becomes the perfect vehicle for tales of postcolonial development aid gone awry. As Joseph

Slaughter suggests, the failure of development aid is told through an aesthetic that is itself resolutely anti-realist and anti-traditional, functioning as a 'burlesque[... of] the inflated rhetorics of humanitarianism, developmentalism, postcolonialism, and internationalism' (206).⁷ In the 'Big Bullshit', for example, Pulu Makau receives livestock via a New Zealand aid scheme. Despite his best efforts to turn Tiko into 'a regular pastureland' in New Zealand's image, he loses the animals one by one due to village obligations and misdirected Christian mores. Meanwhile, in the 'Seventh and Other Days', the persistent failures of the Family Planning Association and low productivity of public servants present a challenge for the 'Wise Men at the Thinking Office', who hire an Overseas Expert, 'Mr Merv Dolittle from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra', to try and make Tikongs work harder.

Immediately evident is that, in contrast to Eri's Toaripi characters, the Tikongs no longer inhabit a fleshed-out social world or an authentic cultural frame into which the foreigner intervenes. These are stories that employ a distortive, ironic narrative frame to critique the economic ripple effects of international loans, grants or donated equipment. Unlike the loathsome and openly racist Australians of Eri's novel, the comically awful donors and development experts of Hau'ofa's world are mere facilitators of the broader functioning of Pacific capitalism. Yet the effects of such financial interventions are both less direct and more profound in altering social structures. Thus, while in *The Crocodile* the unjust economic system of the Australians was earnestly critiqued, in *Tikongs* the logic and authority of dependency-development is precisely *not* up for debate except via Hau'ofa's topsy-turvy satire.

We can trace the shift in modes of authority in Hau'ofa's story 'The Tower of Babel'. After the Tikong export fishing industry fails despite the donation of a retired Japanese fishing vessel, the development of a 'Nation with a Fish Cannery' (20) is left to 'one Alvin (Sharky) Lowe of Alice Springs, Australia' (21). Sharkey is

a Great Expert with lifelong experience in handling natives in New Guinea, Thursday Island, and in a certain humpy settlement outside his gentle hometown of Alice Springs. He had developed a good feel for the Grassroots, demonstrating it by grabbing every frightened, small-time, part-time fisherman on the beaches of Tulisi and forcing him ever so gently to accept \$4000 in Development Loans from the Appropriate Authorities. And, like

⁷ The Caribbean counterpart of *Tales of the Tikongs* would be Jamaica Kincaid's 1988 satirical essay on neocolonialism and tourism in Antigua, *A Small Place*. There are also important parallels with Nora Vagi Brash's 1980 play, 'Which Way Big Man?', a devastating satire of the Westernised political elite of Papua New Guinea.

the Great Shepherd of Nazareth, Sharky converted many frightened fellows into fishermen. (21)

The story follows the misfortunes of one ‘frightened, small-time, part-time fisherman’, Ika Levu, who is pressured into taking a fishing loan by Sharky’s pidgin paraphrase of developmental logic: ‘Now is duty belong you to help Tiko come up rich fela country’ (22). Since Sharky represents the Japanese and Australian fishing companies, his loans of thousands of boats, nets, motors and equipment actually means that—following ‘boomerang aid’ logic—‘in helping the development of Tiko, Sharky had helped the development of himself and his companies most generously’ (23). Ika, meanwhile, is told little about how to manage his debt payments. When he musters the courage to visit the office of the ‘Appropriate Authorities’ to seek help, he finds every officer on a ‘training’ trip to Geneva, Sydney or Jakarta (24). Falling further and further behind on his payments, Ika decides to end his predicament: he takes out his imported boat and equipment to sea, ‘pulled out an axe and hacked a huge hole in the bottom of the boat. Then he swam slowly ashore, cool and relaxed for the first time in months and months’ (25).

Hau’ofa’s dense narrative deserves unpacking. Sharky, our Australian loan agent, deftly recycles his skills in ‘handling natives’ across Alice Springs and the Pacific, reflecting the history of Australian colonial relations toward its domestic indigenous population, the annexed Torres Strait Islands, as well as Papua New Guinea. Sharkey’s ability to coerce Ika into taking the development loan is thus explicitly narrated as a continuation of Australia’s (sub)imperialist role in the Pacific. More profoundly, the loan arrangement also produces a distinct relationship between Sharkey and Ika and, metonymically, between Australia and Tiko. Gone is the ‘white man’s burden’ of Australians depicted in *The Crocodile*, which one Australian colonial officer laconically summarised as, ‘Ah well, I suppose there’s a job to be done and that’s all there is to it’ (Eri 82). Instead, the loan transactions of ‘The Tower of Babel’ render Sharkey the altruistic bearer of technology transfer necessary to Tiko’s development, and Ika the grateful ‘indigenous subject of development’ (Landman 237) who must take up the opportunity (and debt) to make his nation ‘come up rich fela country’. Yet, compared with donor countries like Australia and Japan, Tiko will remain hopelessly ‘underdeveloped’ while ‘national development reveals itself to be a program of international dependency’ (Slaughter 207). Consequently, the literary imaginary of sovereignty has dramatically shifted between *The Crocodile* and *Tales of the Tikongs*. In the former, detailed descriptions of Toaripi culture negotiate cultural-legal narrative space with the colonial authority of the whites. In contrast, Hau’ofa provides us with curiously little island culture in his stories. He makes satirical references to a corrupted version of Christianity and caricatures island laziness such that, for example, the community in ‘The Seventh

and *Other Days* attends church so assiduously on Sundays that the remaining six days are designated rest days. For Hau'ofa, local culture figures merely as the comic stumbling block of so many development programs, while his withering irony spares neither foreigner nor islander.

We can also contrast these literary topographies of sovereignty by examining *what moves* in each fictional world, both in the sense of what are agents of mobility and what motivates action and plot. In *The Crocodile*, the villagers move from home space to neighbouring tribes for food cultivation, marriages, funerals and trade, as allowed by Toaripi law. Periodically, Australian *kiaps* inspect the villages and recruit young men for labour, while natives who enter Port Moresby are subject to curfews and racial discipline. Different authorities in the novel thus manifest themselves through control over distinct regimes of mobility. In *Tikongs*, on the other hand, what 'moves' is precisely *financial capital*: loans, aid schemes, donated equipment and the personnel to administer them. Although there is a circulation of local and foreign aid experts around third world capitals—Hau'ofa calls these the 'alien experts, technical advisers, volunteers, and Third World elite employees of the Great International Organisation' (53)—the authority of the development/dependency complex lies not in the disciplining and mobilising of productive bodies across a given territory, but rather in controlling the flows of finance across it. Sovereignty here has no imagined outside and cannot be countered by the positing of social or cultural wholeness; as such, possibilities for self-determination have decidedly run aground. Hau'ofa's satire appears symptomatic of the fact that, by the 1980s, many agreed that the Pacific Way movement had devolved into an 'elitist regional identity' (Hau'ofa, *Ocean* 17) susceptible to corruption and graft. Fry concurs that as an ideology of 'Pacific leaders', it was 'soon challenged by other Pacific islanders as being an exclusivist vision of Pacific cultural identity and as acting to entrench male chiefly rule' ('Whose Oceania?' 6).

Indeed, in his often anthologised story, 'The Glorious Pacific Way', Hau'ofa allegorises the movement's demise with the character of Ole Pacifikiwei, an islander who becomes an unwitting expert in receiving international aid. Beginning with the modest request to fund an oral history project, Ole eventually creates 18 national committees and councils with his friends and families, applies for \$14 million in aid, and becomes a well-known figure 'in certain influential circles in Brussels, The Hague, Bonn, Geneva, Paris, London, New York, Washington, Wellington, Canberra...' (92). What the Pacific Way devolves into here, of course, is an international game where the aided compete with each other for as much donor money as possible. Local culture becomes at best a funding category, and at worst, 'the privileged term in the rate of exchange between indigenous (Third World) supplicant and foreign (First World) benefactor' (Gima 35).

At another level, Hau'ofa's fierce satires draw in sharp relief the shift from the authority of *productive* capital to that of *finance* capital. That is, *Tikongs* reveals how 'objectively' rational development goals—wielded through the offer of financial loans and aid money—only work to increase the islanders' dependence. Meanwhile, control over the instruments of finance capital—loans apparatuses, structural adjustment regimes and development aid packages—remain decisively in the hands of Western powers, 'reinforc[ing] the worldwide economic polarization that has been a feature of capitalist accumulation since its inception' (Surin 91). Not only does the development-dependency complex come to supplant civilisational hierarchies of colonialism, it creates the conditions whereby distributing and receiving development money becomes the very essence of regional relationships.

V. Development Cooperation, Securitised Aid and Disappearing Asylum Seekers

We can now trace a third configuration of Oceanic sovereignty as that embodied in the present-day Pacific Solution arrangements. Australia's pioneering practice of offshore detention has often been read within the context of Australia's 'new assertiveness' in Oceania since 2001 (Ratuva 87). Recall that the Howard government, inspired by the U.S.'s War on Terror, embarked upon two regional interventions in the early 2000s: one a peace-keeping mission to the Solomon Islands, which had been deemed a security risk and 'failing neighbour', and the other, the 'Enhanced Cooperation Program' which would insert 'in-line managers and police' into the potentially failing states of Papua New Guinea and Nauru (Fry, 'Whose Oceania?' 2).⁸ These interventions accord with what Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi identify as a new trend in international responses which are 'at once military and humanitarian' (10). Such processes 'constitute ... an important political innovation of the late twentieth century, a break with the doctrine of sovereignty that had prevailed until then' (10).

Framed as politically neutral 'regional' and 'cooperative' interventions—but in fact serving Australian (or U.S.) security needs—the interventions might better be understood as the return of brute (neo)colonial sovereignty in the region. Yet, they also rely on the fact that the 1990s shift toward 'structural adjustment programs' or SAPs (loans tied to restructuring requirements) has tended to increase the authority of foreign finance capital and further eroded national sovereignty in the developing world. As one economist notes, Papua New Guinea has been more and more subject to a 'donor-led reform process' whereby

⁸ For details on both these interventions, see Sinclair Dinnen. See Stephen Ratuva for a Pacific perspective on the post-2001 interventions.

international donors dictate the terms *and* content of development projects 'often not tailored to the specific needs and capacities of PNG' (Hnanguie 140-41). The Solomon Islands intervention and the ECP (which was ultimately rejected by Papua New Guinea's High Court in 2005 [Perera 133]) extends the logic of donor-led authority one further step, whereby parts of the Australian state apparatus—in the areas of 'justice, policing, immigration, taxation, transport, and customs' (Perera 68)—are directly inserted into the 'aided' country.

In theorising the new twenty-first century configurations of intervention, aid and sovereignty, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson have provocatively recast third-country refugee processing as not merely about the brute exercise of sovereign state power over an Agambenian 'bare life'. Rather, they insist we see such practices as the state *management* of migration systems and flexible labour markets under pressure from neoliberal economics. The point of migration systems, they stress, is not simply in blocking migration, but in 'filtering, selecting, and channeling migration movements' (165). Modeled after the business of 'crisis management' and increasingly relying on private security forces, 'its aim is to flexibly manage the [migration] crisis in the attempt to produce 'economically needed and beneficial flows' (Geiger and Pecoud qtd. in Mezzadra and Neilson 179). A cornerstone of this regime is the *externalisation* of a country's border practices and detention facilities to third-party sites, usually in underdeveloped, postcolonial countries. Enforced under the banner of 'conditional aid', these practices effectively 'intertwine' migration and border control with the notion of 'development cooperation' (Mezzadra and Nielson 172); the effect is what Dinnen has called the '*securitisation of aid*' (3). The development-crazed Pacific of *Tikongs* is thus refigured as a space where the 'donor-led reform process' now carves out sites to relocate its own unwanted state functions.

The Australian government has insisted on expressing the Pacific Solution as a set of bilateral service agreements between equally sovereign parties 'wishing to build on their existing strong and cordial relations', as the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between Nauru and Australia puts it. The arrangement, however, is better read in terms of 'development cooperation' and 'securitised aid'. In Ian Buchanan's early analysis of the Tampa affair, he explains that

Nauru agreed to take the asylum seekers because Australia not only offered to meet the entire cost of transporting, housing, maintaining and processing them [at the cost of around \$400 million, about \$1 million per refugee], but also to pick up the tab on a number of the island state's more pressing bad debts, such as the \$US1.5 million it owed Pacific Petroleum. In total, Australia provided Nauru with an additional \$20 million dollars worth of

aid. PNG, meanwhile, recouped an aid 're-prioritisation' package worth \$34 million. (n.p.)

Such a situation informs us that, in sustaining the global organisation of security and migration, there are relationships between donors, recipients and now humans who have become the very *currency* of development aid. Eri's model of territorialised colonial authority and Hau'ofa's topography of deterritorialised finance are recombined into a complex picture of 'nested' and 'layered' sovereignties (Hansen and Stepputat 307, 309) driven by economic and security imperatives. The control over a population's mobility emphasised in *The Crocodile* returns, but now as the service performed by the host country and private contractors engaged in the booming business of offshore detention.

One discursive effect of the transnational subcontracting of borders is the almost complete erasure of the asylum seekers themselves. The recent agreements between Australia and Papua New Guinea and Nauru, for example, are written in an Orwellian language that opaquely describes forced deportation and indefinite incarceration as 'transfer, assessment and settlement arrangements'.⁹ The goal of these arrangements is the deterrence of 'people smuggling' and 'irregular migration', ignoring the complex causes of refugee movement in the first place. But most striking is the way the 'transferees' effectively disappear behind the promise of development in the 'host' country:

The Commonwealth of Australia will bear all costs incurred under and incidental to this MOU as agreed between the Participants. If this requires additional development of infrastructure or services, it is envisaged that there will be a broader benefit for communities in which those settled are initially placed. ('Memorandum of Understanding' 3)

Australia effectively offers the development of detention infrastructure and services as an *improvement* to local Nauru communities. In the 2013 resettlement agreement between Australia and Papua New Guinea, the benefits to that country are even more strongly stated. Clause 10 states:

Regional Processing Centres will continue to play an important part in bilateral cooperation, especially as locations to house transferees temporarily should the capacity of communities require development. Australia will work with Papua New Guinea to expand the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre and will also explore with Papua New Guinea the possible construction of other Regional Processing Centres and other options. Regional Processing Centres will be developed so that they can be

⁹ I am grateful to Rebecca Cole for pointing out the Orwellian tone of these phrases.

utilised flexibly for the benefit of local communities or for wider national purposes. ('Regional Resettlement Arrangement' 2)

Note the curious inversion of the first sentence, where we would expect *bilateral cooperation* to play an important role in the *resettlement agreement*. Instead, it is the reverse: 'Regional Processing Centres will continue to play an important part in bilateral cooperation'. The unintended grammatical inference is revealing. The outsourced detention services themselves play an important role because they now *constitute* the development aid relationship. In fact, the awkward phrase, 'especially as locations to house transferees temporarily should the capacity of communities require development', makes it sound as if the detainees are simply there *in order to* wait for the community to be better developed. Put simply, third-country asylum seeker detention is explicitly portrayed as a new growth industry for Papua New Guinea, confirming what Mezzadra and Neilson have recently identified as 'asylum markets' (184). They further note that with the vast and sophisticated technologies of border management, the border has been deterritorialised and 'inscribe[d] ... onto migrants' bodies' (173). Yet from the host country's perspective, the asylum seekers' bodies matter only insofar as they are *bearers of packages of development aid*.¹⁰ Abstracted as 'transferees', they are the new 'privileged currency' exchanged for development aid.

VI. Navigating the Waters

Nash G. Sorariba's suspenseful short story 'Escape from Jayapura' (1997) describes an arduous sea journey. One morning, Pulus Pagawak receives an urgent phone call from his son warning him of imminent state violence—'The military will come for you again' (136)—and he is told he must flee the country immediately with his wife Tamara and their youngest child, 10-year-old John. At the harbour, under the pretence of buying his son an ice-cream, he finds old family friend and ship's captain Boas Lubo who agrees to smuggle his family out of Indonesia that night on his fishing boat. There are many dangers during the journey: the boat is under threat from coastguard surveillance from two countries; a thuggish Indonesian crewman threatens to sabotage the plan and is eliminated; and, for the last stretch, the family must venture forth in treacherous waters in a small rubber dinghy. It is, in fact, a story of illegal people smuggling and 'unauthorised maritime arrivals' before the letter. Yet this is not a tale of Afghan, Iranian or Tamil refugees attempting to cross the seas between Indonesia and Australia. Published by Nash in his 1997 collection *Medal Without Honour* (the first Papuan collection of stories by a single author), the story is not, of course, about the Pacific Solution. Pulus and his family are West Papuans—

¹⁰ We can compare Marx's well known description in the Commodity chapter of *Capital*, Vol. 1, that use value is the 'bearer' (*traeger*) of exchange value.

those on the Indonesian side of the border in what was known as Irian Jaya and who, throughout the Suharto era to the present day, have faced repression and brutality from the Indonesian state.¹¹

Reading the story in this context nevertheless points to another piece in the fragmented picture of Oceanic sovereignty. Nash's story provides background to Papua's divided status through a brief narrative aside: 'The history was complicated. Dutch were the original colonisers of West Papua. Through some mysterious arrangement, West Papua was annexed by Indonesia without the consent of the Melanesian population' (137). When Papuans demanded '[f]reedom of self-determination, religion, culture, and language' (137), the Indonesian state, which considered the Papuans 'wildlife' (138), responded with aerial bombings, mass arrests and public executions, producing a flow of Papuan refugees from Indonesia to Papua New Guinea. Before his escape, Pulus asks himself, 'Why should a man leave his homeland? The land he was entitled to by birth right, race, colour and creed?' (137). During the sea journey Tamara weeps over '[l]osing everything they owned' (141) and the likelihood they will never see their other children again. Again, our literary text makes visible a more complex configuration of regional relationships beyond notions of strong and weak states, aid donors and recipients.

Moreover, although the Pacific Solution has been described as *creating* a refugee problem in places where there was none (Rajaram 290), Nash's story indicates that this is not quite true. Papua New Guinea refuses to question Indonesia's sovereignty over West Papua or to give citizenship to some 9,000 refugees from West Papua, most of whom live in remote camps without services (Chandler). The first wave to arrive in Manus Island in 1969 were actually placed in refugee camps at the instructions of the Australian administration, and many are simply still there (Chandler).¹² 'Escape from Jayapura' not only adds another historical layer to the story of Australian manipulation of Papuan bodies and border control, but illustrates the entirely abstract nature of Papuan sovereignty for West Papuans.¹³ For people born on this side of the island, trapped by the arbitrariness of colonial borders, there has been no decolonisation. Positioned as

¹¹ On the Suharto state repression of the Free Papua movement in the 1990s see Jacques Bertrand.

¹² Chandler notes that this situation has exacerbated the resettlement plans for asylum seekers in Manus Island, which is perceived as unfairly favouring foreigners. Reactions in Papua New Guinea to the 'Pacific Solution' have ranged from questioning whether a still fragmented and developing country can 'accommodate one more new tribe' (Zeriga-Alone 226), to a poem sympathising with the plight of 'boat people' (Landu 139).

¹³ Note, however, that the goal of the West Papuan movement is not to secede from Indonesia to combine with Papua New Guinea, but to establish a new independent state. See Webb-Cannon's comprehensive article on Papua *merdeka*.

the final story in Nash's collection, 'Jayapura' departs from the tenor of the other stories, which mostly detail the violence, poverty and dysfunction of contemporary urban life in Papua New Guinea in a gritty realist narrative. Given that the opening story, 'Medal without Honour', is about Papua New Guinea's contributions to the Australian effort in the Pacific War, we can observe that Papuan life is literally bracketed by historical experiences of colonialism—of Australian rule at one end and the ongoing liberation struggle of West Papuans in Indonesia on the other.

I conclude with this brief reading to again show how literature offers an alternative historical archive of regional relationships in Oceania, and denaturalizes the Pacific Solution as a purely post-2001 phenomenon that relies on the 'convenience' of small, underdeveloped or 'failing' states in the region. As Peter Hitchcock has noted, the notion of 'failure' implies a once-successful state 'that has since disintegrated' (732), and enables Western powers to 'elide the role of former empires in what a nation can become' (741). In short, we see how dependent Oceanic states have been constructed out of the *multiple* legacies of imperial sovereignties: forces which have striven to civilise, modernise, financialise and securitise these people and territories, but very rarely acknowledged their desire for autonomy and sovereignty.

Through literary analysis, we have seen the ways that differential sovereignties of Oceania have been imagined and critiqued across specific colonial and decolonising landscapes, from the competing cultural-legal sovereignties of Eri's *Crocodile*, to the free flowing financial authority of Hau'ofa's *Tikongs*, to the ongoing struggle for decolonisation in Sorariba's 'Jayapura'. Reinscribed within these imaginative geographies, the recent bilateral agreements between Australia, Papua New Guinea and Nauru make all too visible the region's recomposed neocolonial relationships, even as they disappear the asylum seekers themselves. In short, these texts remind us that the 'Pacific Solution' requires analysis not only in relation to human rights, international law, or Australia's attitude toward a region of the world it has referred to as 'our patch'.¹⁴ We must also recognise that detention agreements figured in terms of 'development cooperation' are a *continuation*—and not a departure from—the region's historical distribution of sovereignty, with the result that the relentless flow of securitised aid now finds its material bearers in the vulnerable bodies of refugees. Hansen and Stepputat have described the modern outsourcing of 'zonal' sovereignty epitomised by offshore detention processing as a kind of

¹⁴ See Fry's 'Our Patch', as well as Perera's chapter 'Our Patch: Racial Horizons and the War on Terror.' Perera also draws the crucial connection between discourses of 'failed states' in the Pacific region and the internal 'failed state' of Australian indigenous people.

return of the repressed, where colonial forms of ‘the trading company, the concession, and the royal charter were the main vehicles for early colonial expansion’ (308). Yet, in our literary examples, we see that the colonial relation has never been repressed at all. Rather, it has been manifest in a distinct and all-too-present regional imperialism, now appearing in a disastrously reconfigured form.

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