

Voyaging Ancient Futures

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Slide: Title. How can traditional seafaring help us decolonize, free ourselves, of present-day shackles that are forged through prevailing narratives and visualizations of the past. *How* -- we might also ask - *- do we rewrite new histories of futures that have yet to take place?*

The Ocean, I've come to believe, turns out to be a good place to think and be with: our ocean holds 80% of the earth's life forms, which means that our population is already larger than the entire population of the earth, even including that of China! Furthermore, 80% of the oxygen that oxygen-dependent creatures breathe is produced by our tiniest cousins who live and work in the ocean, whose life involves rising and sinking, and labor, consisting of chemically and photosynthetically reworking carbon dioxide into oxygen. But, tragically, like our atolls in Micronesia – another “tiny” region famously obscured and forgotten in studies of the Pacific – these tiniest of our cousins are themselves endangered by pollution and climate change wrought by the same systems that gave us colonialism that won't go away, and postcolonial-like complicities by those who continue to aid and abet it. Let's see how long humans can live when these particular creatures of moana become extinct. It is a cruel trick, that 80% of the globe's creatures, a microelement of which produces 80% of the earth's oxygen, will die so that the individuals who comprise the 1% of the earth's richest and most powerful people of the world can enjoy things like swimming pools in dream houses. Alas, sometimes it also seems as if, given the opportunity, pools and big houses are pretty much what the remaining 99% of folks would also like to end up with. In any case, it is in view of this re-scoped image of colonialism and postcolonial complicity that I offer three examples of reimagining the futures of our pasts. These I offer in three “acts” if you will, and you should be forewarned now that these three acts of imagination will also be *interactive*. [**Slide: Act One. Anticipating 2021**].

Close your eyes and imagine -- no, really, close your eyes – that you are in a Pacific Island. I understand that sometimes *that* is a hard thing to do for some people in NZ, but it'll only be for a

moment, and it is only an act of imagination. So, close your eyes and imagine you are on a Pacific Island.

Actually you are *at the edge of a cliff* on an island, and directly below and before you, sits the deep blue Pacific Ocean. There is a gentle breeze. You can almost smell the salt air. (Keep your eyes closed!) The year is 1992 and you are in Guam, at a cliff in Oka, Tamuning, overlooking Tumon Bay, Guam's equivalent of Waikiki. Hear that? The surf pounds the reef into shape immediately below, and in the distant, jet skis pollute the water and also threaten to drown out the sounds of children playing at Ipao beach. You peer back out in front of you to the panorama of the Ocean, its razor line of a horizon, but suddenly something moving just below, in the foreground, catches your attention as it moves slowly toward you.

There, just beyond the reef, like some kind of ghost ship, is a 16th century Spanish galleon, sails a-billowing, as it slowly approaches your direction. You can even make out in the flutter the flags of King Ferdinand of Aragon, and Queen Isabel of Castillas, the progenitors of a dynasty whose combined military forces united las Españas into España in the 15th century. You wonder whether you are hallucinating, and you rub your eyes, but there it is, a 16th century Spanish galleon in late-twentieth century Guam. Do you see it? You scratch your head and wonder, "What the fuck is a 16th century Spanish Galleon doing in the late 20th century Guam? And why the hell do I know what the Spanish flag looks like?" You can open your eyes now. [**Slide: The Replica**]

What many of us saw puttering along Guam's western coast in the summer of 1992 was a replica of *Christopher Columbus'* flagship vessel, the *Santa Maria*. Curiously, the ship was built by Haruki Kadokawa, a flamboyant Japanese millionaire-celebrity, and the voyage was part of the Columbian quincentennial celebration. Even more curiously, the replica sailed from Europe to the Americas, and onwards to Guam and Japan and back to Europe, even though Columbus did not push into the Pacific, much less circumnavigate the globe, as is the legacy of his successor, Ferdinand Magellan. *For* the historical facticity of a rich Japanese celebrity's strange desire to celebrate Columbus in this way, the commemorative event in 1992 pretty much assures us that in a little less than nine years from now, on March 6, 2021 to be precise, the Japanese, or somebody somewhere, will sail a replica of one of *Ferdinand Magellan's* ships to Guam, as part of the quincentennial *of that* expedition's circumnavigation of the globe.

Slide: Magellan

Slide: Swarm

For, as some of you may know, it was on March 6, 1521, that the starving and near mutinous crew of Magellan's expedition was saved as the ships stumbled upon what is now known as the Mariana Islands. The caravan had been helplessly lost for three months in an ocean far bigger and significantly less calm than when the conquistador, Balboa, first encountered and christened it years earlier. Happening upon the Marianas saved their lives and in retrospect, made history. [**Slide: Magellan's Tack**]

Magellan's task was to push past Columbus' limits and show that the riches of the Orient lay on Spain's side of the Pope's famous Line of Demarcation, an imaginary but very real line that partitioned which newly discovered non-Christianized lands could belong to Spain and which to Portugal. In what was the first encounter between Pacific Islander and European in (European) recorded history, the Chamorros are said to have pilfered iron and a skiff, a small boat, off of Magellan's ships. These acts incurred the captain's wrath, and for which he ordered a landing party to burn down the nearest village and kill several natives, and then have the men collect water, fruits, vegetables and fowl to resupply the ships stocks. Without any sense of irony or complicity, as Magellan's expedition sailed on towards the sunset, his scribe, Antonio Pigafetta, left the name *Islas de los Ladrones* for these islands, whose native Chamorros now pursued the ships angrily, all the while hurling slingstones and chucking spears that made no harm on the fleeing ships or its passengers. [**Slide: Canon**]

We can empathize with the Chamorros; *we* know who are the real thieves. [**Slide: Canoes and I**]

Ever since I saw that replica galleon in 1992 from the cliff at Oka, Tamuning, I have been rallying students, from Guam to Michigan, and fellow seafarers, from across the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and the US Great Lakes region to ready our fleets for that Magellan replica that is sure to come in 2021. Because sure as another replica European vessel comes a-sailing into our bay to commemorate the last five hundred years of European and Asian colonialism, passing as the celebration of the circumnavigation of the globe in 1521, I want to make sure that we have a fleet of canoes ready to meet that vessel, if only to play my small role in ensuring that the next five hundred years get off to a better start. If the Chamorros of five hundred years ago took a skiff, the slogan five hundred years later, and for the next five hundred years, for the rest of us, might well be

something like, “screw the skiff, we are taking the whole damn ship!” (Poia, Michael?, can you imagine yourself leading a fleet of Te Waka o Aotearoa into Chamorro waters in 9 years? I can assure you that the Chamorros will welcome you into their waters).

In the past two decades [**Slide: PDN collage**] I have been working with traditional canoe carvers and navigators from Polowat atoll in the Central Carolines in a modern nation state called the Federated States of Micronesia. [**2 Slides: Map, The Pacific; The Central Carolines and Marianas**]

Since the 1970s, the Central Carolines have become famous for being virtually the only island group in Oceania to actively maintain an unbroken tradition of outrigger canoe carving and long distance open ocean voyaging using ancient and quite *exotic* (radically different) systems of knowledge. This is where the late and great Satawalese navigator, Mau Piailug hailed, but you should know that Mau was not the only master navigator, nor Satawal the only island with navigators, in the region. [**Slide: Voyage 2000**]

The Polowatese, for example, are another famous group of navigators, staunch rivals, actually, to the Satawalese, even if they are all blood relatives and belong to the same schools of navigation. [**Slide: Soste and PDN**]

Part of my work involved bringing such practitioners to Guam to help revive the traditions among the Chamorros, whose dubious distinction is to have been the first of the Pacific Islanders to encounter and bear the yoke of foreign domination through multiple forms of colonization. But even in the ensuing decades and centuries after Magellan, Chamorros of the Marianas themselves were acknowledged to have some of the finest, and fastest outrigger canoes in the Pacific. Perhaps for these reasons, canoes and canoe culture in the Marianas were also subsequently destroyed, outlawed, during the Chamorro Spanish wars of the 17th century.

My work also involved forays into video production. [**Slide: Sv poster**] My 1997 film, *Sacred Vessels*, recontextualized a persisting binary in Pacific Studies that sees Guam and the Chamorros on the one hand, and the Polowatese on the other, as occupying opposite ends of an historical and cultural situation marked by the presence or absence of the outrigger canoe. While the demise and absence of the outrigger canoe and ability to navigate among the Chamorros have been taken as signs of the death of authentic native culture in the Marianas, the presence of the canoe in Polowat signifies cultural survival, except that, still pivoting

on the canoe, its presence in Polowat would also mean that history had all but passed up the Polowatese, as if they were a primitive people somehow forgotten by time. History, of course, is defined here as what Europeans do through some mythical and inexorable march of time towards and now past modernity. In this problematic formulation, Chamorros get to have history but no culture, while the Polowatese get to have culture, but no history. As I have theorized it elsewhere, these prevailing conceptions of culture and history suck.

In stark contrast, my immersion in seafaring revival and survival began to expose me to other, shall we say, more fluidic, and more organic (as in home grown), forms of conceptualizing history, culture, identity, and power. These examples are the voyaging concepts and techniques of *etak* and *pookof*.

Slide: Etak. Typically translated as “moving islands,” *etak* is the technique for calculating distance traveled, or “position at sea” by triangulating the speed of your islands of departure and destination with that of a third reference island. This is accomplished, by plotting their courses in the celestial sky as a veritable map for the world below.

A map and time piece, a way of negotiating emplotment in time/space -- or more precisely, a way of conceptualizing time/space in order to fix one's place -- *etak* was a critical technological development, along with outrigger design and technology, asymmetrical hulls, and the inverted lateen sail, that permitted humans to traverse over four fifths of the globe's southern hemisphere millennia before Europeans ventured from eyesight of their shores. [**Slide: Map, Austronesia**].

The humans in this story are the so-called Austronesian-speaking peoples, from which all Oceanians descend, and *Etak* and *Pookof* are vestiges of a particular voyaging tradition of outrigger canoes. This illustration charts the coincidence in the spread of Austronesian speaking peoples and outrigger canoe technology to convey the remarkable temporal depth and geographic reach of our ancestors. This diaspora, spreading in both directions of what is now island southeast asia, began some four to six thousand years ago. From Hawaii to Easter Island to Aotearoa New Zealand, three points that mark the so-called Polynesian Triangle, across Micronesia, Melanesia, Island South east Asia, including vernaculars in South Asia and all the way to Madagascar, one finds old linguistic cognates and variations of the outrigger technology. For example, from tribal Taiwan, through the Philippines, Indonesia,

even out to Guam, the word for sky is langit. Working your way into Oceania, the Central Carolinians and even Polynesian Vanuatu say Lang. Lang, of course becomes lani in Hawai'i, rangi, here, and I would bet rangi in Rapa Nui, though I don't know for sure.

Among other things, Austronesian speaking people were ... will always be ... a seafaring people on board outrigger canoes. **Slide: Etak.** Etak made this remarkable Austronesian diaspora happen.

In theory and practice, etak works like this: first you steer towards the stars that mark the island of your destination. While doing so, you also back sight your island of departure until you can no longer see it. At the same time, you also calculate the rate at which a third island, off to the side, moves from beneath the stars where it sat when you left your island of departure, toward the stars under which it should sit if you were standing in the island of your destination.

Let me simplify: you get on your canoe and you follow the stars in the direction where lies your destination island. As your island of departure recedes from view, you also pay attention to a third island, as it is said to move along another prescribed star course.

An anthropologist said it best: for the navigator, the canoe remains stationary and the islands zip by.

Alas, the same observers who have encountered this sensibility in their studies of Carolinian navigation explained that the islands are not *actually* moving, but are either a mental construct, or as one observer put it, "a figure of literary style ... (although) for the Puluwat (sic) navigator it is not a matter of style".

I say, it *is* a question of style, recalling throwback theory and politicized aesthetics, following Hayden White, James Clifford, Dominic LaCapra, Vince Rafael – all of whom have had profound influence on my work in academia -- and countless other critics of cultural and historical form whose works have also given us sharp insight into the workings of power.

But the simple point is, Islands *are* moving, tectonically and discursively. **Slide 19: Pookof**

The second important technique is Pookof, which is the inventory of creatures indigenous to a given island, as well as their travel habits and behavior.

Actually, pookof is part of a larger system of land finding by way of *expanding* an island, which can also be *contracted to the point of invisibility*, if necessary. When you see a given species of

bird or fish, and you know who belongs where and most especially, their travel habits -- the pookof of an island -- you also then know into whose island home you have sailed. Thus are islands known by dint of the furthest travels of their indigenous creatures. Here, indigenous identity is forged through mobility and relationality with other mobile natives without losing the significance and profundity of knowing and acknowledging cultural specificity and boundaries, all of which are as flexible and mobile as the islands and seas themselves.

Slide: Following Ikelap

(Explain it as an example of pookoff, of expanding the island)

The notion of expanding an island also includes knowing things, like the distinct look of clouds above and around an island, the character of currents and waves as they deflect around islands, and of course, the group of stars associated with an island and the range of stars under which an island can travel, as for instance, in etak. Incidentally [**Slide: Smelling History**] navigators can also expand an island by *smelling it* long before they can see it, reminding us how modernity has privileged, albeit incompletely, the sense of sight over the multitude of other senses, in the project of ascertaining truth. But that's another story.

However we do it, etak and pookof teach us the following truths about islands: 1) islands are mobile, 2) they expand and contract, and 3) their coordinates in time and space are emplotted via the farthest reaches of their indigenous creatures who reckon their identities in genealogical relations of kinship with the islands. From the vantage point of the canoe, so to speak, we cannot say that islands are isolated, tiny, and remote, regardless how they have been defined, and thus marginalized, in Cartesian cartography and conceptualizations of subjectivity based on it.

You've heard John Dunne's famous quote, "no man is an island." He penned it to dispel the myth of the intrinsically autonomous, independent man. Post-structuralist and feminist deconstructions of the category "man" would only sharpen the critique. **Slide: Testicularizations.** But that's another story.

To be sure, Dunne reminds us that nobody can work in isolation, and that we are interdependent. Postcolonial theory and practice further interrogates the terms of that interdependency, and I think that when harnessed and grounded by indigenous determinations, postcolonial and cultural studies theorizing make for a potent one-two punch. But let me return to my course.

Older and wiser than Dunne, however, traditional seafaring takes the line further and teaches us that no island was ever an island to begin with. No island is an island. Never was, never will be. At least this is how I cling on to islands in the advanced wake of their disappearance on account of rising waters.

Slide: Act II. Sacred Vessels to the Rescue

Close your eyes a second time. (Close them). Now imagine you are in a movie theatre. It is 1997. You are watching the movie, *Titanic*. Keep your eyes closed. It is that horrific scene right after the climax, moments after the ship plunges into its watery grave. The chilling, horrifying, moment, where frozen bodies are first calling out, then whimpering, for help, in the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Boats with survivors are slowly, desperately, picking through the flotsam for any signs of life. You remember the scene. But do you remember this: amidst the carnage and debris of humans and wood, through the fog and mist, there begins to gradually appear that unmistakable silhouette of the outrigger canoe, first one, then another, and then another, in fact an entire fleet of Micronesian outrigger canoes, like a ghosts from the past, except they are contemporary. Sacred Vessels coming to the rescue, plucking survivors one after the other. You can open your eyes now.

In the late 20th century, the ship that imaged and symbolized in epic proportions the technological wonders of modernity in the beginning of the twentieth century had narrativized (to epic revenue) a crisis of modernity at the end of the century. The startling image of a sinking unsinkable modern marvel, coupled with the drama of what humans will do to survive, or what they will do when they discover they don't have much time to live, tripled with a cheesy love story by a couple of sexy movie stars, allegorized an end-of-the-century-anxiety about nothing less than the state of this ship we call earth. This ship is sinking, it seemed to say, and we are all on the boat together.

Watching this movie in 1997, the year we finished *Sacred Vessels*, I remember thinking, *our* vessels don't sink. And I remember thinking, *our* "tiny," *wooden*, craft (that most people will regard as quintessential opposites of modern technology), our *sacred* vessels: to the rescue for a floundering earth! And so pilfering this sequence from Cameron's *Titanic*, I imagined that a fleet of outrigger canoes had sailed eastwards from Oceania months earlier, and had been exploring the Atlantic for a new home, because their island homes had become submerged by rising sea levels due to

global warming, and because the west coasts of the Americas wouldn't do, for they themselves had crumbled into the sea on account of the big earthquakes (The Pacific's "Rim of Fire!").

This is actually how I had begun to imagine the viability of outrigger canoes by the end of the 20th century, perhaps rationalizing my decision to move from the University of Guam to the University of Michigan in 2001 to help establish Pacific Islands Studies in relation to Ethnic Studies. In 2012, in yet another major move, and rationalization, we relocated to the University of Illinois to develop Pacific islands studies in relation to American Indian Studies and a broader comparative Native Studies program.

Slide: Digitally Archiving the Ancient Futures [text deleted: summarize quickly and go to asterisk below]

***But if I am excited, I'm also frightened. For just as we seek brave new worlds for the older ones in the 21st century, others are doing the same with old, problematic, colonial narratives and visions. We need not reach very far. As you know, to commemorate this the 20th anniversary of the *Titanic*, James Cameron released the 3D version of the film. Of course it was the same Cameron who made the other recent blockbuster film, *Avatar*, only a few years ago. *Avatar* was a film about virtual reality that capitalized by re-imagining and reimagining in the same stereotypical ways the historical struggles of native peoples, now rendered blue as the Nevi. In an April 12, 2012 episode of *The Colbert Report*, host Stephen Colbert interviewed Cameron about the release of *Titanic* 3D, notably in China, but also about a recent trip he made to the Marianas Trench, where he dove the deepest part of the earth's surface, the Challenger Deep, with a single person submarine that he helped develop. It is a six minute, entertaining clip, but watch for how the most recent manifestation and realization of an old Western capitalist dream for the China market in the China premiere of *Titanic* 3D melds with a slightly younger American dream of manifest destiny that literally propels one of America's most famous and successful filmmakers/visual engineers to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

Clip: The Interview in Colbert Report (<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/412441/april-12-2012/james-cameron> [summary of situation deleted]

Cameron's "little thing about water," and the dialogue, though characteristically funny and entertaining, nonetheless reveals the continuity of an old imperialist dream of conquest and profit,

complete with colonial discourse of devaluing, indeed, of negating, indigenous presence and existence. In the present setting in Oceania, the narrative features the equally old and tired story of remote islands – Cameron described the Marianas as, “in the middle of nowhere” – though it harbors the earth’s “last frontier.” All this, of course, is the raw materiality and the discursive locality for reconsolidating EuroAmerican identity, manhood especially, and prosperity.

In the subsequent debate in the second half, what we get is really just an iteration of that old and tired geopolitical cartography of Enlightenment and its offspring, continental imaginaries, that map Pacific Islands and Islanders in such hapless ways, even through Colbert’s characteristically smart and sometimes destabilizing political satire. This is emphasized when Colbert reminds Cameron that, you are on my turf “mother fucker.” And even if Cameron must later correct Colbert that he is in fact “Canadian – *mother fucker*,” any real distinction among settler colonists living out an American imperial dream washes out by the end of the episode when they dutifully shake hands and joke with each other that they are just joking.

But in Guam blogs immediately after the airing, posters debated over whether Cameron was referring to Guam or the Trench when insisting on the location “in the Federated States of Micronesia.” In fact, said one poster, the Challenger Deep, the Trench’s deepest point, is closer to Yap state in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) than to Guam, though another poster pointed out that though it is closer to the FSM, the whole undersea region is in fact registered as a national preserve, a protected site, thereby rendering it firmly within US sovereignty. Now, the FSM’s political status of Free Association with the US is, at the end of the day, a euphemism for colony; certainly the relationship is neocolonial if Congress’ plenary power over the FSM isn’t classical colonialism. And that the mapping that underwrites the debates in the blogs still defers to the continentalist and colonialist cartography mentioned previously. Me, when I consider Cameron and Colbert’s little debate over the correct location of the Mariana Trench, I like to think that the Trench probably just “moved” a bit on them, like a good moving islands that crown its tops.

I like Colbert, and appreciate Cameron’s skills and talents, but Cameron, especially, frightens me for how he has already begun to tease us for the sequel of Avatar. No sooner had he left Guam for

the China premier of the Titanic 3D last month, where he clearly showed at what price he was willing to compromise the integrity of his artistic vision by allowing the Chinese government to censor the sex scene between Decaprio and Winslett in the car, when Cameron released a press statement about how his dive in Micronesia was going to influence Avatar II. After all, said Cameron, Avatar I already sported aquatics as the principal visual motif that corresponded to the manifest plot of indigenous survival (at the hands of the white hero, of course). He also pointed out a direct parallel between the Nevi and Micronesians “who, he explained, are also a colonized water people.” Most ominously, Cameron also proclaimed that *Micronesian navigators* will have a prominent role in Avatar II.

Now even if the Air New Zealand onboard safety video is remarkably creative, and very funny, there’s something quite insidious about how New Zealanders have seemed to sell their souls to Peter Jackson’s emplacement of Tolkien’s racist Middle Earth.

From the jokes about his using Maori – with their enthusiastic support – to play the Orks in order to save money on make up, to the giant fish gobbling Gollum that hangs at the Wellington airport, there is something rather sinister going on here. And now that James Cameron owns a home here – I wonder how many acres and how swimming pools he owns at his New Zealand abode – I’m guessing that New Zealanders are going to get to have a choice over whose historical acts of imagination will poison how they get to live their future lives. **[SlideAct III: Coming Soon]**

Close your eyes for a third and final time. (Close them).

Imagine you are seated in a canoe. Bobbing in the water, off the reef of Tumon Bay. The year is 2021, March 6, to be exact. To your left and to your right; in front, and behind you are hundreds, maybe even a thousand people, all of you, in all manner of native seacraft: Micronesian outrigger canoes; Polynesian double hull canoes; Great Lake birchbarks and Pacific Northwest Coast long boats. (Why, there’s Poia?, Michael? leading a haka!)

There is a slight breeze and you can almost taste the salt air. You look back, a bit further back and see a familiar landmark, a cliff you once stood upon some thirty years, or was it thirty minutes, earlier. Bobbing like this in Tumon Bay, amidst this throng of natives from all over Oceania and the Americas, you would be seasick were it not for the excitement and the anticipation of the arrival of that big replica galleon of Magellan’s. But you wait in

vain; it never arrives. You finally open your eyes to realize you are a memory. Or maybe a film. Or a hologram. As it turns out, back in 2021, the Nevi, led by Micronesian Navigators, with a bunch of Hobbits as their crew, had infiltrated and thus taken possession of Avatar II. Assisted by the legions of oceanic algae, these indigenous creatures who have long crossed the lines between the human and the non human have now breached the lines between the real and the imaginary, between the past, present, and future, and like what poststructuralists call the simulacra, these indigenous agents also blur the distinction between what's real and what's not. Having overcome the tyranny of their mediated containment, they run amok inside the minds and bodies of theatre audiences everywhere in the world. Like the simians and the viruses they carry in the latest version of Planet of the Apes, these Native creatures are also now on the verge of reclaiming Planet earth and humans are scared shitless. But this is not your standard, western, poststructuralist theory. Welcome to the indigenous simulacra. You can open your eyes now.

Right now, I'm just making this shit up; of course I don't even know how the story ends. But if you can imagine it, my friends, they will come, those future revisions of the past. But just what versions of the past, and what visions of the future they will be – Peter Jackson's, James Cameron's -- would be entirely up to you.