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## **Anthropological Knowledge Production in Oceania and How to Decolonize (Swiss) Academia**

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# ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN OCEANIA

## And How to Decolonise Anthropology in (Swiss) Academia

*Juliane Neuhaus*

### Abstract

In Oceania, as elsewhere, power relations in knowledge production have been highly debated for many decades. Oceanian anthropologists have developed challenging proposals to decolonise anthropology and academia in Oceania at large. Nevertheless, insights from this region do not figure prominently in recent theoretical discussions about coloniality and decolonisation “about the subaltern” (Grosfoguel 2007, 211). By focusing on the long-lasting Oceanian discourse in a Swiss peer-reviewed journal, this article aims to contribute to the decolonisation of Swiss academia by proposing an anthropology “with and from a subaltern perspective” (Grosfoguel 2007, 211). Drawing on recent online research, and experiences with teaching the anthropology of Oceania, this article familiarises a European readership with Indigenous anthropologists from Oceania, and their struggles with our discipline. It looks at Indigenous scholars’ reflections about and propositions for different ways of knowledge production and Indigenous research methods. The article concludes with suggestions to further the decolonisation process within (Swiss) academia.

**Keywords:** *anthropological knowledge, Indigenous anthropology, Oceania, decolonising academia*

### Introduction

*It is obvious that non-Western anthropologists, such as me for example, have received their training mostly in metropolitan countries under Western mentors, or in their own lands under Western-trained teachers. Any special “feel” for or subjective insight they may have into their own communities and people could have been effectively suppressed by their rigorous training in the uncompromising empiricist traditions in outside settings.*  
(Hau’ofa 1975, 283)

Nearly 50 years ago, Hau’ofa addressed the power relations between Western and Indigenous scholars involved in knowledge production about Indigenous peoples in Oceania from the point of view of an Indigenous student. Reading and discussing Hau’ofa’s criticism of his own anthropological training, and, more generally, his and other Oceanian anthropologists’ criticism of anthropology as a discipline was eye-opening for students participating

in a course called “Research from Oceania” that I taught in spring 2020. I’m training students of anthropology in a metropolitan European country (in Zurich, Switzerland) since the 2010s, and as a North-European I’ve been trained in another such place (in Hamburg, Germany) in the 1990s. My students in Switzerland had not yet been confronted with criticism of our discipline emanating from Oceania, and neither had I, during my studies. Oceania has already been a regional focus during my studies of social anthropology and law. I’ve twice conducted fieldwork about legal pluralism and village courts in the eastern lowlands of Papua New Guinea in the first decade of 2000. Trotting paths well-established by colonialism, proselytization, and a classical long-term anthropological endeavour including several generations of western scholars, my research was situated in the midst of a “colonial matrix of power” (Siegenthaler and Allain Bonilla 2019, 6; see also Quijano 2000a and b, and Mignolo 2007). My own fieldwork and writing were largely untouched by debates about the decolonisation of anthropological knowledge production and my interaction with Indigenous scholars remained limited to a few visits before and after fieldwork, when I was able to meet anthropologist Linus Digim’rina and late lawyer Lawrence Kalinoe in the capital Port Moresby. Our exchanges were extremely fruitful thanks to their advice and guidance. Important local publications about my topic had been largely inaccessible in Europe, and it was only through my presence in Papua New Guinea that I was able to access local university libraries and their impressive collections of both Indigenous and western scholars’ publications (Kalinoe and Leach 2001).

More recent material has mainly remained unattainable for me and other researchers living in far-away places such as Europe or the US. Digitalisation facilitates access to Indigenous scholars’ publications, and we need to consciously enhance our attention to virtual spaces with their subaltern knowledge, networks, and activities. My plans for travelling back to research sites in Oceania in 2020 had to get cancelled because of the outbreak of SARS-COV-2, and I re-embarked on such a research in virtual spaces in Oceania about anthropological institutions, publications, and researchers / lecturers based in Oceania. A focus on Indigenous scholars was furthered by debates about a de-canonization of teaching at the ISEK in Zurich in 2019 (Kukuczka and Fitzpatrick 2020), and intensive discussions with my students, especially in two courses about anthropological research in Oceania. While one course was oriented along the lines of canonical ethnographic literature about Oceania, the second exclusively focused on Indigenous anthropologists from Oceania and their publications since the year 2000. Preparing and teaching this latter course in Zurich in spring 2020 showed how non-fieldwork periods can be productively used for a closer virtual engagement with Indigenous scholars.

Taking up Hau’ofa’s dichotomy between Western and non-Western anthropologists is not unproblematic since we all have several identities, mixed origins, and self-attributions as well as attributions by others vary. Nonetheless, such a distinction is imminent in the critique of anthropology as a colonial discipline, as it differentiates between privileged and marginalised or excluded scholars and epistemologies (Moosavi 2020, 345). Over time, scholars employed different dichotomies such as insider / outsider and national/foreign (Morauta 1979, 562), native/regular or non-native (Narayan 1993), white/non-white; Global North/ Global South; at the centre/ in the periphery (see Moosavi 2020, 345–347, for a discussion

of these terms), or western/subaltern (Grosfoguel 2007) – and these axes do not always correspond. In using such dichotomies, scholars point out differences in the reception of contributions of metropolitan academics and those scholars in places outside North America and Europe (Henare 2007, 93). Our joint effort to foster processes of decolonisation will hopefully lead to ultimately overcome such differences and distinctions. For the time being, I employ the dichotomy of Western and Indigenous academics because Indigenous researchers seem to find it a useful one until today.

In contemporary Oceania, Indigenous anthropologists are gradually replacing Western scholars such as the ones initially criticized by Hau'ofa. Western scholars, who had initiated, built, and filled university positions in Oceania for decades, were first replaced by another generation of Western scholars. As the numbers of Indigenous students increased, some became young Indigenous academics who then went on to replace their academic mentors. Some gradually gained power to influence our anthropological discipline, although it continues to represent “colonial forms of domination” (Grosfoguel 2007, 219–220). Even if the mere existence of Indigenous academics in powerful positions could be understood as a welcome outcome of decolonising processes within academia, unequal power relations remain when it comes to working conditions, publishing and academic success and visibility.<sup>1</sup> A way out of this dilemma was the creation of a new interdisciplinary discipline in Oceania around the turn of the century: a discipline decolonial in its approach called *Pacific (Islands) Studies*<sup>2</sup> or *Cultural Studies*<sup>3</sup> (Henare 2007; Winduo 2004; Wood 2003; Firth 2003; White and Tengan 2001), emphasizing and validating Pacific Islanders epistemologies (Wood 2003, 341). Today, *Pacific Island Studies / Cultural Studies for Oceania* sometimes include the discipline of social anthropology, and sometimes both exist as different departments or study programs side-by-side. In some circumstances, one merely finds any Indigenous scholar employed in social anthropology, since these have rather joined the explicitly de-colonial counter-discipline (Henare 2007, 93).

My aim in this article is to add to recent decolonising processes in (Swiss) academia, by writing about the decolonisation of anthropological knowledge as called for by Indigenous scholars in Oceania. In doing so, I contribute to a broadening of our horizons by better including Indigenous anthropologists from Oceania into an academic “we” (Chua and

<sup>1</sup> That students and young Oceanian academics still need special support, be it within the region or abroad, is acknowledged through special support programs, such as, for example, *Pasifika Hub* in New Zealand; *Pasifika Australia* in Australia; PICA-WA and YPL, both in the US.

<sup>2</sup> Departments of Pacific (Islands) Studies in Oceania: *Center for Pacific Islands Studies* (CPIS); *Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies* (MBC); *Pacific Research and Policy Centre*; *School of Pacific Studies*; Melanesian and Pacific Studies Centre (MAPS) at the University of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (see Winduo 2004). For a recent summary about Pacific Island Studies in the US see Schliemann (2021). The label of “Pacific Studies” has gained institutional prominence in Europe, too (see the digital platform Pacific-Studies.Net).

<sup>3</sup> Departments and research units of Cultural Studies in Oceania: Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATS); Hawai'i inuiakea – School of Hawai'i an Knowledge (HSHK); Nga Pae o te Maramatanga (NPM); Ngai Tahu Research Centre (NTRC); Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies and Te Kawa a Maui – School of Maori Studies; Te pua wananga tit e Ao – Faculty of Maori and Indigenous Studies (FMIS); School of Maori Studies; Maori Studies, Centre for Samoan Studies.

Mathur 2018). As an anthropologist Indigenous to Oceania, Ty Tengan contributed to that volume by elaborating on the pronoun “we”, and he pointed out that it has divergent meanings, either including different audiences or excluding them (Tengan 2018, 158). As a scholar working at a Swiss university, I wish to include Indigenous anthropologists from Oceania and to give space to their voices into the academic discourse. Since, if we want to “normalize” anthropology, to rid it of its hegemony, we need to better include subaltern voices (Escobar and Restrepo 2009). In the same vein, Moosavi urges Northern academics to look at decolonial theory from the Global South to tackle “enduring structures of inequality” (2020, 333). In this article, I thus put an emphasis on an important Oceanian discourse, which results in omitting references to many Northern / Western anthropologists of Oceania who have also been committed to the process of decolonising our discipline.<sup>4</sup>

This article is structured as follows: I first introduce Indigenous scholars’ struggles with identity, the reception of their work and anthropology as a discipline. After recalling the initial years of academic institutions in Oceania, and digging for the roots of intellectual decolonisation, I focus on two prominent Indigenous anthropologists. This is followed by a discussion of points of critique raised in the discourse, and a presentation of an emergent pan-Oceanian research paradigm. I finish my article with suggestions to further the decolonisation process within academia in Switzerland.

### **Intellectual decolonisation in Oceania: struggling with identity, reception, and anthropology**

In Oceania, as elsewhere, knowledge production and its relations to power have been highly debated issues for many decades. Discussions have been initiated, *inter alia*, by Hau’ofa, cited at the beginning. Oceania is the term used to describe “a sea of islands” (Hau’ofa 1994), covering the vast region of the Pacific Ocean, situated between the American continent to the East, and the Asian continent and its archipelagos to the West. The emic term of *Moana Nui* (Pacific Ocean) also has come to be widely used to refer to Oceania. Oceanians or Pacific Islanders are “anyone who has lived in our region and is committed to Oceania” (Hau’ofa 2008, 51). The term allows for broad identification, and also takes into account migration, thus embracing those living abroad in various parts of the world. Yet an alternative term is Indigenous peoples of Oceania. In some circumstances, the term Pacific Islanders only includes people from Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, excluding Indigenous people from New Zealand, Australia, New Caledonia, Guam, and Hawai’i – probably because in these latter countries, Indigenous inhabitants face a different political situation, being minorities in settler nations (Gagné and Salaün 2012). But again, the terms used may vary, depending on self-ascription and ascription by others. Pacific Islanders living abroad also

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<sup>4</sup> Take, for example, anthropologists working about Oceania Martha Macintyre (see Bainton et al 2021; Macintyre and Foale 2013; Macintyre and Golub 2021) and Paige West (see West 2018a, b and c), as well as scholars from other disciplines, for example historians focusing on Indigenous agency in processes of decolonisation, such as Banivanua Mar (2016), Rawlings (2015), Hanlon (2014), Gardner and Waters (2013), Chappell (2013), Diaz (2010), Waddell (2008).

employ the term *Pasifika* to display their on-going connection to the region.<sup>5</sup> Oceanian scholars have discussed which term to employ for themselves (native, local, insider or indigen-ous), reaching agreement by capitalizing “I” in *Indigenous scholar/anthropologist* to point to particular ways in which Oceanian scholars “have taken up anthropology for their own purposes” (Tengan 2018, 154) and for stressing their shared experiences of coloniality with colleagues in other postcolonial states.

Debates about anthropology as a colonial discipline and related criticism, starting in the 1970s, form part of a large and interdisciplinary intellectual discourse about decolonisation within Oceania. One example of this intellectual debate is Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith’s bestselling book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) that has just recently been published in its third edition (2021). In it, Smith, an internationally accomplished Indigenous scholar/researcher from Aotearoa/New Zealand, advocates a specifically Indigenous research agenda and Indigenous methodologies. Although *Decolonizing Methodologies* is often referenced in international publications about the decolonisation of knowledge, a regional contextualisation – placing it within the Oceanian discourse or just naming the Oceanian discourse – is often missing (Bilge 2020, 328; Moosavi 2020, 344–346; Siegenthaler and Allain Bonilla 2019, 6; Last 2018, 211). Moreover, with the exception of Smith’s book, findings from Oceania do not seem to figure prominently in recent theoretical discussions about coloniality and decolonisation (see e. g. Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nisancioglu 2018; Allen and Jobson 2016; Escobar and Restrepo 2009; Grosfoguel 2007; Rey 2008). One example is Moosavi (2020) who offers an “alternative genealogy of intellectual decolonisation” by discussing decolonial theories from the Global South that are often neglected by Northern Scholars (Moosavi 2020, 333). He mentions Malaysian scholars (Moosavi 2020, 335–336), African scholars (Moosavi 2020, 336–337), the Subaltern School in India and beyond (Moosavi 2020, 337–338), scholars from Latin America (Moosavi 2020, 338–339), and from Asia (Moosavi 2020, 339–341), but at the same time, he neglects the discourse in Oceania. Along with Smith, many other authors from many different disciplines, including anthropology, are participating in the discourse about decolonisation within Oceania (e. g. Tebrakunna country, Lee, and Evans, 2022). Without even being trying to be exhaustive, I name a few contemporary anthropologists from Oceania that have received little international attention: Ruth Faleolo, Arapata Hakiwai, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Maia Nuku, Michelle Nayahamui Rooney, Marata Taimara, Fa’anofo Lisaclaire (Lisa) Uperesa.

During the 1960s, in the wake of independence of Oceanian island nations from imperial powers such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the US and Australia – as successor with mandates for former British and German colonies – colonial administrations have sent many Indigenous individuals abroad to get educated as radio journalists, policemen, health workers, or to study academic disciplines. The idea behind this endeavour was to enable locals to run the state, businesses, radio stations and education once a colony would become independent. Additionally, many universities in Oceania have been founded just before and after independence, in the spirit of encouraging higher education in former colonies. Univer-

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<sup>5</sup> See Franklin (2003) for a fascinating study about questions of identity in internet discussion forums for Pasifika living in the US, Australia and New Zealand.

sities received financial and logistical support by former colonial powers, and they are financed until today by these same powers, via development agencies or direct partnerships. For example, the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) was founded in 1965 by the colonial Australian administration, and the University of the South Pacific (USP) was founded in Fiji in 1967 by Australia and the United Kingdom. Western academics researching the region initially helped to found specific academic departments and trained first generations of Indigenous students in various disciplines, reproducing western canons and their classical disciplinary conceptualisations and paradigms. This led Western anthropologists of Oceania to consider the decolonisation of their discipline. In 1979, British anthropologist Louise Morauta published an article about “Indigenous Anthropology in Papua New Guinea” in *Current Anthropology*. Morauta considered inequalities between local objects of study and foreign scholars, applied the term of “indigenous anthropology” – distinguishing between “outsiders” (foreign anthropologists) and “insiders” (national social scientists) – and hoped for “possibilities of intellectual discourse between foreigners and nationals” (1979, 561–562). Some anthropologists held to the idea that “the ultimate ‘decolonization’ of anthropology in Papua New Guinea will come when the profession has produced a group of local anthropologists who will both conduct research in their own nation and go forth to study the natives of the so-called developed world” (Ogan 1975, 334, cited in Morauta 1979, 561). Several students from UPNG addressed other aspects concerning the decolonization of anthropology, and these were published as a comment to Morauta (1979, 567):

- › Who decides research priorities?
- › Who funds research projects?
- › For what purposes are these research projects being carried out?
- › Who benefits from the results of these research projects?

These questions seem surprisingly fresh today. But it took more than “a generation” (Allen and Jobson 2016), to produce a group of Indigenous anthropologists, and to make important steps towards the decolonisation of anthropology in Oceania. Only during the last decade or two, more and more Indigenous anthropologists are climbing the academic ladder in Oceania and elsewhere and are thus gaining academic influence within their postcolonial states, and within the region.

Postcolonial states come in many guises: some are settler nations with a minority of Indigenous peoples and a majority of former settlers, such as the US and Canada, and countries in Latin and South America. A comparable situation exists in Oceania, for example in Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai’i, the latter being a state of US. Other regions in Oceania also continue to have close ties to a former imperial power – although with reversed majority-minority relations. Namely, those regions collectively called *la France d’outre-mer*, former French colonies such as New Caledonia, Wallis et Futuna and French Polynesia. Yet, other countries of Oceania have gained independence from former imperial powers such as Germany or the United Kingdom. Today, these countries are inhabited and governed by a majority of Indigenous peoples, e. g., Papua New Guinea, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Nauru or Vanuatu. Different kinds of postcolonial states in Oceania have produced different ways of

academic involvement in the decolonising project, both over time and in substance.<sup>6</sup> They also pose different limitations to and offer different possibilities for academic decolonisation. Epeli Hau'ofa and Ty Tengan are two examples Indigenous anthropologists, widely recognised in Oceania. Spanning the time between the early postcolonial period and today, they represent two generations of Indigenous scholars, with specific academic genealogies. I ask how these scholars struggle with anthropology as a discipline.

Epeli Hau'ofa (1939–2009) was among the first Indigenous scholars to postulate discomfort with the products of western anthropology: ethnographies. He also formulated region-specific criticism of the anthropological enterprise, claiming for Indigenous knowledge production. He continuously encouraged his colleagues and co-Oceanians to free themselves from an ongoing intellectual coloniality (Hau'ofa 1994). I take Epeli Hau'ofa as an example of a Pacific Islander of the first generation to study anthropology at a western university. By the time he wrote his dissertation at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra in 1975, he called himself the second “native professional anthropologist” from the Pacific (Hau'ofa 1975, 287)<sup>7</sup>. And he was to become one of the most influential social scientists within Oceania in the 1980s until his death in 2009 (see Tengan 2018; Wesley-Smith 2010). Epeli Hau'ofa was an Oceanian anthropologist, writer, and philosopher. His life displays some of the possible connections between islands in the Ocean, as he was born to Tongan missionaries in Papua New Guinea, attended school in Tonga, Fiji, Australia, and Canada, before studying anthropology in Canada and Australia, doing his PhD based on fieldwork in Papua New Guinea (Tengan 2018, 151). Hau'ofa described how it felt to study anthropology as an Indigenous student with a Western teacher: “It is a painful experience for people to sit and listen to someone talking about himself” (Hau'ofa 1975, 283). He described problems with regards to knowledge production and representation, arising when trained “in the West”, as indicated in the citation at the beginning of this article. He also problematised the presence of outsider anthropologists in relation to the local acceptance of the discipline, when he stated:

*[T]he longer that [Western anthropologists], as outsiders, monopolize the research in the region, the stronger will be the feelings against us [non-Western anthropologists], and the more difficult will be our task of extricating our discipline from taint of imperialism and exploitation.* (Hau'ofa 1975, 288)

Hau'ofa wanted to reconcile those studied (Pacific Islanders) with those who studied them (anthropologists), reminding us that “it will be on the basis of what we have written, what we are writing, and what we will write that we improve our relationships with Pacific peoples” (Hau'ofa 1975, 286–87). Another point of criticism was directed at unequal research relations: “most [Western] anthropologists involve Pacific peoples in our research projects only in the capacity of field assistants, which is paternalism in the extreme” (Hau'ofa 1975,

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. Banivanua Mar (2016); Gagné and Salaün (2013); concerning New Caledonia see Trépiéd (2013); for New Zealand see Metge (2013), Reilly (2011) and Henare (2007); for Hawai'i see White and Tengan (2001).

<sup>7</sup> The “first native professional anthropologist” (Hau'ofa 1975, 287) was Rusiate Nayacakalou (1927–1972) from Fiji, a lecturer at the University of Sydney, Australia (Tomlinson 2006).



288). As a result, Hau'ofa urged for the "rise of fully trained local colleagues in each Pacific country" (Hau'ofa 1975, 288.). Later in his life, Hau'ofa participated in meetings of the *Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania* (ASAO), predominantly populated by anthropologists from the US (Rensel 2021, 16; Mawyer and Howard 2021), a few participants from Australia, New Zealand, or Europe, and – at least at that time – very few Indigenous ones. In 1993, after having participated in one of these meetings, Hau'ofa sketched his famous talk "Our sea of Islands" (Hau'ofa 1994), where he reflected about the still ongoing colonial discourses belittling Pacific Islanders. For long, Pacific Islanders' identity was gravely undermined by colonialism, and they felt second or third class in their countries and worldwide, as well as in academia. Hau'ofa wrote his essay to counter the dominant discourse with his more optimistic view about the region, calling for a pan-Oceanian identity, reinforcing local knowledges and oral traditions. His call has contributed to an internal process, first strengthening Indigenous voices, by exclusion of non-Indigenous scholars for about a decade or two, followed by opening-up for collaboration more recently. And this leads me to the generation of Indigenous anthropologists that both Morauta and Hau'ofa had urged for.

Since roughly the year 2000, different scholars working in Oceania, of Western as well as of Indigenous origins, have developed challenging proposals to decolonise anthropology, research methodologies, and academia at large (Smith 1999, Tengan 2005 and 2018; Golub 2018). Their aim is to add to an anthropology "with and from subaltern perspectives" (Grosfoguel 2007, 211), and to "create a more inclusive Pacific anthropology" (Golub 2018, 32). I take Ty Tengan (born 1975) as an example of an Oceanian scholar of this later generation. Today, Tengan is employed at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM) as Department Chair and Associate Professor in Ethnic Studies, and he is Associate Professor in Anthropology. Both departments have a mixed faculty, with a male and "white" predominance. On the one hand, Tengan is thus a "diversity scholar" in a department of ethnic studies taught in a historically predominant white institution belonging to the United States, comparable to the ones discussed in Bilge (2020). On the other hand, Tengan is an Indigenous scholar, employed at a Hawai'ian department of anthropology. Tengan was born in 1975 in Hawai'i and has spent most of his life there, feeling at home in Maui, as he states on his webpage (University of Hawai'i 2022a). He is – as far as I can see from his writings – as powerful an anthropologist fighting for academic decolonisation as Hau'ofa was. Tengan states on his website that he is "involved in the exploration and development of new models for Indigenous research in anthropology and the social sciences more generally, as well as the ways in which such research agendas articulate with other modes of critical scholarship" (University of Hawai'i 2022a). As student of anthropology, he reflected about his discipline, as Hau'ofa had done 30 years earlier. Tengan experienced a deep discomfort with anthropology among Indigenous students and scholars of other disciplines:

*In Hawai'i, as in other parts of the Pacific and the world where former objects of ethnography were now speaking back, Native scholars had identified anthropology as the single most colonialist field in the academy. Those I met were shocked that I was in anthropology and told me that it was "an evil white discipline" that was "racist towards Hawaiians".*  
(Tengan 2005, 247)

As a graduate student, Tengan inquired into his department, not uncovering any racist discourses or ideologies (Tengan 2005, 248). However, he found “that the disciplinary models and practices carried out in the department [...] have historically worked to erect and maintain boundaries between outsider-anthropologist and insider-native” (Tengan 2005, 48). When he and a few others received their PhD in the early 2000s, they were the first Hawai’ians to be awarded such honour at UHM (Tengan 2005, 249). As Hau’ofa had been the “second native anthropologist” in Australia in 1975, Tengan was the first Hawai’ian with a faculty position in anthropology when he became assistant professor at the University of Hawai’i in 2005 (Tengan 2005).<sup>8</sup> After a timespan of a generational 30 years, the project of having Indigenous anthropologists in powerful positions was thus launched. As such, Tengan became a member of the ASAO, and has co-organized meetings for younger Indigenous scholars in Oceania.<sup>9</sup> Spanning over four years, their meetings led to a publication in *Pacific Studies* (Tengan et al. 2010), in which participants reflect about further steps to decolonise anthropology in Oceania. Recently, Tengan (2018) has discussed more generally how to “generate a more just and decolonial future” for anthropology in an edited volume questioning the state of inclusion of subaltern academics globally (Chua and Mathur 2018). Critical reflections about the decolonisation of anthropology from Oceania thus start to reach a broader audience outside Oceania. What are the central points of critique that have hindered a decolonisation of anthropological knowledge production in Oceania for decades?

### **Anthropological knowledge production in Oceania: points of critique and an emergent Indigenous research paradigm**

I juxtapose aspects initially criticised with more recent reflections, before turning to Indigenous scholars’ propositions for the future. Again, I’m focusing on reflections by Indigenous scholars – omitting Western anthropologists whose approaches, research ethics and styles of representation have of course changed in comparison to the canonical authors criticised.

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<sup>8</sup> Tengan here refers to faculty positions in anthropology at the University of Hawai’i. There have been earlier incidents of positions in other faculties for Indigenous scholars, e.g., Bruce Biggs (1921–2000) and Haunani-Kay Trask (1949–2021) (see University of Hawai’i 2021). Biggs was a Maori anthropology professor at the Linguistics Department at the University of Hawai’i in 1967–68, before returning to New Zealand in 1969 (see Pawley 2019).

<sup>9</sup> A first explicit invitation to Pacific Islanders to participate in ASAO’s annual conference was formulated in 1993 (Rensel 2021, 4). Being part of an emergent group of Indigenous scholars between 1990 and 2000, Teresia Teaiwa (2001) vividly recalls how it felt to participate at ASAO (and related associations’) meetings.

## Understanding (Mis)Representations

A major issue raised early on by Hau'ofa that is still discussed until today is that of misrepresentation and language. Hau'ofa addressed it just after Geertz's publication of "The Interpretation of Culture" (1973), making way for the Writing Culture debate in the mid-1980s. Speaking about Sahlins' (1963) well-known piece of writing about political types in Melanesia and Polynesia, Hau'ofa stated that this article is "clever, thoughtless and insulting. [...] The whole article is an invidious pseudo-evolutionary comparison, in Sahlins' terminology, between the 'developed' Polynesian polities and the 'underdeveloped' Melanesian ones. It belongs to a pedigree of literature on Oceania" (Hau'ofa 1975, 285). Hau'ofa also tackled the misrepresentation of Pacific Islanders in anthropological literature (published before 1975) more generally:

*There is hardly anything in our literature to indicate whether these people [we study] have any sentiments of love, kindness, consideration, altruism and so on. We cannot tell from our ethnographic writings whether they have a sense of humour. We know little about their systems of morality, specifically their ideas about good and the bad, and their philosophies [...] We have ignored their physical gestures, their deportment, and their patterns of non-verbal communication. By presenting incomplete and distorted representations of Melanesians we have bastardised our discipline, denied people important aspects of their humanity in our literature, and we have thereby unwittingly contributed to the perpetuation of the outrageous stereotypes of them made by ignorant outsiders who lived in their midst.* (Hau'ofa 1975, 286)

In their recent publications, Indigenous scholars continue to address their discomfort with canonical anthropological literature.<sup>10</sup> To give just one example, Samoan anthropologist Uperesa (2010, 284) spells out her discomfort when reading about Samoan sexuality (Mead 1928). The same may hold true for a Trobriand Islander like anthropologist Linus Digim'Rina, when reading Malinowski or his diaries (Malinowski 1967) in a seminar about the history of anthropology.

### Researching Topics that Matter Locally

Indigenous researchers today try to choose topics that matter to the communities and people studied. This problématique is very much in the vein of an on-going discussion about possibilities of collaboration between anthropologists and communities, and of collaboration between Western and Indigenous researchers (e.g. Larsen et al. 2022; Boyer and Marcus 2020; Field and Fox 2020; Gómez-Barris and Joseph 2019; Low and Merry 2010; Choy et al. 2009; Lassiter 2005; Lamphere 2004). Oceanian scholars, too, ask questions such as "what

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<sup>10</sup> Anthropologist around the world currently discuss and criticize the anthropological canon, see, e.g., Bhabra, Gebrial, and Nisancioglu (2018), Mogstad and Tse (2018), Buell et al. (2019), Durrani (2019), Kukuczka and Fitzpatrick (2020).

do Indigenous perspectives and politics bring to anthropological practice, and what can anthropology offer Indigenous peoples?” (Tengan et al. 2010, 148). Such topics relevant to Pacific Islanders may be found in a publication series compiled by Oceanian scholars, offering online teaching materials about Oceania (University of Hawai‘i 2022b). Topics covered in this series include, for example: “Militarism and nuclear testing in the Pacific”; “Gender”, “Oceanic Arts” and “Health and the Environment”. The series offers access to appropriate literature and various starting points for further readings, it perfectly fits the design of *Pacific Island Studies* proposed earlier on by Wood (2003).

### Strengthening Pacific identities

As suggested by Hau‘ofa (1994), Indigenous scholars strengthen their Pacific identities when they suggest paying special attention to ‘genealogies’ in their “search for, production, and transformation of connections across time and space” (Tengan et al. 2010, 140). Seeking far into their past they learn to better know “who we are, where we belong and where we are going” (Tengan et al. 2010, 141). They situate themselves within time and space as Indigenous anthropologists (opposed to non-Indigenous ones) by talking, debating, and enacting their genealogies – and by including these reflections in their presentations and publications. Indigenous anthropologists aim at “connecting people, gods, lands and seas as an effort to reclaim knowledge and contest imperialism in the Pacific” (Tengan et al. 2010, 144). The aims of doing genealogical work are manifold, an important one being to “create a genealogy for the next generation of Indigenous Oceanian anthropologists, provide them with a point of reference, a connection, and a set of relations” (Tengan et al. 2010, 161). Individual scholars’ pages at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, for example, display how they position themselves, and how they reveal their genealogy to anthropology as well as to specific places (e. g., University of Hawai‘i 2022a). Such genealogies are also pronounced by many other scholars and activists from Oceania, including New Zealand and Australia, weaving nets of belonging to the region and leading to a pan-Oceanian identity and to a pan-Oceanian community of scholars.

### An emergent pan-Pacific research paradigm

Oceanian scholars propose specific methods for research. In 2010, a publication explained how to search for these “Pacific research models and methodologies” (McFall-McCaffery 2010). More recently, and two decades after Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), different initiatives have been summarized under the heading of *The Pacific Research Paradigm* (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019). This paradigm is applied to the fields of education, mental health and health, social work, literature, and anthropology (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 190). It covers contemporary approaches, encompassing metaphors, models, frameworks, methods, and methodologies (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 191). Although the authors excluded work by Indigenous scholars from New

Zealand and Hawai'i (Tualalelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019), they compiled an impressive list of qualitative approaches covering four pages (Tualalelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 192–195). The authors looked at both context-specific approaches as well as at pan-Pacific concepts (Tualalelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 191).<sup>11</sup>

Just one example for such a pan-Pacific research method is *Talanoa*, or “story telling”. It literally means “talking about nothing in particular” but also encompasses “the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions” (Vaioleti 2006, 23–24). The use of this method in ethnography, and in other academic data gathering, has recurrently been discussed (Fa’avae, Tecun, and Siu’ulua 2021; Tecun et al. 2018; Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba 2014; Vaioleti 2006). “Story telling” as Indigenous research method had already been proposed by Smith (1999, 144). In her work, she describes 25 approaches to Indigenous research (chapter 8, “Indigenous projects”). Smith explains, that “story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves” (1999, 145). In the context of anthropological research, *Talanoa* is employed as “an Indigenous method of learning and enquiry, it creates and requires closeness rather than distance within an assumed objectivity that is common-place in dominant Western research practices” (Tecun, et al. 2018, 158). Recently, *Talanoa* has been employed in a collaborative research project about medical trust in the Pacific (ASAO 2022a). The concept is also employed in attempts to strengthen a pan-Pacific identity outside academia (Talanoa 2019), or as a way of indigenous knowledge transmission (Cidro 2012). And *Talanoa* has gained broader prominence, and experiences wider use in political discourses inside and outside Oceania, for example in the context of initiatives against climate change (Robie 2018; United Nations Climate Change 2018). *Talanoa* as well as many other local epistemologies enter the international floor outside academia, for example within the framework of UNESCO’s initiative for International Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (ICHCAP 2014; Nemani 2012).

### Opening up for Collaboration with non-Indigenous scholars

There are several future goals spelled out by Indigenous scholars: they plan to challenge, for example, the primacy of English terminology and concepts; to humanize research by making it more authentic, respectful and meaningful to Pacific communities; to include multiple perspectives of knowledge, at the same time not rejecting everything from abroad; to develop more sophisticated and complex terminologies; and to position these within the communities they should serve (Tualalelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 197). Today, after having developed their own, Oceanian epistemology, Oceanian scholars are ready to bridge the divide between them and us, explicitly inviting both novice and non-Pacific scholars to make use of their approaches in our research, and to further theorize about them (Tualalelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019, 197). Two decades earlier, Smith discussed several possibilities for

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<sup>11</sup> There are many other authors offering reflections about Indigenous epistemology and research not mentioned in that summary, e.g., Koya-Vaka’uta (2017) and Koya-Vaka’uta, Vaka’uta, and Lagi (2018).

“bicultural” research (1999, 177–178). She favoured “partnership research” as it “involves both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers working on a research project and shaping that project together” (Smith 1999, 178), with indigenous scholars taking key and senior roles in that kind of partnership. Around the same time, other Oceanian scholars such as Vilsoni Hereniko (2000, 90) also voted for more collaboration between members of the two groups in the future embracing the different ways of knowledge production of white/foreign/outsider and Pacific/native persons. Two examples of fruitful collaboration projects between European researchers and Indigenous communities took place around the same time and are brilliantly discussed by Pigliasco and Lipp (2011). Guido Carlo Pigliasco is an Italian anthropologist who has studied and taught at the University of Hawai‘i (University of Hawai‘i 2022c), and Thorolf Lipp is a German visual anthropologist (see <http://www.thorolf-lipp.de/>). Their projects were based on performance practices, and were designed “to be collaborative, empowering, and somewhat experimental multimedia projects” (Pigliasco and Lipp 2011, 373). The projects were carried out in Fiji (*Sawau* project, Beqa Island) and in Vanuatu (*UrSprung in der Südsee* project, Pentecost Island) with additional places in Germany. The authors understand their projects as “initiatives to leave the academic ivory tower and to try to insert some of the findings of our discipline into the contemporary stream of living culture as a service to the societies we had the privilege to visit” (Pigliasco and Lipp 2011, 376). Even though both projects were close collaborations between outside anthropologists and Indigenous partners, and they both followed Indigenous goals, the academic output was published without Indigenous participation. What remains to be done?

### Towards a Decolonisation of (Swiss) Academia

In the last section of this article, I propose steps of decolonisation within (Swiss) academia, including steps already taken, and I discuss how to broaden the distribution of knowledge produced in Oceania. Moosavi (2020, 333) lists six dangers of intellectual decolonisation by Northern academics, the most important being to overlook decolonial theory from the Global South. I hope to have added to his alternative genealogy of intellectual decolonisation by focusing on Oceanian scholars and their reflections. Five additional dangers remain, these are to “simplify intellectual decolonisation; essentialise and appropriate the Global South; overlook some forms of colonial exclusion; produce nativism; and be tokenistic” (Moosavi 2020, 334 and 341–350). The decolonisation process has entered European universities as institutions of coloniality. European Universities had been sites of colonial thinking, and the “fall of formal empires did little to change the logic of Western universities” (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nisancioglu 2018, 5; see also Mogstad and Tse 2018). Taking a closer look at possibilities and dangers when it comes to *Decolonising the University*, the editors conclude that there remains “more work to be done” (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nisancioglu 2018, 6). A main question in this context is “how to use the resources and position of the institution, while recognising, accounting for, and undoing its inherent exclusivity?” (Gebrial 2018, 29).

A broader discourse about academic decolonisation is also emerging in Switzerland, a country that only slowly realizes that it is a postcolonial state, too (Purtschert 2019;

Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné 2015; Purtschert, Lüthi, and Falk 2012). Switzerland “has never been a colonial power” (Siegenthaler and Allain Bonilla 2019, 4), and the country, its institutions and researchers have rather belated come to engage with decolonisation and coloniality. Coloniality – the colonial matrix of power – emerged as result of colonialism and works beyond geopolitical borders worldwide until today (Siegenthaler and Allain Bonilla 2019, 6). Coloniality is to be understood the heir of colonialism and colonial thinking, in that it perpetuates former patterns of power (Siegenthaler and Allain Bonilla 2019). A decolonial approach to Swiss academia means to both reconsider and undo this colonial power matrix in divergent “historic global connections, markets, and power networks”, in academia and beyond, unveiling “their colonial roots, and bring[ing] to light the contemporary participation of Swiss institutions” (Siegenthaler and Allain Bonilla 2019, 5). Many researchers in Switzerland are now urging for a decolonisation of academia by broadening knowledge production, and a diversification of anthropological research methodologies from different points of view (Tsantsa Special Issues 2022 and 2019; SAA 2022). Some initiatives already make use of institutional resources to enhance reception and visibility of Indigenous anthropologists and their publications at our workplace in Switzerland: ethnographic museums opt for virtual exhibitions and archives to invite exchange with communities in Oceania and beyond (Ethnographic Museum Zurich 2022; MEG 2022), and region-specific academic associations explicitly invite Oceanian and Pasifika scholars to join, strengthening their networks and including them into our networks (ESfO 2022; ASAO 2022b). In addition to these already existent initiatives, I propose to make a better use of the virtual space to enhance the connectivity between all of us interested in Oceania, and our respective students. This may be realised, on the one hand, by reading Indigenous scholars, and on the other hand, by providing better access to Indigenous scholars via the virtual spaces of our Swiss institutions.

### Furthering the reception of Indigenous scholars

I think we (Swiss/Western scholars) need to continue our (anthropological) education by exploring new methods and methodologies, not being content with our classical anthropology toolkit for fieldwork, as well as by studying and employing theories “from the South”. To further educate ourselves we may discover blogs and university websites, and other useful sources of online publications by Indigenous scholars such as

- › *MAI: A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Research*. *MAI* articles critically analyze and address Indigenous and Pacific issues in the context of Aotearoa / New Zealand.
- › *AlterNatives: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, published by SAGE since 2005, presenting “research on Indigenous worldviews and experiences of decolonisation from Indigenous perspectives from around the world [,] showcase themes of Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies [, and] document the emergence of different Indigenous methodologies and value systems within an academic environment” (AlterNatives 2021).

- › *Collaborative Anthropologies*, edited by Charles Menzies and published by the University of Nebraska Press since 2008. The journal “is a forum for dialogue with a special focus on the complex collaborations between and among researchers and research participants/interlocutors. It features essays that are descriptive as well as analytical, from all subfields of anthropology and closely related disciplines, and that present a diversity of perspectives on collaborative research.” (*Collaborative Anthropologies* 2022).

Within a familiar framework of peer reviewed journals, we, as academics at Western institutions, may easily access Indigenous scholarship, and one may no longer overlook decolonial theory from the Global South (Moosavi 2020, 333). To start with, we may further the reception of Indigenous scholarship through our own and our students’ readings. This will lead to a better integration of Indigenous scholars’ methods and findings in future research and publication, and academic knowledge production will become more inclusive. Additionally, translations of publications in lesser accessible languages could be fostered, as already done, for example, by *Anthropological Quarterly/Polyglot Perspectives*; and *Current Anthropology*, financing translations into English and offering to publish the final version of an accepted manuscript in the original language if requested by the author, as online supplement. We may also directly exchange with our Indigenous colleagues making use of digitalisation, e. g., through interviews about the ideas presented in this special issue, and further online exchange about our common project to decolonise knowledge production. We may want to expand our dialogue by discussing topics such as the translation of key terms, or the dangers of cultural appropriation by non-Indigenous scholars through the use of Indigenous methodologies, terms and epistemologies.

#### Furthering the access to Indigenous anthropologists

As part of an intellectual decolonisation, I propose to use our (Swiss/Western) institutional resources to enhance visibility of and access to Indigenous scholarship. I herewith refer to what is (in)visible or less accessible in our institutional virtual spaces. We, as scholars working in Swiss/Western institutions, may not only want to extend our individual regional expertise about regional-specific online platforms, materials, and publication organs. We may also want to exchange about initiatives across the globe with “each other” (meant inclusively: with Indigenous and non-Indigenous) scholars, and with our respective students. Insights from the South are useful in cross-regional comparison, and in non-region-specific theoretical discussions. Besides reading Indigenous scholars and including references to their publications in our texts, we may, for example, grant better visibility for them on our institutional and/or personal websites. At the ISEK in Zurich, we have so far provided access to canonical anthropological journals – compiled to inform students what to read (University of Zurich 2022). By adding journals as those mentioned above, we would enhance access to Indigenous scholars’ perspectives, and to knowledge produced besides canonical publication organs. We may also provide alternative points of access to the many networks, institutions and scholars in



Oceania, and to their publications. This idea – developed in collaboration with ISEK librarian Jörg Schlatter a couple of years ago – wants to enhance the visibility of and access to academic institutions and scholars per world region beyond the well-known research centres and universities in Europe already easily accessible (see e. g. Pacific-Studies.Net 2022). It could be realised at individual Swiss/Western scholars' websites, at research sections of institutional libraries' websites or even at the level of academic institutions such as SAA, ESfO and ASAO.

There are, of course, many other ways for our mutual quest to decolonise anthropology, for example through teaching. Some of these have long-standing traditions in anthropological departments, some may still need to be developed:

- › co-teaching with Indigenous anthropologists or streaming them into a specific session (and vice versa).
- › teaching Indigenous research methods with online consultations of Indigenous researchers.
- › summer schools taking place in our research regions, enhancing Western and Indigenous students' and scholars' exchange.

My article is a contribution to an emergent process of decolonising academia in Switzerland, and in Europe. I've followed a decolonial approach to Swiss academia by bringing to light an Indigenous discourse I feel has been neglected within the field of decolonisation. In the same vein, I've proposed some ideas to enhance reception of, access and visibility to (Oceanian) Indigenous scholars, mainly in virtual spaces. As cited above (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nisancioglu 2018, 6), there is still a lot of work to be done. Taken together with insights from other regions addressed in this latest Tsantsa Special Issue, my contribution will hopefully advance the inclusion of many more subaltern voices and different ways of knowledge production in Swiss academia, and beyond.

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