Unsettling Legal Imperialism and Cultivating Homegrown Law: Why Law Schools Need Pacific Studies

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One of us undertook a postgraduate thesis on critical legal theorizing for Pacific peoples. Due to the author's lack of training in Pacific studies, they centered their thesis on the work of non-Pasifika scholars at elite US institutions. Epeli Hau'ofa's work was briefly mentioned, but the rich contributions of Hau'ofa and many other Pacific studies scholars went unacknowledged and erased.

One of us taught a course on Pacific legal systems at a law school located in a hub of government, diplomacy, and international development. The students were introduced to dominant narratives of law and development in the region, including data demonstrating high rates of poverty and debates about "weak" states. We then turned to Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands" (1994), which counters the hegemonic view of Pacific Island states as isolated and resource poor with a vision of islands connected by watery pathways traversed by creative Oceanians.

The students were excited, and an animated discussion of Hau'ofa's essay followed. As the teacher suggested a break, a hand shot up—a Papua New Guinean lawyer who had been sitting quietly in the back. He said he had something important to share. He said Hau'ofa's essay gave him a vocabulary to explain the disconnect between portrayals of rural deficit he heard in Port Moresby and the upbringing he had experienced in his village in the Highlands—full of games with other children, the warmth of extended family, and an abundance of food from gardens, forests, and rivers. He was frustrated: Why hadn't he been introduced to this essay earlier? Why did he have to come to one of the metropolitan powers to learn of these Oceanic concepts and arguments that resonated for him, even as a

person who had grown up as far from the ocean and seafaring traditions invoked by Hau'ofa as any Pacific Islander could?

One of us taught law classes with students from across the Pacific. Teachers tried to tailor the curriculum to these contexts but still largely followed the curricula in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Notably, law courses in these two countries rarely refer to their neighboring common-law jurisdictions but instead rely on cases from the United Kingdom and other colonial powers.

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The experiences we recount here point to the fact that in law schools globally there has been very little interest in teaching about, let alone learning from, the Pacific and its people. They also lead us to argue that legal scholars, educators, and students have much to gain from increased engagement with Pacific studies. We further suggest that such engagement is critical for law schools across Oceania if we are to have any hope of cultivating the homegrown theories and practices that might drive liberation across our region.

Legal scholarship, and especially critical and sociolegal scholarship, has often been informed by scholars' experiences in Pacific communities and legal systems (Fitzpatrick 1980; Merry 2000; Riles 2000; Tamanaha 2001). Yet scholars and insights from the region remain grossly underrepresented and pushed to the margins of legal scholarship. This silencing reproduces the underrepresentation of Pacific people in law schools and the legal profession outside the region (Asafo 2020; Asafo and Tuiburelevu 2021), as well as in important global dialogues regarding justice systems (Monson 2023, 6).

Our argument for increased engagement with Pacific studies is not simply about increasing diversity, enhancing inclusivity, or pluralizing curricula—although such efforts are very necessary (see also Te Punga Somerville 2016, 188; Adebisi 2021, 434). Rather, following Teresia Teaiwa (2014, 46), we argue that Pacific studies provides a suite of theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical plows, sails, and oars to expose and address the racist, gender-binary, and heteropatriarchal frameworks that are embedded throughout legal scholarship, teaching, and practice and that produce and naturalize material inequalities. Moreover, Pacific studies offers us distinctively place-based, Indigenous, Pacific, and Oceanic concepts, theories, and approaches that are necessary to ensure that the critical and decolonial

scholarship emanating from our part of the world is grounded (or berthed!) in our unique contexts and does not merely reproduce an alternative version of the ethnocentric and universalizing frameworks it contests (compare with Kauvaka 2016, 134).

In the first section of this dialogue piece, we explain our approach to Pacific studies. We highlight five interlocking principles that distinguish Pacific studies from predominant models of legal scholarship and might provide a guide to legal scholars wishing to engage more deeply with the field. We stress that Pacific studies must be understood not as "any and all studies in or of the Pacific" (T Teaiwa 2010, 112) but rather as a scholarly genealogy grounded in a commitment to transforming oppressive structures and liberating Pacific people. This approach to Pacific studies promotes models of scholarship that (1) center Indigenous and Pacific voices and create space for plural epistemologies and ontologies; (2) are characterized by transdisciplinarity; (3) trek across multiple sites, scales, and times; (4) are attentive to relatedness and power and emphasize self-reflexivity; and, most importantly, (5) strive to be accountable to the Indigenous sovereign people of the places we live, learn, build relationships, and work in.

In the second section, we set out some of the ways Pacific studies can drive forward new approaches to legal scholarship and teaching. We focus on pedagogy, suggesting that pedagogical approaches developed within Pacific studies may ameliorate the marginalization, isolation, and racism that is experienced in law schools by Pasifika people as well as many more Indigenous, First Nations, Bla(c)k, Brown and "majority world" students and staff.[1] In the third section, we shift our attention to epistemology and methodology, arguing that Pacific studies offers a suite of conceptual devices that advance ongoing, collective efforts across a range of fields to decenter whiteness, address the persistence of Eurocentrism and US-centrism in legal scholarship, and contend with questions of history, power, and politics. These devices are particularly important for those located in law schools across Oceania, as they can help to advance the grounded and place-based material, epistemological, and ontological approaches most appropriate to our communities and contexts.

Our arguments emerge from our experiences, initially as law students and now as academics at universities on unceded Indigenous lands in settler colonies (Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i), as well as in law schools on lands formally controlled by traditional custodians (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Sāmoa). Two of us are currently based at the national law schools of Aotearoa and Australia, respectively: Dylan

Asafo is a Samoan man who was born on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations in Narrm and raised in the lands of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei in Aotearoa, and Rebecca Monson is a white Australian who grew up in a farming community in Gunaikurnai Country in the southeast of so-called Australia. Joseph D Foukona belongs to the Abu'oli clan of Foueda (part of the Rere tribe) with maternal blood ties to the Ganomela tribe in Lau Lagoon of Malaita, Solomon Islands, and was born and raised in Honiara, on Guadalcanal. He spent many years working at the law school of the University of the South Pacific in Port Vila, Vanuatu (formerly known as the British and French condominium of the New Hebrides), before moving to the history department at the University of Hawai'i–Mānoa. Bridget Fa'amatuainu is Samoan, born and raised in Tāmaki-makau-rau, Aotearoa, and is an academic at the Auckland University of Technology Law School. Her background spans law reform, gender development consulting, and legal practice, with a particular focus on the theory and practice of private law in the Pacific.

Our experiences in these different institutional and political environments are diverse, but there are also common threads that we highlight in this dialogue piece. Like most, if not all, of the Pacific lawyers and jurists we have discussed this piece with, none of us received training in Pacific studies. However, we have increasingly engaged with the field because it has offered us resources to sustain our scholarship, teaching, and academic life. Pacific studies has enabled us to expose and challenge hegemonic, racist, and belittling views of Pacific Islanders as primitive, impoverished, and awaiting rescue by foreign interveners with their good governance and rule-of-law programs (Monson, Camacho, and Foukona 2023). It has also provided us with conceptual tools and frames to respond to reviewers who dismiss our work as addressing "niche" concerns and lacking global relevance; to disrupt the whiteness and Euro- and US-centrism of the legal canon; and to counter assumptions among Pasifika students, their families, and their communities that they have little to gain from Pacific-focused law courses, particularly in terms of professional skills and employability. In short, Pacific studies has provided us with vital tools to foster solidarity, build relationships, strengthen communities, and forge paths to new legal worlds.

Pacific Studies: A Chart of the Field for Lawyers

Debates about the ethos and boundaries of Pacific studies often start with the three rationales identified by Terence Wesley-Smith (1995): the

pragmatic rationale, the laboratory rationale, and the empowerment approach. The first emphasizes the need for the metropolitan colonial and neocolonial powers to know about the Pacific Island countries with whom they deal and is often found in security studies and international relations (Fry 1997; Wesley-Smith 2016). The second "values the Pacific Islands and Pacific Islanders primarily as objects for study" contributing to "an esoteric body of knowledge" and careers located elsewhere (Wesley-Smith 2016, 158). Both approaches are highly extractive, and their violence is starkly exposed by scientific research subjecting Pacific Islanders, their landscapes, and their seascapes to radiation experiments (DeLoughrey 2012). However, it also reverberates when legal scholars concerned with the work of climate justice represent "the Pacific" through just a few pithy quotes extracted from the Pacific studies literature, without deeper engagement with the diversity and complexity of the region and its scholarship.

The third rationale, which Wesley-Smith has dubbed "the empowerment approach," fosters research that enables Pacific Islanders to respond to the problems and challenges that they identify for their own communities and contexts (Wesley-Smith 1995; T Teaiwa 2014). A significant body of legal scholarship seems to adopt this approach, for example by addressing widely recognized legal and policy challenges for the region (Forsyth 2012; Fitzpatrick, Compton, and Foukona 2019); seeking to amplify work by Pasifika scholars (Lixinski, McAdam, and Tupou 2022); and developing claims against polluting states and resource-extraction companies that can be brought to domestic and international judicial bodies (Wewerinke-Singh, Aguon, and Hunter 2021; Sproat 2016). This work is vital, given the underrepresentation we have noted. It has been essential to the advancement of Pacific-focused legal research and teaching. It has also been central to law reform, public policy, and program development in the region (Monson and others 2024; Human Rights Watch 2025). We cannot overstate how vital it has been for collective attempts to transform structures that oppress, as exemplified by the work of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (Hounihi 2023).

In this essay, we chart additional approaches that are needed to fortify these collective efforts. Existing legal scholarship focused on the Pacific tends to be conceptually grounded in Western and particularly Anglo-American and French theory. The stated goal is often to assess local practice by reference to international human rights law, to draw on existing frameworks to hold powerful actors to account, or to diversify or expand legal

regimes rather than challenge their very foundations. For example, in our own work, Rebecca turned first to research in political ecology, legal geography, and anthropology primarily produced in elite Global North institutions (eg, Monson 2012, 2014); Dylan looked to US-based critical legal theories (eg, Asafo 2020, 2021); Joseph drew on legal history and legal geography (eg, Foukona 2017); and Bridget turned to private law theory and practice to inform her pedagogy (eg, Fa'amatuainu 2023, 2024, 2025; Ahmadu and Fa'amatuainu 2024). Like many legal scholars, we did not initially engage with Pacific studies literature in any detailed or systematic way, and in some instances, we neglected it entirely (eg, Foukona and others 2021). This emphasis on Western theory and neglect of Pacific studies literature reproduces (however unintentionally) the notion that the region is one in which research content or evidence may be found and extracted, while "critical or theoretical work happens elsewhere" (Te Punga Somerville 2015, 650).

In highlighting the emphasis on "Western theory," we do not suggest that such work is irrelevant, nor do we posit a polarized binary of "Western" legal traditions and the "authentically Indigenous." We strongly reject such binarized approaches to law. They are conceptually and practically unhelpful, and they inflict harm whenever debates about legal recognition of custom arise within our families, communities, and professional networks. Our argument is that engaging with Pacific studies as a "genealogy of transformative and activist academic practice" (Hennessey 2021, ix) could be enormously generative for legal research, teaching, and practice. This approach is "decolonized" in the sense propounded by Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith: it is grounded in Pacific concerns and worldviews, and it engages a range of theories and knowledges, including Indigenous and Western ones, for Pacific people's own identified purposes (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 39). Employing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's evocative phrase (1993), it enables us to "move the centre" of knowledge production from elite institutions in the Global North and instead start with the voices associated with a plurality of Pacific "centres." We argue that this opens up new ways to understand the realities of Pacific legal systems and new ways to "voyage to places of freedom" (Asafo 2020).

Defining Pacific studies in this way leads us to distill five interlocking principles from the Pacific studies literature. These principles may provide signposts or landmarks to legal scholars and educators wishing to enhance their engagement with the field. Moreover, they could be enormously generative for lawyers precisely because they differ from our predominant practices.

First, consistent with various critical turns in legal scholarship, Pacific studies emphasizes the coproduction of material and epistemic inequalities. Yet the fields differ in the extent to which this insight is applied to scholarly practice itself. Legal scholars have long observed that legal scholarship has a problem with imperial citation practices (Delgado 1984; Harris 2019; Ruru 2022), but *Pacific studies centers Indigenous and Pacific voices, accounts for Indigenous ways of knowing and telling their own stories, creates space for plural epistemologies, and supports the cultivation of Indigenous ontologies* (see also T Teaiwa 2010).

This emphasis on particular voices can be misunderstood as essentializing the Global South or reproducing ethnic nationalism (T Teaiwa 2017; D'Costa 2021). However, we do not approach identity as predetermined and static, kinship as purely biological, or Indigenous perspectives as merely "diverse" rather than contested and conflicting. Instead, we understand them as grounded in distinct and unique relationships with landscapes, seascapes, and soundscapes and as emerging in encounters and struggles with colonialism, neocolonialism, capitalism, and statism (T Teaiwa 2014; Kauanui 2021). This understanding of identity and kinship generates intellectual genealogies that are expansive and rooted in contests over theory and ideology rather than biology. Indeed, Teaiwa was clear that she considered white scholars to be kin if their work was directed toward decolonial ends (T Teaiwa 2014).

Second, *Pacific studies values approaches that are inherently inter-, trans-, and even undisciplined*. Critical and Indigenous legal theorists have long observed that legal scholarship and teaching are characterized by the fragmentation and ordering of knowledge into different fields and methods (Davies 1994; I Watson 2002). This can be seen in persistent distinctions between doctrinal and sociolegal scholarship; law and culture; and international, public, and private law. Yet such fragmentation severely limits our understanding of Pacific peoples' concerns, knowledges, experiences, and strategies to resist power and oppression (Ratuva, cited in Husband 2020). For example, Banaban demands for reparations for phosphate mining can only be understood via multisited, multiscalar, and multivocal approaches that "track fragmented and dispersed stories, peoples and landscapes" (K Teaiwa 2015, xvi). Similarly, debates about property, federalism, and citizenship in Solomon Islands require attention not only to the political economy of extractive industries and struggles over property and territory (themes the emerging "law and political economy" movement can address) but also to the diverse, contested, and culturally particular meanings and histories of land (Foukona 2020; Monson 2023).

Third, *Pacific studies emphasizes situatedness and relatedness* to and through place, genealogies, and power hierarchies. Work by Indigenous and Pasifika legal scholars often expressly addresses these issues (see, eg, Aguon 2008; Asafo 2020). However, this is not the norm in legal scholarship, which remains relatively quiet about situatedness, relatedness, and scholars' investments in their work (Mawani 2012; Monson 2014; Massoud 2022). If academic labor is to serve the interests of the Pacific and its people, scholars must engage in critical self-reflection about the diverse, embodied, and emplaced knowledges of all people involved in education and research. This requires us to evaluate "all forms and sources of power, including indigenous ones" (Teaiwa 2017, 269). We must be more attentive to our perspectives, biases, and limitations; to our intellectual genealogies (who is cited, who is not, and why); and to our shifting locations within a web of unequal social, economic, and political relations. All scholars should be more explicit and specific about how these dynamics shape our questions, methods, discussions, and findings. Attending to our locations also calls us to consider whether our impulse to publish is appropriate or whether doing so might contribute to an untimely and even dangerous "cacophony of voices" (Wood 2023, 8). As Teaiwa noted, "What is more often at stake [in debates about coloniality and knowledge production] is not who does the work, but how it is done" (T Teaiwa 2010, 113).

Fourth, *this attention to situatedness and relatedness demands a turn away from extractive practices* that treat the Pacific as a substrate from which to obtain examples and findings for an intellectual exercise centered elsewhere. It requires us to be good kin and nurture more just and less exploitative relations by collaborating with communities to advance their agendas (Foukona 2017, 40–43; Kanngieser and Todd 2020; Wood 2023). This relational ethic may prompt us to pursue questions that have become unfashionable for academics but remain urgent for rural communities (Gegeo 2001, 491–493). It may involve relinquishing projects that should not proceed at all (Wood 2023). It often involves maintaining relationships and observing obligations long after a project has ended, and it demands diverse forms of research dissemination—not only in the pages of prestigious law journals but through Facebook discussions; conversations over coffee, kava, or betelnut; and distribution of hard copies of publications. These forms of academic labor are routinely invisibilized by the metrics of the neoliberal academe, despite being—in the language of that same system—crucial to our social license to operate in and with Pacific

communities. They are also entirely consistent with the "cultural competency" frameworks promulgated in law schools (eg, Burns, Lee Hong, and Wood 2019); the tertiary education sector (eg, Universities Australia 2011a, 2011b); and public institutions (eg, Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission 2025; Judicial Commission of New South Wales 2022) in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and elsewhere.

Finally, *our research and teaching must be grounded in accountability to and solidarity with the sovereign people of the places where we are located*. Such praxis has often been emphasized in Pacific scholarship (Trask 2000; Kauanui 2016), but it has not always been fulfilled. This was stressed by numerous speakers at the conference at which this dialogue piece was first developed, the 2023 Australian Association for Pacific Studies (AAPS) conference held at the Australian National University on unceded Ngunnawal Ngambri lands. Solidarity can be fraught, particularly when struggles center on state regulation of Indigenous lands, waters, and lives.[2] We (the authors) are all scholars living and working on unceded lands that are not our own, and this means that all of us must reckon with our responsibilities toward the Indigenous sovereign people of the places we inhabit and our complicity in all forms of colonialism (Prendergast 2023). For example, our efforts to include Pacific content in Australian law school curricula must strengthen and amplify, and never compromise, efforts to advance Australian Indigenous content.

Australian migration law demonstrates the importance of engaging with the kind of Pacific studies we sketch here. As Amangu Yamatji lawyer and academic Crystal McKinnon has argued, Australia's incarceration of refugees on Manus in Papua New Guinea and on Nauru cannot be properly understood apart from the regional and global systems of imperialism, racial capital, and settler colonialism that inflict violence against "Black, Brown and Indigenous brothers and sisters" in so-called Australia, Manus, West Papua, and elsewhere (McKinnon 2020, 692). Yet some refugee rights advocates have failed to acknowledge this wider context. In so doing, they have undermined solidarity and inflicted further violence by reproducing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous discourses of Papua New Guinean and Nauruan deficit (Monson, Camacho, and Foukona 2023). For example, one of us was approached by an Australian lawyer who sought to demonstrate the harms of detention by requesting that we produce an expert report setting out high rates of betelnut use in Papua New Guinea and its contribution to interpersonal violence. Betelnut is consumed by hundreds of millions of people globally and can be central to Indigenous

research methods such as tok stori (Foukona 2017, 39–41; Paulsen and Spratt 2020; Sanga and others 2021). We know that it can have devastating health impacts, but the relationship posited by the lawyer is not one we have heard discussed by the communities we work with, nor have we found it in the peer-reviewed literature.

Legal strategies such as this one—the defense of refugee interests by demonizing Papua New Guinean habits—are often dressed up as progressive, but they reproduce the racist narratives of Indigenous deficit that the Australian settler colony depends on. As McKinnon observed, the scripts that underpin the theft of Indigenous lands in Australia also "interpellate [Pacific] lands as available for white appropriation and use as sites of refugee detention and imprisonment" (McKinnon 2020, 696; see also J Watson 2015). Refugee rights advocates have maintained these scripts by deploying the same vocabulary as phosphate mining companies, denigrating Nauru as "a pile of bird-droppings" (Burnside 2002). Derogatory, extractivist narratives such as these produced the violent "blackbirding" of Indigenous people from across Oceania to work in the Australian colonies in the 1800s and then drove their expulsion with the introduction of the White Australia Policy in the early 1900s (Banivanua-Mar 2006). They now cloak seasonal-worker and labor-mobility schemes, which recruit Pacific Islanders to work in plantations and factories in so-called Australia and New Zealand, as "humanitarian" measures. Contemporary Australian migration law and policy cannot be properly understood apart from these interconnected histories of Australian and Pacific labor migration, land legalization, and state territorialization.

The specific instances of violence we've recounted here are not individualized or rare. They emerge from and reproduce the structural racism that is intrinsic to the settler colonies of Oceania and that leaks across the colonial borders that it simultaneously upholds. Work by Pacific studies scholars has been crucial to our ability to trace these flows and to understand the enduring, racialized, and gendered geography of the region (Banivanua-Mar 2009; Kabutaulaka 2015; T Teaiwa and others 2017). This geography is also crudely revealed by the words of an Australian official who worked on the infamous "Intervention" in Aboriginal communities before moving to the Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands: "I've worked in the Northern Territory and I know how to deal with *these people*" (Cable from Ambassador Leslie Rowe, 2006, quoted in Monson, Camacho, and Foukona 2023, 290; emphasis added).[3]

Pacific studies has been critical to our attempts to understand, expose, and respond to the structural racism reproduced in all aspects of our legal systems, including legal education. In Aotearoa, Pacific students and staff have consistently reported that they experience isolation and racism in law schools (Mayeda and others 2014; Hosoda 2015; Asafo and Tuiburelevu 2021; Fa'amatuainu 2023). A recent nationwide study of Pacific peoples' experiences in Aotearoa's law schools found that "racism is a fact of life for many Pasifika in law schools and the legal profession . . . . Pasifika students often experience rampant racism both directly and indirectly. Some student participants said they felt ignored and treated as second-class students" (Tupou-Vaitohi and Gucake 2022, 11).

There have not yet been similar studies of Pacific peoples' experiences of law schools in our other locations of Melbourne, Canberra, and Honolulu. However, numerous studies attest to the alienation, isolation, and racism experienced by Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and other Indigenous and Pasifika students and staff (I Watson 2005; N Watson 2005; Wood 2011; Maguire and Young 2015; Cubillo 2023). The Council of Australian Law Deans has expressly acknowledged these ongoing problems, issuing a formal statement recognizing the critical role that legal education plays in maintaining "systemic discrimination and structural bias against First Nations people" and the need for "full partnership with First Nations peoples, in exposing, critiquing and addressing institutionalized injustice" (CALD 2020).

Survival in the face of such racism is essential if any such "partnerships" are to occur. It is imperative if students are to survive law school and gain the colonial credentials and expertise necessary to dismantle the interlocking systems of colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy that are leveraged against Pacific people and other marginalized groups around the world. In settler colonies across Oceania, Indigenous and Pacific people are disproportionately targeted by police, militaries, extractive industries, and other state and corporate institutions (Camacho 2021). Greater numbers of Indigenous lawyers are desperately needed to protect their people and fight back to quell this violence. Yet to journey to this place, they must first pass through the corridors and lecture theaters of law schools. As Teaiwa aptly explained, "The paradox of colonialism is that it offers us tools for our liberation even as it attempts to dominate us. Education is the

perfect example of this colonial paradox" (T Teaiwa 2005, 39). Law is another "perfect example" of this paradox.

In Aotearoa, some law schools have sought to address systemic racism by increasing permanent Pasifika academic staff and developing Pacific law courses (Tupou-Vaitohi and Gucake 2022). Law schools in Australia have not taken such steps, despite national political rhetoric claiming membership in "the Pacific family." In any case, reform premised on "equity, diversity, and inclusion" is not sufficient to enable Pacific people and allies to survive and thrive in law schools, let alone understand the Pacific and its vast waters, lands, and living beings (compare with Dua and Lawrence 2000). More fundamental shifts are required, including in the pedagogical approaches adopted in law school classrooms across Oceania.

Recent research into the experiences of Pacific law students in Aotearoa emphasizes that "current pedagogical and learning environment settings within law schools do not support Pasifika students to succeed and sometimes even oppress Pasifika" and that "law schools often discourage collective learning" (Tupou-Vaitohi and Gucake 2022, 10). Research on the experiences of other Indigenous people, Black people, and people of color in law schools reaches similar conclusions and stresses the need to move away from the existing hierarchical model of legal education (Fa'amatuainu 2023). Legal scholars working in a variety of contexts globally frequently note that the dominant pedagogical model centers on the delivery of context-free, text-based content, with limited discussion of gendered, racialized, and classed experiences, by a teacher who is presumed to be authoritative, to students who are presumed to know very little (see, eg, Adebisi 2021; Kameri-Mbote and others 2020, 474–475).

This pedagogical model has implications for all students, for example by obscuring the economic structures that have produced the current planetary crisis and therefore failing to equip students to address that crisis (Galloway and Graham 2023). However, as Kimberlé Crenshaw explained more than thirty-five years ago, it is particularly burdensome for minority students who are expected to perform as if they are "colorless legal analysts" and reproduce "a white middle-class world view" (Crenshaw 1988, 3). Torres Strait lawyer and legal educator Asmi Wood has similarly observed that the epistemological violence encountered by students includes the expectation that they discuss legal concepts and cases largely divorced from context and the oppression, trauma, and resistance of their families and communities (2013, 58).

Our own efforts to disrupt these disciplining hierarchies and advance a more collaborative and reflexive approach have drawn significant inspiration from Teaiwa's model of "the classroom as a metaphorical canoe" (T Teaiwa 2005). This model has become extremely influential in Pacific studies and can only be sensibly deployed when it is explicitly discussed with students. It asks us to imagine teaching venues as different kinds of canoes, with lecturers and tutors having various roles as chiefs, navigators, and coxswains. In these settings, students are not passive learners or passengers but play an essential role as the crew. As Teaiwa emphasized, without a crew there can be no major oceangoing voyage (T Teaiwa 2005, 43). The metaphor directs our attention to the importance of cooperation, a sense of shared responsibility, and a willingness to pitch in during risky or even dangerous situations (Wilson 2008, 313).

Teaiwa's model requires us to situate legal frameworks and struggles in wider historical, economic, and ecological processes and to acknowledge the diverse lived experiences and expertise of students. Doing so can mitigate some of the harms of existing pedagogical models by unsettling the assumed authority of the teacher and the Western legal canon. It embraces the situated and embodied knowledges of students and teachers, and it inspires self-reflection. It disrupts the state-centricity of traditional legal education, carving out space for students to share their expertise and lived experiences of varied cultural, customary, and religious orders. This approach to teaching creates opportunities to collectively reflect on the ways hegemonic orders produce and sustain power relations and the extent to which those orders may (or may not) be harnessed to disrupt inequalities.

Importantly, this approach to teaching equips students to break down the dominant model of law and chart paths toward more just worlds. This task is becoming more urgent as wealth inequality deepens and the climate crisis escalates (Matsuda 2014; Taylor 2021). Teaiwa's model is also consistent with, and has enabled us to advance, the critical pedagogies that many Indigenous legal scholars advocate (see, eg, Maguire and Young 2015; Burns, Lee Hong, and Wood 2019). It embodies values that are critical to any ethical approach to teaching and learning—perhaps especially for white teachers such as Rebecca, given the long-standing imbrication of research and teaching "expertise" with colonial subjugation and the tendency for "Indigenizing" agendas to dispossess Indigenous people from knowing themselves/ourselves (Mukandi and Bond 2019).

We acknowledge that the large size of law school classrooms—which continue to swell in the wake of COVID-19–induced financial crises—can

make models of teaching that prioritize exchange and risk-taking more difficult to adopt than in smaller classrooms. As legal scholars have noted, further challenges are presented by the institutional pursuit of "flexibility" for students, which drives asynchronous learning, intensified content, and unidirectional delivery of information, typically online (Tzouvala 2024; Clark, Keenan, and Page 2024; compare with Sen 2020). For non-Pacific readers, it might also be tempting to imagine canoes as being small, when in fact they can vary enormously in scale and purpose. While we were writing this dialogue piece, Cliff Bird, a Pacific theologian from Marovo Lagoon in Solomon Islands, reminded Rebecca that Teaiwa's metaphor could be thought of in terms of the great tomoko of the western Solomon Islands. These impressive vessels could carry an intimidating crew of eighty people, and three might set out on a raiding expedition. The baru of Lau Lagoon, where Joseph is from, could carry more than twenty people. Teaiwa's model invites us to think about whether different-sized canoes might set out in different (asynchronous!) directions at different times and whether they might have different or shared purposes (including fishing, gardening, warfare, and migration).

In our own courses, we have found that most law students embrace the opportunity to explicitly discuss pedagogy, and many have commented that it is the first time they have had the opportunity to do so. Most also respond with increased classroom engagement. Teaiwa's approach facilitates a shift from "transactional" to "transformational" teaching, and the model expressly embraces learning that is not only cognitive but affective and embodied. The positive impact of these approaches for students is documented in their feedback. They have also been sustaining and transformative for us. As Kanaka Maoli scholar Emalani Case wrote (2016): "I will not say that I 'taught' them. Rather, I will honor the fact that we taught each other, and that we learned and grew together .... I've watched them rise like the tide to fill spaces that had once been left empty in their own lives, and then to tread in their wholeness, sometimes uncomfortably, sometimes passionately."

By embracing our wholeness, this approach not only strengthens Pacific students but many other Indigenous students, Black students, and students of color, as well as working-class students and others who are underrepresented in law schools and legal practice. Put another way, it bolsters *the majority of the world* who do not feel safe precisely because they do not fit into "the mould of the upper echelons of white ... establishment" who dominate these spaces (I Watson 2005, 23; see also Underhill-Sem 2017).

Our Pacific studies canoes do not shy away from the choppy waters of uncomfortable conversations regarding racism, hetero-patriarchy, or classism. Instead, the notion of a shared canoe and journey directs our attention to the patterns of winds, storms, and currents and how we might navigate them collectively, given our different roles and locations within the canoe. For Teaiwa: "Whether they are Pasifika, Māori, Pākehā, Asian, new migrant, or international exchange students, I celebrate the successes of all my students. It is truly amazing that some of them are able to complete their courses and qualifications at all, given the barriers and disincentives around them. We journey on through these rough waters" (T Teaiwa (2017, 280).

The commitment to solidarity and celebration in collective struggles demonstrated by Teaiwa, Case, and others—seen on the page, in the classroom, and in the streets—is one of the things that has drawn us to Pacific studies. Indeed, we suggest that some of the most exciting, productive features of Pacific studies are its resistance to the white settler-slave logics that try to pit Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color against each other and its insistence that site-specific struggles are bound up with many others occurring globally. This sense of interconnected struggles is desperately needed in law schools, where underrepresentation and isolation are persistent challenges.

Wood has noted that the underrepresentation of Indigenous students in Australian law schools "significantly impacts on wellbeing among Indigenous law students," particularly by limiting their peer-support network (2011, 253). This is true, to varying degrees, for all people who find themselves underrepresented in law schools. Yet when our oars are deployed with an awareness of our responsibilities, we open up space for solidarity. Directing our canoes toward confronting colonialism and racism not only ameliorates our isolation but also creates the communities we cherish. This is why when Eddie Cubillo, a Larrakia, Wadjigan, and Central Arrente academic, resigned from his role as associate dean (Indigenous) at Melbourne Law School over its institutional racism (Cubillo 2023), we—and many colleagues across the Pacific—immediately understood his allegations as exposing the anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and classism that persist across Oceania and demand our response (Kabutaulaka 2015; T Teaiwa and others 2017). We continue to stand in solidarity with Cubillo and other Blak, Black, and Indigenous scholars facing similar battles, breaking the silences of academia and speaking up against the racial, gender, and class violence of our institutions.

Pacific studies has not only informed our pedagogical practices but has driven our theorizing. It provides an array of theoretical and methodological tools to challenge predominant legal concepts and frameworks and, importantly, to craft alternatives. We therefore emphasize that Pacific studies should be understood and valued not merely as a response to imperial violence but as a gift to the world.

Law, like education, "offers tools for our liberation even as it attempts to dominate us" (T Teaiwa 2005, 39). Legal systems produce and naturalize material inequalities and ecological degradation, but they also offer partial solutions to these manifold processes of dispossession and oppression. We argue that engagement with Pacific studies is vital for lawyers concerned with the emancipation of Oceania, as it offers distinctively place-based concepts, theories, and approaches that are necessary to ensure that the critical, decolonial, and ecological legal approaches emanating from our part of the world are rooted and berthed in our own social, political, economic, and ecological contexts and struggles.

In 2005, Tanganekald and Meintangk legal scholar Irene Watson described her experience of law school in Australia as "torture" in an environment that was "clueless and disinterested in understanding that there are other ways of coming to know the world and its laws" (2005, 23). There have been some advancements since then. In Australia, there have been efforts to build "cultural competency" and incorporate "Indigenous content," often through cases featuring Indigenous litigants. However, debates about Indigenous law and legal pluralism remain peripheral; these topics are treated as "additional" and "interesting" content rather than core material woven throughout the courses and assessments that are compulsory for admission to legal practice (see also Maguire and Young 2015, 110).

Efforts in Aotearoa have gone further. While tikanga Māori has historically received minimal attention (Te Aka Matua o te Ture I Law Commission 2023), starting in 2025 all law schools will progressively introduce compulsory tikanga components in all core courses, as well as a compulsory tikanga Māori course (New Zealand Law Society 2023). Despite this progress, Māori scholars have noted the challenges of having tikanga Māori taught in predominantly Pākehā (white) law schools, emphasizing that doing so requires a "bijural, bilingual and bicultural" law degree, decolonized learning institutions, and constitutional transformation based on honoring te Tiriti o Waitangi

(Jackson 1997; Markham-Nicklin and Wharehoka 2021). These remain significant challenges in a context in which te Tiriti o Waitangi is under sustained attack.

Even when Indigenous knowledges are addressed, we have seen them co-opted into predominant state-centric approaches and treated as "evidence" rather than "law," or as subject matter requiring "recognition" by the state. Indigenous laws are also frequently recruited into the relentless expansion of rights, for example in the rights-to-nature movement. State recognition (or absorption) of Indigenous laws and knowledges in this way is often treated as unquestionably "a good thing," as if it is uncontested. There is a need for much greater engagement with the vibrant debates about resistance, refusal, and disruption to such recognition, as well as resurgence and reimagination occurring among Indigenous scholars, families, and communities (see, eg, I Watson 2002; Simpson 2014; Hallenbeck and others 2016; Kauanui 2018).

The present neglect of these complex debates makes it difficult to escape the conclusion that, across our different contexts, the legal academe remains largely uninterested in, and sometimes antagonistic toward, these "other worlds." This attitude is communicated in manifold ways, such as in the treatment of recent military commissions as "exceptional" rather than an integral part of US imperialism, with which Indigenous and Pacific people have long experience (Camacho 2019; Aguon 2008); the sidelining of questions of Indigenous, customary, and even religious law as questions of sociology, culture, and anthropology rather than legal theory or doctrine; and the relegation of Indigenous staff to the role of cultural specialist rather than legal expert (Cubillo 2023). Imperial citation practices persist, with the diverse work of Indigenous and Pacific scholars and jurists underrepresented in classrooms, bibliographies, and edited collections. Where this work is mentioned, the citations are limited to a very narrow canon, homogenized and filtered through white intermediaries. This observation holds true even for fields that purport to address colonialist exclusion, such as Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) (noted by Burra 2016; Merino 2018) and work on the Anthropocene and post-human legal theory (see Todd 2016; Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt 2020).

Scholars have often explained this citational politics to us in terms of struggling to locate relevant work, feeling "out of their depth," or wishing to "stay in their lane" and leave leadership to Indigenous scholars. However, as Rohini Sen observed of similar rationales for the neglect of feminist scholarship within TWAIL (2020), these explanations turn

engagement into a burden and legitimize scholars' decisions to avoid shouldering it.

We do not see Pacific studies as a burden but rather as a gift that provides us with some of the wire cutters necessary to sever our white citational chains, bush knives to clear the weeds of the hegemonic legal system and reveal the legal pluriversalities that persist beneath, and trowels to gently tend to homegrown legal theorizing. Pacific jurists and legal scholars (B Narokobi 1989; Jackson 1997; Aguon 2008; Suaalii-Sauni 2012; Efi 2018); poets (Molisa 1983; Makini 1997); church leaders (Bird, Saiki, and Ratunabuabua 2020); and many others have long sought to expose and disrupt racial subordination, capitalist expansion, and environmental degradation and have sought to "re-story" predominant models of social, legal, and economic "progress" (Monson, Camacho, and Foukona 2023). This work should not be homogenized or tokenized; it is critical to attend to the diversity and contestation within the large streams of scholarship we draw on here. However, it is nevertheless possible to identify some broad contours in this work that provide at least two crucial correctives to the predominant patterns of legal research and education we have identified.

First, in contrast with much legal scholarship but consistent with much critical Indigenous and Native scholarship, *Pacific studies scholars ground their analyses in specific places*—that is, in not only material but also epistemological, cosmogonical, and cosmological relations to rivers, lagoons, mountains, skies, animals, habitats, and ecosystems. For Bernard Narokobi, the foundations of Papua New Guinean jurisprudence were to be found in village life, "a vital and dynamic human institution" (1983, 13) with an emphasis on "close human relations that cannot be disentangled from other aspects of experience" (V Narokobi 2020, 275): "Our vision was not and still is not an artificially dichotomised and compartmentalised pragmatism of the secular society. Ours is a vision of totality, a vision of cosmic harmony . . . . [It] sees the human person in his totality with the spirit world as well as the animal and plant world" (B Narokobi 1983, 6, quoted in V Narokobi 2020, 275). Narokobi's approach assists our efforts to "move the centre" in the sense advocated by Thiong'o (1993), as it requires us to acknowledge the collective expertise of communities rather than rely exclusively on the individual voices of international lawyers and academics.

Other characteristics commonly found in this place-based work include the deployment of Indigenous concepts and epistemologies; an emphasis on the intimacy and interdependence of living people with their environment

and ancestors; and attention to the specificities of places and ecosystems. For example, Keith Camacho's analysis of the 1944 military tribunal in Guam expertly weaves Giorgio Agamben's homo sacer with a Chamorro proverb of ko'ko (bird) and hilitai (lizard) to drive forward understandings of US empire and biopower more broadly (Camacho 2019).[4] The ko'ko-hilitai relation cannot be properly understood without reference to the colors, patterns, songs, and behaviors of various birds, crustaceans, reptiles, and mammals in relation to each other (Camacho 2019, 17ff). It also requires some understanding of the cosmological and political roles of the hills, rivers, beaches, and trees in which it is embedded.

As Camacho insisted, engaging these aspects of Chamorro knowledge is not a question of representation or inclusion. Rather, it is vital to understanding how the military tribunal relied on the ko'ko-hilitai relation to reduce Rotanese and Saipanese men to the most abject bare life and to expand US possession of Chamorro lands (Camacho 2019, 21, 216). Yet it is precisely this kind of insistence that knowledge has a location that can lead scholarship to be dismissed, at least by legal scholars, as addressing "niche" rather than "global" concerns and being "empirical" rather than "theoretical."[5] There is a persistent failure to recognize, as Haudenosaunee and Anishanaabe scholar Vanessa Watts put it (2013, 22), that "it is not that Indigenous people do not theorize, but that these complex theories are not distinct from place."

Grounding our work in specific places is crucial if we are to advance debates, theories, methodologies, and priorities that resonate for and in those contexts, rather than reproduce the hegemonic dynamics that we contest. Yet the implications stretch far beyond these specific places. We suggest that it is this emphasis on the specificities of place that offers generative insights to *all* scholars concerned with understanding and communicating the entanglement of law not only with humans but also with animals, plants, waterways, the Earth, and the entire cosmos.

There are of course numerous streams of legal scholarship that seek to understand these entanglements and the place-basedness of law. However, even this work remains strikingly silent as to location and place, including those of authors themselves, while simultaneously foregrounding concepts, debates, and scholars that have emerged from locations and ecosystems elsewhere (Monson 2024). There is a tendency to extract concepts and debates emerging from "the rock-star arenas of Euro-American thought" (Todd 2016, 8), transport them wholesale into new ecosystems, and

transplant them with little regard for their histories, relationships, ontologies, and materialities.

We suggest that this neglect of the location, materialities, and corporealities of the intellectual genealogies we deploy to enact, contest, and recreate law represents one of the many manifestations of what critical property scholar Nicole Graham termed the "dephysicalisation" of law (Graham 2014). As Graham has demonstrated (2021), the dematerialization of legal theory has been central to the dispossession of human and nonhuman communities from lands and waterways; carved integrated ecosystems up into separable resources and services; masked the dynamic, networked relations of peopled landscapes; and allowed land "owners" to distance themselves from the consequences of their proprietorship. We have collectively observed that these processes are frequently reproduced in scholarship.

To give an example, legal scholarship on the climate crisis frequently notes that it is driven by the world's most affluent populations at the expense of those who have contributed the least, including Pacific people. Yet this important observation is often followed by the reproduction of a citational chain that excludes those very people. Such discursive practices reproduce the material practices of the fossil-fuel driven capitalist global economy they purport to critique by mobilizing "facts" that have been extracted from specific places and commodified; by rendering Pacific people unscholarly, expendable, and disposable in the services of careers, agendas, and economies in the Global North; and by obscuring scholars' own positionalities and complicities in these processes.

Pacific studies scholarship and praxis robustly contest this emptying of place and the abstraction of theory from specific places, objects, and patterns of labor and trade. They resist colonial erasures by celebrating the embodied, place-based intellectual traditions that have emerged from those locations and ecosystems. They disrupt the colonizing traditions that have muffled and sought to silence living people and their lands, waterways, skies, and ancestors. Far from being "niche," this emphasis connects Pacific studies with critical Indigenous and Native studies scholarship worldwide. The last twenty years has seen an efflorescence of work that integrates "land, methodology, and theory building" in order to "reorient, respatialize, and repoliticize dispossession" to include not only material dispossession but also the "disruption, dislocation, and elimination of ways of being, systems of governing, and forms of life of Indigenous peoples and nations" (Hallenbeck and others 2016, 112).

This leads us to a second powerful contribution that Pacific studies offers predominant models of legal scholarship and education (but there are surely more): *it not only shifts attention from imperial centers and borders to embodied acts of resistance and revitalization grounded in specific localities, but simultaneously traces and celebrates the connections that make them global*. This perspective is the inverse of much (but certainly not all) legal scholarship, where there is a tendency to start with international or domestic laws and institutions and then hone in on "the local" as a somewhat discrete example or case study. As Chamoru/Chamorro scholars Tiara Na'puti and Michael Lujan Bevacqua have observed (2015, 845), instances of community opposition to US military expansion in Guåhan (Guam), the Northern Marianas, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and Okinawa "are often represented as small, minor, and local, yet in the same way in which the US 'sea of bases' stretches across the globe, so do these struggles possess global possibilities in terms of critique, resistance, and transoceanic dialogue."

This emphasis on the specificities of bodies and places is not parochial or exclusionary, nor is it a choice of *methods*. Rather, to reiterate Watts, it is a choice of *theory*. Consistent with the (perhaps idealized version of) Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies we have been trained in, we ground our work in "focal points" in places and scholarly genealogies rather than constructing and enforcing outer boundaries of nation-states, epistemic communities, or political movements (Monson 2023, 90–91, 217). When we have anchored our academic labor in this way, we have been able to situate site-specific struggles within wider histories of transnational imperialism, dispossession, and activism that stretch not only from Australia and New Zealand to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands but into the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, and elsewhere (D'Costa 2021, 13). Tracing these connections not only fuels our hope that other worlds are possible but also shows us how they are already being made real on the ground.

Conclusion: Law for Our Sea of Islands

Pacific studies has offered us distinctively place-based, Indigenous, Pacific, and Oceanic concepts, theories, and approaches (the sails and oars) that are necessary to ensure that the critical and decolonial scholarship emanating from our part of the world is grounded and berthed in our unique contexts and ecosystems and does not merely reproduce an alternative version of the ethnocentric and universalizing frameworks it contests. Our engagement

with Pacific studies is an ongoing journey (or voyage) that continues to challenge us intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

As once students and now teachers in various law schools (and in one instance, a history department) across Oceania, we have sought to find and use concepts, theories, and approaches that enable us to contribute meaningfully to critical and decolonial movements for liberation in, of, and for Oceania and its many peoples. These initially came from our turn to a range of critical legal scholarship including critical race theory, TWAIL, legal geography, and progressive property scholarship. While our engagements with these fields have been enormously generative, our focus on law-centered, non-Pacific work has also sometimes limited and isolated us. We have collectively come to understand that our turn to these traditions has been driven by the ways in which law (including colonial legal systems, law schools, and the legal profession) has obscured the field of Pacific studies. We have also reproduced these harmful obfuscations. These erasures have distanced us from the decades of rich Pacific studies scholarship we are just now catching up on. They have also cost us opportunities to build relationships and community with Pacific studies scholars and advocates. Our experiences reflect, and we have sometimes reinforced, many of the challenges and violence experienced by our students and colleagues. We hope that growing numbers of legal scholars, students, and practitioners will join us in the labor of reimagining law and navigating toward a free and liberated Oceania and world.

Postscript

This paper was finalized shortly after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) hearings for an advisory opinion (AO) on climate change in December 2024 and prior to the delivery of the opinion in July 2025. We look forward to scholarship considering those proceedings and their relationship with the challenges and opportunities we set out here. We also note that the 2023 AAPS conference has been described by one lawyer active in the proceedings as "the breeding ground for ICJ AO lawyering."

* * *

Aspects of this dialogue piece *were presented at the 2023 Australian Association for Pacific Studies conference, and we thank participants for their engagement and feedback. The work was subsequently presented in a keynote*

and a panel session at the International Education Conference, "Rethinking Solomon Islands Education for a Sustainable Future through Tok Stori" held at Solomon Islands National University in 2024, and at a University of the South Pacific School of Law and Social Sciences seminar held at Emalus campus in 2025. We similarly thank participants at those events for their valuable feedback. These presentations enabled us to test our ideas in different contexts and institutional settings: the first tended to focus on experiences in settler colonies, and the second and third showed us that our arguments also resonated for many students, researchers, and teachers at Solomon Islands National University and at the University of the South Pacific. We are enormously grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their robust and incisive feedback, the editorial board of The Contemporary Pacific for their detailed reviews, and Sarouche Razi for his engagement with this work. Several grants have facilitated this collaboration: Rebecca Monson is the recipient of an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE210100486) funded by the Australian Government; Joseph D Foukona received the 2023 Jerry H Bentley World History Endowed Faculty Award, Department of History, University of Hawai'i–Mānoa; and we collectively received an Australian National University Gender Institute grant for "Advancing Pacific Critical Legal Studies for and by Pacific People."

Notes

1 In this essay we often use the phrase "Indigenous and Pacific," acknowledging that these categories overlap but are not identical. In particular, we acknowledge the unique identities of Indo-Fijian people, whose ancestors arrived in Fiji as indentured laborers known as Girmitiyas, as Pasifika people. We also acknowledge that collective nouns including "Indigenous," "First Nations," "Aboriginal," and "Torres Strait Islander" are colonial terms and contested. Wherever possible, we use the names by which authors self-identify in public documents. The term "Blak" is widely attributed to Destiny Deacon, who wanted to reclaim the term and remove its derogatory and colonialist meanings. It has also become a critical means of differentiating the experiences of Indigenous people of so-called Australia from those of non-Indigenous communities of color. See also Munro 2020; Latimore 2021.

2 Indigenous people make up a large majority of the populations in Pacific states, and Indigenous institutions and power structures receive some recognition from the apparatus of the state (eg, Vanuatu's Malvatumauri, which is established by the Constitution). By contrast, Indigenous people are in subjugated minorities in Australia (where they constitute approximately 3 percent of the population); New Zealand (approximately 17 percent); Canada (approximately 5 percent); and the United States (approximately 2 percent) (see Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023; Stats NZ 2024; Mamo 2025; Statistics Canada 2023). Indigenous peoples'

movements in these settler colonial states have not always enjoyed the solidarity of independent Pacific states, with a well-known example being debates about the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People: when most states adopted the declaration in 2007, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States voted against it, and just one Pacific nation, the Federated States of Micronesia, voted in favor. Other Pacific states abstained and were nonvoting.

3 The Northern Territory Emergency Response (2007–2022), which became known as "the Intervention," was a package of legislation and policies that entailed a blanket ban on alcohol sales and consumption; compulsory health checks on children; increased services including increased numbers of police, teachers, and health workers; and an income-management scheme in Indigenous communities. It was triggered by media coverage of the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children Are Sacred"* report, which set out allegations of widespread violence in Indigenous communities (Wild and Anderson 2007). The Intervention largely ignored the recommendations of that report. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (2003–2017) was an Australian-led regional mission involving hundreds of police, military, and civilian personnel from fifteen Pacific nations. It was formed after repeated requests from Solomon Islands for assistance with quelling conflict that occurred from 1998 to 2003. It was aimed at restoring peace and strengthening state institutions in Solomon Islands.

4 The Roman legal concept of homo sacer refers to the person whose life has no value and who may be killed but not murdered or sacrificed. Agamben drew on this concept to consider how sovereign power relegates some people to states of "bare life," reducing them from political subjects to mere biological lives (1998).

5 See, for example, book reviews by Mark Tushnet (2024), Rachel Sieder (2023), and Carl Lindskoog (2022) that note and refute such assumptions.

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Abstract

Legal scholarship has often been deeply informed by the study of Pacific legal systems, but in law schools across the world there has been very little interest in teaching about, let alone learning from, the region and its people. Scholars and insights from the region remain grossly underrepresented and pushed to the margins of legal scholarship, and this silencing reproduces the underrepresentation of Pasifika people in law schools, the legal profession, and critical global dialogues regarding justice systems. We argue that legal scholars, educators, and students have much to learn from increased engagement with Pacific studies. We suggest that such engagement is particularly critical for law schools across Oceania if we are to have any hope of developing the homegrown theories and practices necessary to contribute to anticolonial movements for liberation across our region and beyond.

KEYWORDS: law, legal education, anticolonialism, racism, Pacific studies, Eurocentrism, US-centrism, critical legal scholarship, epistemologies, place-based scholarship