



## **Pacific Research Cluster**

### ***An Oceanic Imagination: A Tribute to the Life and Mind of 'Epeli Hau'ofa'***

Jenny Bryant-Tokalau and Patrick Vakaoti

In October 2009 at Otago University the Division of Humanities Pacific Research Cluster Symposium held a highly successful symposium entitled '*An Oceanic Imagination: A Tribute to the Life and Mind of 'Epeli Hau'ofa'*'. The symposium attracted between 40 and 50 delegates with more visitors the following day to view the 'Red Wave' art exhibition which was also on show. Drs Jenny Bryant-Tokalau and Patrick Vakaoti organized the day with the support of members of the research cluster and many others noted below.

The one-day symposium included presentations from key Pacific researchers and artists: Associate Professor Ropate Qalo, Sociology Department, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji; Mr. Josaia McNamara, Artist, Oceanic Centre of Arts and Culture, USP, Suva; Ms Karlo Mila-Schaaf, Performance Poet; Associate Professor Judy Bennett, History Department, Otago; Dr Ian Frazer; Dr Steve Ratuva, Pacific Studies, University of Auckland; Ema Tavola, Pacific Arts Coordinator, Manukau City Council; and Luisa Tora, Activist/Writer. Members of the research cluster actively participated as facilitators and in providing summaries of the panels (Professor Paul Tapsell, Drs Greg Rawlings and Greg Burnett), as well as students, members of the public and staff from a wide variety of University departments. Members of the Tongan and Fijian communities from both Otago University and the wider Dunedin area were fully involved with the smooth running of the day, preparations and the evening dinner and performances. The symposium also attracted visitors from Lincoln and Massey universities.

Papers presented included a range of themes including '*A Tribute to our Oceanian 'Epeli Hau'ofa'*'; '*From Tales of the Tikongs to a Sea of Islands*', '*Epeli and my life as an artist*' and '*Visions of building Pacific representations through the arts*'. Each of the speakers has now provided a copy of their paper and it is intended that a joint publication with the Oceanic Centre at the University of the South Pacific will be completed soon. Now, in order that all those who participated as well as others with a love for and interest in 'Epeli, an on-line presentation here

will give a flavour of the day. We include here some of the power point presentations, as well as the art work, and poetry presented in the evening.

We link the presentations with sections of a paper written by Dr Greg Burnett who beautifully summed up the day with his paper '*Epeli Hau'ofa: Resisting the deadly discourses that bind*'. This paper will be produced fully in the written manuscript but much of the intent is here.

Who was 'Epeli Hau'ofa? Many know him as the first director of the Oceanic Centre of Arts and Culture (and Pacific Studies) at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. But he was so much more than that. Born and raised in Papua New Guinea, the child of Tongan missionaries, 'Epeli was truly a Pacific man. Penelope Schoeffel-Meleisea in her tribute in newsletter of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (September 2009) called him a 'Reluctant Anthropologist'. He lived across the Pacific – Fiji for school, Armidale, NSW for undergraduate studies (and where he met Barbara his wife), McGill and ANU for post-graduate. His PhD fieldwork was undertaken in Papua New Guinea and post-doctoral research in Tonga. He then became Deputy Private Secretary to His Majesty the King of Tonga, Keeper of the Palace Record and Secretary to the Tonga Traditions Committee (Schoeffel-Meleisea, 2009). In Tonga he began his satirical writings (as well as analyses of Tongan society) with *Tales of the Tikongs*. He joined USP in Tonga and then Fiji in the early 1980s. Schoeffel-Meleisea eloquently describes those early days at USP and we too remember the divisions (versions of Marxist sociology versus 'conservative' anthropology, and 'Epeli blithely ignoring them all with his distinctive style. Finally, the reluctant anthropologist who disliked the discussions of 'us' and 'them' and the other, attained his desire, to establish what is today known as the Oceanic Centre of Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies. Perhaps it is at the Centre that Epeli's vision of a New Oceania became a lived reality. The centre metaphorically became an oceanic space of interconnectedness, exploration, and where one could venture and be guided by the ebb and flow of the tides. For Pacific Islanders the Centre became a place where they would create and be respected for their art, dance, sculpture, music and be taken seriously. The Oceanic Centre of Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies is an important legacy of 'Epeli, but so too were his sense of humour, his honesty, his 'groundedness' (a word I am certain he would hate) but which is a reflection, and most of all his love for Barbara.

## Contents

### ***\*Introduction***

\*Opening remarks: Jenny Bryant-Tokalau and Patrick Vakaoti – **3 pages**

\*‘Remembering ‘Epeli’ Poem - Ropate Qalo – **1 page**

\*‘Epeli and my life as an artist: a tribute to Epeli Hau’ofa’ - Josaia McNamara – **19 slides**

### ***Part Two: ‘From Tales of the Tikongs to a Sea of Islands’.***

\*\*‘Epeli Hau’ofa: The Magical Metaphor Man’ - Karlo Mila-Schaaf - **17 pages**

\*\*‘Epeli – the man... the myth... martyr... the mana’ - Steve Ratuva – **8 slides**

### ***Part Three: ‘Visions of building Pacific representations through the arts’***

\*‘Visuals of Pacific Art: Fresh Gallery Otago’ - Ema Tavola - **40 slides, all visuals**

\*‘The Rebirth of Cool: Through the Gendered Looking Glass’ - Luisa Tora - **15 slides**

### ***With extracts throughout from:***

\*\*‘Epeli Hau’ofa: Resisting the deadly discourses that bind’ - Greg Burnett