Oceanian Pain in the Nuclear Epoch, or: How I Learned to Love Epeli Hau‘ofa’s Kisses in the Nederends

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If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it
—Zora Neale Hurston

From Hau‘ofa, with Love

Epeli Hau‘ofa, the late writer and much beloved professor at The University of the South Pacific (USP), published his second novel, Kisses in the Nederends (1987), at a zenith point of the “nuclear-free and independent” movement in the South Pacific. Unlike his first novel Tales of the Tikongs (which took him four years to write), Hau‘ofa wrote Kisses in the Nederends in six months, deciding to forego the additional six months he had originally allotted for revisions during a sabbatical year. Hau‘ofa joked with his colleague Subramani in their interview, “A Promise of Renewal,” published at the back of the second edition, that he did not want Nederends “to smell like a brand new hospital,” stating that he preferred it remain “raw.” It is little wonder then, that as a graduate student, I personally found Nederends difficult to swallow. It bothered me even more when, as a lecturer, I noticed my students had a similar reaction: they tended to gravitate towards (and valorize) Tales of the Tikongs, and, just like me, left Nederends undigested. Over time, I began to piece together a method for teaching how to love Nederends.

Nederends is a book that requires rather more work than usual, but it is very much worth it. Thirty years after its publication, the ongoing militarization in Oceania, particularly by the United States, casts a long, ominous shadow. Recently a false alarm was sent to cell phones across the archipelago of Hawai‘i stating, “BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.” Noelani Arista, a professor at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa wrote on Twitter shortly after: “people on the continent who imagine that Hawai‘i is somewhere on the
margins—we are the tip of the American spear” (@noeolali 2018). Coupled with the real threats of climate changes and ongoing resource extraction by foreign corporate entities, debt imperialism, and economic dependencies, it is more critical than ever to use Nederends as the cipher it was intended to be. For students, especially those from the Pacific region, Nederends has the potential to disrupt dogmatic thinking and generate critical thinking.

In my courses, Nederends is presented as a theoretical text which speaks to (neo)liberal consensus and modernization regimes as a chronic affliction affecting former and current colonies, states, and territories in the Pacific. Such pains are often concealed in our thinking, and class discussion centers on the collective body’s (symbolized by the protagonist Oilei Bombaki’s ailing body afflicted with a “pain in the arse”) relationship to pain and suffering as we begin to talk through the metaphor of pain towards the search for relief and the lure of doping agents along the way. Class discussions also often move towards personal narrative that share the degree to which pain and suffering is socio-politically and culturally sublimated, rather than depositioned. Amongst Oceanian students, the conversations around sublimation run particularly deep. In particular, we draw a connection between the concept of the “nederends” as a stand-in for the decolonizing “third world” or, as the current President of the United States of America recently phrased it, “shithole countries” (Davis 2018), “nederend” and “shithole” being synonymous with “anus.”

In our classes, we slow down a few absurd moments from Nederends to ascertain that directionality is often scrambled as a way to disorient and question the “order of things,” notably in the extended passage on the “Uppertuks” and “Lowertuks,” which is a rowdy but challenging interlude in which the “body worlds” of two mythical tribes are humorously represented as territorializing different bodily functions in a mad dash to secure power and privilege (i.e. the rational head versus the sensational body). This conversation links to learning world systems theory and disturbing thinking around mapping, in particular the Mercator map projection and North-South binaries. We also talk about the locational indeterminancy of being “modernish” to highlight modernity as process rather than status, and also to underscore agency. The suffix “ish” helps destabilize dialectical thinking that tends to accompany preexisting thoughts on modernity and the traditional as states or beginning and ending points rather than processes in flux. My aim is to steer thinking towards conceptualizing a hybridity in which agency and choice are inherent creative forces, and in using “modernish” I keep “hybrid” coasting along the lines of a verb rather than noun—in a constant flux of becoming. We talk about the language and grammar in Oceanic languages, in which the past/future is a reversal of English and French. The past being “in front” (kuonga mu’a) and the future being “behind” (kuonga mu’i). Being modernish is to be able to be both in front and behind simultaneously.

The interview, “A Promise of Renewal,” at the back of the novel is an important primer because it lays out the book’s semi-autobiographical origins.
When I first taught *Nederends*, I made the mistake of treating the interview as an appendix rather than a central roadmap, and my students suffered for it, because in the interview Hau’ofa not only explains his own affliction with anal fistulae that inspired *Nederends*, but he also maps his literary genealogy to, in particular, Chester Himes, an African-American writer (1909-1984). I use Himes (and show clips of *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, the 1970 blaxploitation film based on his novel of the same title) as a means to understanding some of Hau’ofa’s aspirations in relating to his readers. Himes’ work subverts the tropes of American hardboiled detective fiction by centering Black characters and worlding Harlem (where many of his novels are set) as a distinctive space of Black love, standing out amongst the flood of popular representations of the opposite. Hau’ofa links his own marginality to this brilliant subversive genre (Himes’ being just one of a longer lineage of African-American writers) and in so doing maps the same for (to use an expression common in African-American literature) his own “beloveds”—those who he writes for, or his ideal audience. For Hau’ofa, his beloveds were “those with backgrounds similar to mine” (meaning Oceanians “close to the dirt”) and “others with backgrounds in the ghettos of large cities” (1985, 168).

Even with the interview, however, *Nederends* has a way of being impervious to critique. This can be said to be part of its power and purpose: inherent instability is the actual point of *Nederends*. Teresia Teaiwa dealt with the novel’s destabilizing nature by employing a comparative method to read *Nederends* alongside Paul Gauguin’s illustrated diary, *Noa Noa*, first published in 1901. Perhaps Teaiwa found *Nederends* troublesome to critique yet essential to critique, and this conundrum could somewhat explain the comparative method. Indeed she writes, “Oilei’s anus is perhaps the most radical literary site available for critiquing...the ‘Polynesian’ body,” particularly the Polynesian wahine (woman) generated by 20th century “militourism” (1999, 256). Teaiwa argues that militourism—the interconnected industries of recreational tourism and militarism— is a discursive structure that arrests and centers the body of the Polynesian wahine while effacing (and by extension ordering underneath) the Melanesian woman. In a figurative way students can discern within Teaiwa’s remix of *Noa Noa* and *Nederends* a love ballad to Black Melanesia and Black woman in particular. Although she does not say so in an outright manner, she places herself in a genealogy of Africana and Oceanian ancestors, and continues to highlight the racism and sexism at play in the rhetoric of militourism that perpetuates a divisive racial hierarchy predicated on white supremacism and colorism.

As students continue to read Teaiwa’s analysis, we take the opportunity to again talk about pain in terms of (in)visibility and hypervisibility. We unpack how the hypervisibility of Oilei’s anus conceals a number of interpretations, including the pain of the Marshall Islanders who registered as imperceptible or “barely there” (just like the bikini swimsuit named after Bikini Atoll in the archipelago). Students are always stunned when they learn of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s notorious comment when asked about
the ethics of testing nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands: “There are only 90,000 of them out there. Who gives a damn?” (qtd. in Durutalo 1992, 224). To underscore these points, I show my students a clip from Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 masterpiece, *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. In particular, we view and discuss the scene with Miss Scott, the only woman in the film, who stands as a *heliaki* or *kaona* (indirect allusion) for militourism’s appropriation of the Polynesian *wahine*, as well as the simultaneous evisceration of indigenous Pacific bodies from narratives in the nuclear epoch: indigenous land becomes militarized land, and its indigeneity overwritten, particularly in Hawai‘i, Guam, and the former “Trust Territories of Micronesia” (some of these are currently under “Compact Agreements” with the U.S. to continue strategic military use of lands). *Dr. Strangelove* is an excellent companion text for *Nederends*, but this scene (along with the opening frame mentioning Russian tests on Zhokhov Islands) encourages discussion about the invisibility of Oceania that the anal-centricity of *Nederends* tries to highlight.

Teiwa’s use of comparative method allows us to segue into a mode of interpretation found in the hip-hop deejaying technique called “chopped and screwed,” a mode that I find students enjoy and can use to apply critically to their textual readings, especially comparative readings. The chopped and screwed style originated in the early 1990s in the Southern United States, led by “The Originator” Robert Earl “DJ Screw” Davis, Jr., who created remixes featuring significantly slower beats, skipped beats, scratched records, and deeper, slowed-down vocals whose pitch verges major notes into minor cadences—the technique can thus host an array of blue notes that would otherwise be silent. Chopped and screwed was pioneered by musicians experimenting with a party drug known colloquially as “purple drank” and “lean.” Purple drank was an alcoholic beverage spiked with codeine and promethazine which often came in the form of a pharmaceutical strength cough syrup, hence its artificial color. Candy syrups could be added to it which made it particularly easy to imbibe—and which caused a high percentage of overdosing on the drug. DJ Screw himself passed away in 2000, as did a number of other musicians known as part of the chopped and screwed scene, from overdosing on purple drank variations in combination with other drugs. In fact, the narcotic cocktail was disproportionately used by Latinx, Native Americans, and African-Americans in the ghettos of urban centers, in particularly Texas and other Southern states (Agnich 2013, 2445). Chopped and screwed music mimics the effects of the cardiovascular depressants contained in codeine and promethazine. The narcotic drink slows down the heart rate similar to the way the DJ would slow and deform the hyper major riffs into minor notes of otherwise upbeat songs.

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1Teiwa’s article “Bikinis and Other S/pacific N/oceans” (1994) is a necessary intervention here.
While reading *Nederends*, the fast, upbeat, absurd journey provides little space for dwelling on ideas around the often drawn-out effects of chronic pain, pain which feels as if it will “last forever.” *Nederends*’ fast and furious absurdity can allow readers to undervalue the effects and affects of pain, and as a result the novel suggests that there is no real pain in Oceania because everything is so hilarious; therefore we need not look for real cures, as the temporary salve of laughter will do. Laughter can be misinterpreted as a cure in and of itself, which is not quite good enough. A deeper, slower reading encourages students to analyze the idea that when power is analysed as a narcotic, laughter can be, and is, deadly serious.

Chopping and screwing *Nederends*’ heartbeat slows it down to a crawl, and from the crawl, we can pick and seize a few of the recessed blue notes that lurk underneath. This is where I learned to chop and screw *Nederends*—just as Teaiwa did—with companion pieces like *Dr. Strangelove*. The proper balancing or (re)mixing of supporting texts helped me teach *Nederends* with much more impact. In some semesters I assign readings on U.S. liberal consensus alongside primary sources from the cold war, such as pamphlets published by governments, or articles telling stories about the nuclear-free and independent South Pacific treaties and movements. At times I have tried also to showcase the independence movement in Vanuatu as a case study, and bring in the work of Father Walter Lini, Melanesian Socialism, and Black Internationalism as a way to understand *Nederends*’ references to Third World geopolitics and its treatment of political figures like Muammar Mohammed Abu Minyar Gaddafi. *Nederends* mentions Palau’s constitution, so I also bring in the story of the assassination of Haruo Ignacio Remeliik, Palau’s first president. Hau’ofa’s novel is a wonderful way to open up conversations about the roots of activism against colonialism and neocolonialism in the region. A companion piece that’s particularly useful is Simione Durutalo’s essay, “Authoritarianism and Anthropology in the Pacific Islands,” as is Glenn Alcalay’s “The United States Anthropologist in Micronesia: Toward a Counter Hegemonic Study of Sapiens,” both in the monograph *Confronting the Margaret Mead Legacy: Scholarship, Empire and the South Pacific*. Both stand as a pitch perfect companions which balance the humor in *Nederends* and provide necessary backdrops. Finally, I also include Malama Meleisea’s sobering piece “Ideology in Pacific Studies: A Personal View,” which adds much-needed gravity alongside *Nederends*.

Although the mirth seems all-encompassing, I teach my students that Hau’ofa proposes that there is no narcotic to alleviate the pain that *Nederends* chronicles. Even worse, as the book suggests, there is no apparent source of Oilei’s pain. Oilei remains in the dark about how, where or why he suffers. Oilei’s “pain in the arse” appears early one morning seemingly out of nowhere. The pain seizes him in his marital bed, and overcomes his wife. Just as Oilei’s fart is immediately one-upped by Makarita’s snore, so the text works to build oppositional but conjunctural realities, implying that worlding is not linear or successive but compounding—despite being
oppositional or different orifices, a fart and a snore are essential the same content. The pain becomes a both wedge and tie that amplifies their existing relationship for better or worse. Slowing down a bit more, we see here the notion of conjunctural worlding: as much as modernity pleasures us with its progression and creative increases, so does it trouble us in excessive doses, which can cause stupor, coma, convulsions and in some cases death. In other words, it’s difficult to discern how Oilei and Oceania got into the state of pain. Like “purple drank,” the narcotic of laughter slows down and numbs pain’s effects but it does not resolve it. Once the narcotic wears off, more of it is needed or the pain persists. Indeed, like many narcotics, one’s tolerance grows and higher doses are necessary to continue to manage the pain. Of course, narcotics do not address the pain, but mask and conceal it. It’s worthwhile to remind ourselves here that Hau’ofa himself suffered for years with the excruciating “pain in the arse,” of anal fistula—the pain the book engages with extends in a very real sense from the Oceanian body to Oceania itself.

Between theorizing pain, narcotics, and addiction we also continue the threaded thinking to ask what, where, when and how “is” modern? When Losana Tonaka, the traditional healer says, “I always believe in using more than one kind of medicine” she implies an ethical stance that supposes that multiple or conjunctural worlds exist simultaneously rather than supplanting each other. Suspended in a “Nether-region” of conjunctural worlds, subjects in Tipota are re-coded with “modernish” inputs that are far from congruous to their output: they approximate a condition that qualifies as something close-to modern, but not quite. A capacity to utilize multiple dimensions mark the narrative: Makarita gorging on a “2-inch sliced bread buttered on both sides” demonstrates the dexterity of negotiating compounded and conjunctural worlds. Or take the emerging class of *dottores* or “doctor in italics” which mark out the indigenous participation in the technocratic projects of neoliberal “modern development” (Hau’ofa 1995, 32, 40-53, 65, 72, 83, 91, 128, 143).

The family pet, Caesar, on the other hand, provides a moment to reflect on subjection and self-subjection towards a conservation of power and control in relationship both with the past and with the future. Using the language of eugenics, he is a “one quarter Alsatian” named for a defunct line of Roman emperors; the nod to empire is clear. His untraced—and perhaps diluted—bloodlines has produced an animal spirit bearing no signs of consciousness (i.e. no playfulness, loyalty or spontaneity); Caesar seems a product of conjunct systems of oppression. Alsatians, also known as German Shepherds, were and still are a breed used especially by military and policing forces—here the nod to militarism seems intentional. Alsatians are a breed described by the American Kennel Club as having a “noble spirit and high intelligence” with a “distinct personality marked by direct and fearless, but not hostile, expression.” Caesar is the opposite, bearing all the signs of a broken and oppressed subject who has grown accustomed to the brute force
of Oilei’s physical aggression and Makarita’s verbal abuse. Characterized as “boofy,” Caesar’s personality is unintelligent, and he mirrors a damaged human masculinity having suffered distinct abuse inside the compound of Oilei and Makarita. Throughout the narrative Caesar is urinated on, kicked down, punched (1995, 1) and labelled a rapist (38) by his owners. Caesar’s “personality” can be seen as created by brute, if fleeting, aggression. As he only appears in the text to be subjected to verbal and physical abuse, and inasmuch as he is set up as a product of synergetic bloodlines, Caesar seems to be a spectre of the shadowy indigenous self of Oceania trapped in oppressive environments, resulting in a broken-spirited beast.

Another point of modernity that the book allows us to think through is its stream of transient “internationals” who come from outside the village collective (from Austria, Australia, England, New Zealand, China, etc.). Like Tales of the Tikongs, Nederends treats this class mostly as superficial caricatures, highlighting their relationship to money or power as international agents but mostly posing them as con artists. The string of characters mimics the episodic madness of the picaro hero interacting with the variety of caricatures that reflected the displacements of the feudal system. It is amongst this stream of internationals that the primary villain in Nederends is introduced. After bush doctors, acupuncturists, and faith healers fail him, Oilei meets Babu Vivekanand, a global cult leader and harbinger of a coming globalist new world order that would be midwifed by the global state apparatuses of the CIA, KGB, and Mossad. Babu instructs Oilei to bring his opposites together by kissing his own anus, thereby making the inner tabooed opposites noa. Since much is made about the anus and the kissing of anuses being “taboo,” it is useful to note that the etymology of taboo is tapu, the Pan-Polynesian word meaning something prohibited or restricted. Tapu was an extended system that protected cultural norms, social cohesion, environmental balance, and so on. Noa, or the concept for “zero,” means that which is open, accessible, unrestricted. Tapu were regulated or enforced by ruling classes and were something like a “binding” or covenant that controlled social behaviors. Noa is a concept that lifts or unties a tapu. Babu is adamant: if the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. presidents were to kiss each other’s nederends, world peace would be imminent (1995, 103-104). Although Babu is placed in the narrative as an outsider to Oceania, his thinking seems very much in line with the Polynesian/Oceanic thinking around tapu/noa and treads on the magico-religious worlding of indigenous cultures in Oceania.

One of the particularly troublesome interludes in Nederends is the many kisses that are applied on the anus, which makes most students somewhat confused and sometimes embarrassed. Depending on the cultural contexts of the students this can be an awkward point to digest, and since the entire novel

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2Dictionary.com defines “Boofy” as Australian slang for “(of a man) unreflective and physically well-built or strong, in a way perceived as typically male.”

3See Blackburn (1979) and Bjornson (1977) for more on the picaro subjectivity.

4For an analysis of tapu/noa see Steiner (1956), Shirres (1982), and Denney (2005).
is built around this, understanding the kiss is critical. The kiss in *Nederends* has an actual basis in reality. In 1990, Soviet artist Dmitri Vrubel painted a mural named “Bruderkuss,” or “Kiss of Death,” which depicts Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev giving the East Germany President Erich Honecker a “socialist kiss.” The “socialist fraternal kiss” has deeper origins in the Orthodox Catholic Church. The mural was based on a 1979 photograph taken by Regis Bossouf. Photographs of ritual kisses between leaders of communist states circulated widely in mediascapes during the cold war, including one with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and East German President Honecker from 1986, the year before *Nederends* publication. According to the website *Rare Historical Photos*: “In rare cases, when the two leaders considered themselves exceptionally close, the kisses were given on the mouth rather than on the cheeks…. The greeting was also adopted by socialist leaders in the Third World, as well as the leaders of socialist-aligned liberation movements such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the African National Congress.” This context, probably well-known to Hau’ofa at the time of writing, has receded somewhat into the background and was not something I was aware of as a graduate student in the early 2000s.

Although *Nederends* is semi-autobiographical and Hau’ofa himself was cured of his anal fistulae in a New Zealand hospital, he decided to have healing take place rather differently in his novel. In the face of never-ending pain and as all natural and hybrid forms of treatment fail him, Oilei flies to New Zealand for modern treatment and undergoes surgery for an anus transplant. Initially the anus, donated by a “White Woman Feminist,” is rejected by Oilei’s body. (As an aside, given *Nederends* is a book which also targets academic collusion with military-development complexes, I wonder if Hau’ofa found feminism of that period an unstable body of knowledge for its lack of critique of empire. As he noted in his interview, some theories are “absolutely deadly” [1987, 157]). In the final scenes the only healing he can turn to is, again, the con artist-cum-yogi Babu Vivekanand, who had ended up in a mental institution but was “rescued” by KGB and CIA operatives. Babu returns to save a comatose Oilei by burying his face into Oilei’s arse for round-the-clock face-to-arse contact. While the White Woman anus does not ultimately kill Oilei, it does not heal him either, for by the end of the novel, even with his pain gone, Oilei’s spiritual pain remains and it seems he wants the entire world to know it. Oilei’s belligerent final words, “Kiss my arse!” continues to assault the faint of heart and cause a lingering aftertaste that persists to disrupt all kinds of dogmatic thinking, starting with the basics of anuses and mouths.

By these final moment students are feeling fatigued, and I urge them to jot down some of the key phrases, concepts, and diads like: Third Millennium Foundation and the Ministry of Health (at the health conference), Marxism/Communism and its shadow ideology Capitalism/Democracy, University of Southern Paradise (Hau’ofa’s stand-in for the University of the South Pacific), U.S.A./U.S.S.R., C.I.A./K.G.B., etc.; and also to jot down the cast: *dottore,
colonial administrators, the reference to Gaddafi etc. This glossary we use to constellate the hegemonic concepts and questions of the Pacific region during the nuclear epoch (up to and including today): was the cold war a “Europe/USA”? Where/what was going on globally then and now that set up decolonization to move forward in such a split manner?—i.e. we look at the case study of Hawai’i’s not being on the United Nations decolonization list.

Often, because I have taught in Pacific Studies, students begin with a vague but virulent attachment to “traditional knowledge” as the “salve” for and “salvation” from a troublesome “modernization” process. I remind them Hau’ofa certainly might have found the notion of a Pacific exceptionalism or the “Pacific Way” worthy of discrediting as a precursor both to decolonial thinking and to creating a space of dispersion for thinking otherwise. Looking at the world through indigenous and local knowledge is certainly part of Hau’ofa’s modus operandi, but it doesn’t end there. That’s merely a beginning. Through Nederends, students learn to loosen their preconceptions of traditional/modern and hopefully build flexibility in thinking beyond this dialectic. Hau’ofa’s Nederends is a wholly modern Oceanian text, not because of its valorization of any particular knowledge system as salvation—he fully exploits and dismisses both indigenous exceptionalism and western development as “modernish” nightmares misleading the masses. He gives equal opportunity for everyone to be scrutinized and found wanting. Hau’ofa’s work is open-ended and vague enough to suggest that not having a solution to the modernish condition seems appropriate. Nederends questions the reigning normative order of all worlds and finds them all suspect. If anything Hau’ofa is radical for his complete commitment to weaponizing absurdism.

Perhaps intentionally left unsaid is the ethical intervention that might absolve Oceania from the “Pacific Way” programming, which was clearly a dogma that had been on Hau’ofa’s mind and on the tips of leaders’ tongues. Forged during political decolonization, the “Pacific Way” provided a platform for visibility and consolidation of power but also effectively concealed the uneven planking upon which both an older imperial order dominated by pre-war European nations and Japan and the “New Pacific” dominated by the settler states of U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand and France was built. But to be absolved one must first make confession. That decolonization or the “New Millenarian”/Pacific Way helped assure the dissociation of North and South and the hegemonic control of the U.S.A. and its allies. That is to say, the deepest issue of pain is the pain which is self-inflicted from the inside out. As Nederends notes, “the dinosaurs did not kill each other off; each was his own murderer” (1995, 105). In the book, Hau’ofa ensures that the final ending portrays one idea but actually means another: “He [Oilei] and his lowliest organ had been called upon to the great task of saving humanity from its headlong rush toward the Apocolypse, and ushering in a new millennium of lasting peace, prosperity and happiness. He remembered Bulbul’s prophetic
words: “Marxism and Communism have shaken the twentieth century: the Pan Pacific Philosophy for Peace and the Third Millennium will shake the twenty-first and beyond” (157). There is no definitive way to avoid painful choices but Nederends seems to reject the gloss that there is a unitary way under which Oceania can become a better self. A savior-ideology (like the Pacific Way) is an easier pill to swallow than the “red pill” of truth: and that is that perhaps that we are right now our worst self. Perhaps rejecting the sycophantic image of kissing arse in favour of Hau’ofa literal arse kissing—getting close to parts of ourselves that we might prefer to ignore—might open the line of questioning around how can we might become our better selves.

Nederends is indeed mostly about pain but underneath its gauze of laughter, it is about the work of self-knowledge. As Malama Meleisea wrote:

It is time for us to get past pre-formulated solutions and a mentality that would blame everything on imperialism and the colonial inheritance. It is so much easier to blame the world system for all our problems. It is more difficult to look carefully at what we had once and have now. It is more painful to face and carefully compare our very limited choices. It is harder to look critically at the way in which we ourselves have made choices prior to, during, and since the colonial period. It is harder still to ask why we made these choices and ask whether we might still have other options. (1978, 152)

Personal rebellion is one option, but is a short-lived option and does not address the systemic roots. Hau’ofa indeed fits the profile of “intellectuals who hazard all they have in order to discern not only the limitations but also the possibilities in the present, to widen the area of choice and to help bring about a productive and constructive future” (Durutalo 1992, 229). Hau’ofa hazards his personal dignity by alternative mappings of a Tipotan waywardness that is ultimately loveable because Tipota refuses to be easily coded: an important ontological point to consider in societies like Tipota that value social cohesion and homogenization. (Another aside: Tipota is a Tongan transliteration of the English word teapot—another code around global changes or perhaps just the ticking time bombs and boiling points of modernity?)

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To the extent that much writing about Oceanians is either ethnographic, realist or descriptive and often ahistorical and aphasic, Hau’ofa’s fiction remains a radical and underused literary space for ethical discourse on many levels. There remains as much, if not more, to be said about Oceanian love, which is the topic I ask students to contemplate on their final exam. The exam is prefaced with the two captions. The first is the caption underneath Vrubel’s
“Bruderkiss.” Translated from German it says, “My God, help me to survive this deadly Love.” The second caption is a quote from the African-American writer and ethnographer Zora Neale Hurston, which says, “If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.” I ask students to write a short essay about Oceanian pain and love using class readings and autobiographical narratives. They never fail to inspire me. So that takes us full circle. I hope that this essay will help to keep Nederends on the syllabi of the world, and especially the syllabi in Tipota (and not forgetting Tiko) and all the “Universities of the Southern Paradises.”

Just one final piece of advice that I share with my students. I have found that reading Nederends is best done in short sittings, a little bit at a time. Therefore, I highly recommend keeping a copy in the toilet, right next to the box of matches.

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