

SEA OF READINGS

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## The Bible in the South Pacific

*Edited by*  
Jione Havea

SBL Press



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## PREFACE

Kissing point, the place where saltwater (from the sea) meets freshwater (coming down a stream or river), is appropriate for describing the interweaving of islander backgrounds, wisdoms and readings, and responses and engagements in this collection of essays. To be more precise, bearing in mind that precision is not rigid with respect to waters, this work is the confluence of two kissing points.

First, this collection of essays developed as fruits of several *meetings* (read: conferences, intersections, discussions, revisions, edits). Over the past twenty-five years or so, islander criticism has been ebbing and flowing, seeking attention at gatherings of the Society of Biblical Literature. Then in 2009, at the New Orleans gathering, a Society of Biblical Literature group began to form. The Islands, Islanders, and Bible unit had its first session at the 2010 Atlanta meeting, then took on the new name Islands, Islanders, and Scriptures in 2013. Out of these meetings came *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible: RumInations* (SBL Press, 2015), to which this *Sea of Readings* is a companion from a specific island location, Pasifika (Oceania, South Pacific).

Presented at conferences and then later redrafted, reviewed, and revised for publication, most of the essays in this collection had an early germination at meetings (read: intersections) of OBSA (Oceania Biblical Studies Association) with islander criticism. OBSA was conceived during the 2008 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature at Auckland (Aotearoa New Zealand) and has met since 2010 at different islands with the support of Trinity Methodist Theological College (New Zealand), School of Theology at the University of Auckland (New Zealand), Malua Theological College (Samoa), Piula Theological College (Samoa), University of the South Pacific (Tonga campus), Sia'atoutai Theological College (Tonga), Siasi Uēsiliana Tau'atāina 'o Tonga (Tonga), Pacific Theological College (Fiji), and many generous friends (with gifts of time, insights, and resources). The publication of *Sea of Readings* is

supported by a grant from the Rev'd Veitinia Waqabaca's Literary and Theological Studies Foundation, administered by Parramatta Mission (of the Uniting Church in Australia). To one and to all, *Vinaka vakalevu* (Fijian, lit. "many [boat-load-of] thanks").

Not all OBSA presentations are included in this collection. Pasifika Islanders are not keen to submit their thoughts into writing, which is expected of thinkers from oral preferring cultures. Two of the essays (Afutiti and Song) in this collection were not presented at an OBSA gathering,<sup>1</sup> and sadly, two of the contributors, Afutiti and Koloamatangi, passed away before this publication came into life.

Second, this monograph is the meeting of Pasifika *twists and turns* with the ebbs and flows from *across the sea*. Hence the three sections of the book: Island Twists contains contributions that twist, like a whirlpool, biblical texts around insights of native Pasifika novelists, composers, poets, and sages. Island Turns contains contextual readings that turn a selection of biblical texts toward, and under, some aspect of Pasifika waters, ways, and worries. The chapters in both sections demonstrate, but in different degrees, how (traditional) historical and literary studies can sit alongside and under cultural studies, with islander and Pasifika manifestations. The third part, *Across the Sea*, contains engagements by biblical critics who were all asked to launch from the same spot, an essay (by Koloamatangi) that they cannot read. They had to depend on the editor's short introduction, then to reflect on the impact of that experience on reading three other chapters, and thereupon to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that *Sea of Readings* pose for islander criticism in particular and biblical criticism overall. Thankfully, the respondents did not all follow the editor's direction! Raymond wisely ended, rather than opened, with Koloamatangi (a name that means "treasure of/in wind," which acknowledges that the wind continues to gift islanders even when it twists, turns, and changes direction; but the wind, which gains energy from the sea, also causes damage to systems of life in the sea and on the shore). Graciously, nonetheless, all respondents identified more tasks and directions for islander criticism, so there are more kissing points to be reached.

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1. Angeline M. G. Song's essay draws on her previously published "Heartless Bimbo or Subversive Role Model? A Narrative (Self) Critical Reading of the Character of Esther," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 49 (2010): 56–69.



Of course, kissing points are not places to linger. Waters push. Currents are strong. Tides are coming and going. Waters are pushed. Movements.

## Language

Language is a barrier in biblical criticism, with the politics and limits of translation as daily food for biblical critics. Language is thus also a house for misunderstanding, for missing the point, and for romanticizing. But the barrier of language is an opportunity. To slow down. To read again. To ponder. To play. To reconsider. To *reconstruct*. For language is more than words. Language is also a kissing point for traditions, peoples, ways, cultures, (is)lands, and more.

In Pasifika, English is a colonial language. It comes with *pālangi* (alt. spelling *palagi*: “European,” “White,” “foreign”) sentiments, formalities, and rigidities. People of Pasifika, with hundreds of languages (there are, for instance, over eight hundred living languages in the island of Papua alone), learn English in order to communicate across tribal and national borders. But we do not always follow the English rules. We also creolize in both our speech and writing. For example, the northwestern islands use *Tok Pisin* (Papua), *Pijin blong Solomon* (Solomon Islands), and *Bislama* (Vanuatu), three different forms of creolizing English. Natives of these three island groups may speak, each in her or his creole tongue, and could easily understand one another. They do not need to speak the same tongue in order to communicate, and they do not creolize in the same way. Their different forms of creole are necessary for trade and business and for defying proper English. Thrice.

The written form is not fixed for all Pasifika languages. There are different spellings of the same native words—as an example, Kolia prefers “Sāmoa” (the first “a” is a long vowel when the word is pronounced) because “sā” (sacred) is significant in his reading. There are variants across Pasifika—the references to white Europeans are *palagi* (Samoan), *pālangi* (Tongan), and *pākeha* (Māori). Out of respect to the privileging of orality in island circles, consistency in spelling is not sought in this collection.

It is reasonable to expect a book from our region to resist the rules of English. For ideological reasons and for the sake of reducing the number of italicized words in this book, only the first occurrence of a native word in each chapter—out of respect for the authors who write from different native languages—is italicized. In this unconventional approach, bearing in mind that English is a foreign language to our sea of islands, this book

problematizes the uncritical assumption that English is the only proper, standard, and academic language. Whose English? Whose English rules? Who decides in the aftermath of European colonization which languages are foreign?

As indicated above, the essay by Koloamatangi is presented in the Tongan language with a short introduction by the editor. Text fields are inserted into the essay, with English translations of key (in the eyes of the editor) phrases and lines, so that non-Tongan readers may get a tweet, a dribble, of Koloamatangi's thinking. Koloamatangi has passed on, but his Tongan words trickle into English in the introduction and text fields. His thoughts are not off limits. This is one way of saying that language is a conduit, a passageway, but not a trap or barrier, in this and in other seas of readings.

Overall, language is like the image on the front cover of this book: a spot, a moment, a flick, on one of the coasts of Papua New Guinea, but common in the *mata-ni-vanua* (Fijian for "eyes-of-the-land"). Language *brings into life*, together, the edge, grass, sand, rocks, branches, leaves, trunks, sea, water, voyage, migration, ancestors, kissing points, another island, another eye-land (*mata-vanua*), another ripple, another wave, another motion, another fare-well, another well-come, another *talanoa*, another.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>American Anthropologist</i>
AB	The Anchor Bible
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ARIEL	<i>ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature</i>
AS	Advances in Semiotics
ASMS	American Society of Missiology Series
BCT	<i>Bible and Critical Theory</i>
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds. 2000. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BL	Biblical Limits
BP	Bibliothèque de la Pléiade
BTA	Bible and Theology in Africa
<i>BTBull</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
<i>CanCul</i>	<i>Canon and Culture</i>
CBC	The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CC	<i>Constitutional Commentary</i>
<i>ClimC</i>	<i>Climate Change</i>

ConC	Continental Commentaries
CP	<i>The Contemporary Pacific</i>
Dem.	Demetrius the Chronographer
<i>Dia</i>	<i>Diacritics</i>
<i>DiJT</i>	<i>Dialog: A Journal of Theology</i>
EBS	Encountering Biblical Studies
ERS	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Exod. Rab.	Exodus Rabbah
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>IJPT</i>	<i>International Journal of Public Theology</i>
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>The Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JPolyS</i>	<i>The Journal of the Polynesian Society</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
Jub.	Jubilees
KJV	King James Version
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
Mo'ed Qat.	Mo'ed Qatan
MR	<i>Mana Review</i>
MQ	<i>Mankind Quarterly</i>
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLR	<i>New Literature Review</i>

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
<i>OTP</i>	Charlesworth, James H., ed. <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985.
<i>PJT</i>	<i>The Pacific Journal of Theology</i>
PostRel	Postcolonialism and Religions
<i>PS</i>	<i>Pacific Studies</i>
Pseu	Pseudepigrapha
RECS	Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series
<i>RT</i>	<i>Religion and Theology</i>
RS	Religion and Society
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. Johannes, and Helmer Ringgren, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by David E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975–2015.
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
Trns	Transitions
TT	Texts and Translations
TTCABS	T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies
SBEC	Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SIHC	Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity
SRA	Studies of Religion in Africa
STCPRIB	Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible
StudBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SVT	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
<i>VE</i>	<i>Verbum et Ecclesia</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	World Biblical Commentary
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>