

Christina Thompson: ... that, and also, it is, if you think about it, what is the one thing that would be emblematic of that people?

John Plotz: Yeah.

Christina: It would be the canoe.

John: From Brandeis University, welcome to Recall This Book, where we assemble scholars and writers from different disciplines to make sense of contemporary issues, problems, and events.

John: Today, as usual, your hosts are me, John... hello... and to my left, the inimitable Elizabeth Ferry

Elizabeth Ferry: Hello.

John: And we are joined to my further left by Christina Thompson, author of a compelling new book, *Sea People: The Puzzle of Polynesia*. Hello.

Christina: Hi.

John: Hey. It's awesome to have you.

John: And her book is going to be at the heart of our conversation today, which is... The conversation is going to be about how cultures and communities are imagined, especially the case of Polynesian ones, how cultural revivals and renewals occur through what media, and also, very germane for our *Recall This Book* organizing principle, the role that people's conceptions of their shared past play in those revival movements.

John: So we're going to begin with *Sea People*, and Elizabeth will then add an article that, over the past quarter century, has had a huge impact on how people think about Polynesian cultural connections and cultural identity, and as always, we'll end up with Recallable Books, which are suggestions for further readings.

John: So, I'm going to resist the temptation to introduce Christina as thoroughly as she deserves... I hope you will look her up online on your way to ordering her book... but I will say she's the editor of the *Harvard Review* since 2000, I think. Is that right, Christina?

Christina: Correct.

John: So almost two decades as the editor of the *Harvard Review*, and author of a previous book, a 2009 memoir, *Come Ashore and We Will Kill and Eat You All*, which, I have to say, wins the prize for the best book title that we've ever had in the RTB booth.

John: So Christina, often the way we start here is to just ask the guest to kick us off by telling us about their book, so can I throw it over to you?

Christina: Okay.

Christina: So, this book... Let's see. I've been writing about the Pacific for I don't know how many decades... several... and I wrote this earlier book that you mentioned, *Come On Shore and We Will Kill and Eat You All*, which was really, I thought of it as a history of contact between Europeans and the Indigenous people of New Zealand, who are Polynesians known as Maori.

Christina: So that was what my understanding of that books was. It was actually sold, in the end, and shelved as a memoir because—

John: My bad. I just called it a memoir....

Christina: No, no, no, it is a memoir actually, it's just I was resisting the idea, because what I really ended up doing was looking at this history sort of refracted through my own experience of having married into this Maori family. So, to me, I was really focused on the history, but I used my own experience as a lens.

Christina: So, there's a chapter in that book called *Hawaiki*, which is a chapter which told the story... it was set in Hawaii, in Honolulu, actually, and it had to do with the fact that my husband's father died and he had to go back to New Zealand. So when he was gone, I was there in Honolulu thinking about New Zealand, and it's sort of... the big sense of the Pacific and the Polynesian diaspora was very present to me. So I wrote this chapter about that, and then when I was done with that book, I thought, "That's where I'm going to go next." So I'm going to go back further in time, I'm going to go wider in the Pacific, and I'm going to look at the first people who come to the Pacific... who are the Polynesians... in this expansion.

John: Cool. And so your book... I mean, I don't want to caricature it, but you are telling several stories at once, because you're telling the story of the settlement of Polynesia, but you're also telling a kind of scholarly story of how later scholars... some Western, mostly Western, not all Western... then come to kind of reconstruct that story.

Elizabeth: Yeah. I mean, one thing that I thought was so great about the sort of tacking back and forth... if we can use yet another non-sailor using a sailor metaphor, which I have learned a lot about that phenomenon—

John: Careful you don't jibe, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Elizabeth: Is one of the things I loved about that, was you pose this puzzle of how did people get there, how did all these people get to all these places? But then the other puzzle is, how do we know that? So there's all this mobilization of linguistics and archaeology and ethnography and mythology, geology, and I just think that's really the sort of feeling of these multiple stories being told. It works really well.

Christina: Thanks, that is a good description of what it is. I mean, what happened was that when I got this idea that I'm going to tell this story of the epic history of the Polynesian expansion, which is, I think, what it is, and then I had a moment and I thought, "Actually, that's a novel. That's like *Moana*. I can't do that, because I don't have the material. It's too far back in time, they're oral cultures, there's no... What is it? What is the evidence? What am I going to use to tell that story?"

Christina: So then I thought, "Well okay, what do we know?" And there's quite a lot, because people have been thinking about this for hundreds of years. Pretty much as soon as Europeans arrive in the Pacific, they meet Polynesians on these little islands and they go, "Whoa, how'd you get here? Who are you? Where'd you come from?" So as soon as that question gets asked, which is literally kind of at the end of the 16th Century... it's mainly in the 17th and 18th, and then into the 19th and on forward, but I mean, it's a lot of centuries to be compiling inquiry, as it were.

John: And inquiries that already seem commonsensical to us, too, like word-list inquiries, like noticing linguistic commonality.

Christina: Right. Absolute. I mean, they start figuring out the linguistics stuff much earlier than you would think, because the sailors make word lists for practical purposes. And then there are all those different pathways to thinking about it, all these different avenues. There's linguistics, as you say, there's archaeology, there's what does the mythology tell us? And even the mythology's tricky, because oral traditions are themselves very, very slippery sources.

Elizabeth: Sure.

Christina: Yeah. And we didn't really, no one even had access to them except people who spoke those languages until the mid-19th Century, or early 19th Century. So there was just a lot of really interesting approaches to the problem, and that's what I ended up tracking.

John: Yeah, So I want to get to the last few chapters of the book, which is the moment, as I sort of alluded to already, the moment of cultural renewal by way of rediscovery of ancient Polynesian common identity, but I kind of wanted to ask you, in terms of your own process for writing this, do you think of it as a book that was written from the present backward? In other words, were the present-day issues the ones that were on your mind, and then you had to go

back into the past to solve them? Or were you thinking about it as beginning with like *ur*-stories.

Christina: That's kind of interesting. I think I almost came at it like sort of pincer movement, because on the one hand, I was very familiar with and very interested in what's at the end of the book, which you're referring to, which is the reenactments of Polynesian voyaging, the experimental voyaging movement. And then I was also very familiar with, because it had been kind of my own historical research and background for a long time, early European explorers. So I had a really clear sense of what the explorers found when they arrived, and then I had this vivid sense of what had been done in the last 50 years, or even more recently.

Christina: What I wasn't so clear on when I started was what happened in between. So that was... yeah.

Elizabeth: But interesting that they both have to do with voyaging.

Christina: Yeah, well I mean, in the end, it's funny, because it wasn't until I got to the end of the book and I suddenly realized that two bodies of information that came from experience of the actual sea and the islands themselves were the container for the whole thing. And you know, I'm not a sailor, so...

John: Have you been out on any of the historical vessels, or have you—

Christina: No, not really.

John: You've never been on a canoe that would be capable of going—

Christina: Well, I have stood on the *Hokule'a*. I mean, I have been on—

John: Oh, the *Hokule'a* itself!

Christina: The *Hokule'a* itself. In fact, in Boston, when it came to Boston in the [Mālama Honua](#) voyage around the world.

John: Can we pivot to the cultural renewal story, and maybe tell people about the *Hokule'a*? Now that I know you've actually stood on it, I'm agog. So can you walk us through Mau and Nainoa Thompson and folks like that?

Christina: Right.

Christina: So without making it too long, what happened was that in the 1950s, there was a guy in New Zealand, a historian named Andrew Sharp, who wrote a book in which he asserted that there was really no possibility that anyone could have sailed intentionally, navigated intentionally beyond 300 miles. And this just made people insane. He was not, himself, a sailor, and the people that were

really driven mad by this were not just so much Polynesians themselves who were all enraged, but also a couple of sailors, namely a guy named David Lewis and a guy named Ben Finney, one a physician, the other an anthropologist, and they are really the people who got started thinking about, "Okay, so let's look at it practically. How was it done? How could it have been done? How might it have been done?" And David Lewis figured out... He did a lot of ethnographic work, untrained ethnographer. He just went out in his sailboat into the Western Pacific and interviewed navigators and asked them, "So how do you do it?"

Christina: There were some navigators left in places like Santa Cruz Islands and in Micronesia. There really weren't any people practicing non-instrumental navigation left in Polynesia, so you couldn't just go to Polynesia and say, "Okay guys, how do you do it?" People didn't know anymore. They hadn't done it for a long time, and the really long-distance travel really hadn't been done for a long time. People would've been going between Tahiti and the Tuamotus in their little boats or whatever, but the really long-distance stuff... Tahiti to Hawaii, for example... hundreds and hundreds of years since that had been done.

John: I just thought of an analogy, and maybe it's a bad one, but that Albert Lord went to Yugoslavia, not to Greece, when he was trying to prove the Homeric oral tradition.

Christina: Exactly.

John: Sometimes you have to go to a proximate place where the cultural practice is still—

Christina: Exactly. Exactly. That's a perfect parallel. That's exactly right.

Christina: So he got these guys to tell him what they did, and he wrote it all down in this book called *We The Navigators*... which is a totally great book... and a guy named Ben Finney decided to try, and he was interested in canoe design, so he decided to try and rebuild a replica canoe. It's funny, because his first attempt was a failure. His first canoe skidded across the water sideways.

John: Oh, it had no keel?

Christina: Yeah, it had no keel. The hulls were rounded, and it was based on some model that they had, which just like, "Nope. That's wrong."

Christina: So then they went to Hawaii and they formed... well, Lewis wasn't that, but... Finney and some other guys formed this thing called The Polynesian Voyaging Society in the early 1970s in Hawaii, and they built a replica canoe, but not out of... They built it out of fiberglass and stuff, it was modern in that sense, but it was based on an old model. And they decided that in the bicentennial year of 1976, they would sail it to Tahiti and back.

Christina: So then what happened was they built their canoe and that was great, and then they went, "Okay, who's going to navigate?" And they didn't have anybody. So they asked David Lewis, and Lewis said, "Well, I recommend you go to Satawal and get this guy named Mau Pialug." They asked Mau to do it, and he came and navigated the canoe from Hawaii to Tahiti in that year using only his own understanding of what was going on.

John: Yeah.

John: And just look at a map while Christina's telling this story. I mean, that is no mean feat. I don't care how much geosynchronous tracking you might have, that's impressive, yeah.

Christina: Well, plus the really, really amazing thing... I mean, I have a slide that I sometimes use when I talk about this... which is if you look at where Mau came from, it's over in Micronesia, it's a smallish area. It's a group of islands that run mostly East/West. He wasn't traveling from there to New Zealand routinely or something. I mean, he lived within that region. And they asked him to navigate the canoe from Hawaii, a place that he had not been to, to Tahiti, a place he had not been to, which is a distance of 2400 miles North/South, which means that you're crossing latitudes, and it means that sky is changing in a major way. Different stars are available to you. I mean—

John: And the wind bands are all East/West in that—

Christina: Well, they're East/West except in the middle, because you've got to cross over the Equator.

John: Oh yeah, East/West, you've got nothing. Right.

Christina: You've got the Equator and the Doldrums. Exactly. So I mean, it was massive, what they asked him to do. A lot of times, we just go, "Oh yeah, Mau did it." But whoa!

Christina: And then there's... yeah, the story goes on, but that was the amazing first thing. And then younger people from Hawaii, including Nainoa Thompson, subsequently learned how to do it and piloted the canoe, and then several other people from different islands learned how, and Polynesian voyaging society expanded non-instrumental navigation and wayfinding.

John: Can you pull out the Bishop Museum Observatory story? Because I love that detail.

Christina: So with Mau, Lewis is there with Mau, and they're all there, and they're thinking, "Okay, Mau, we've got this thing we want you to do and it's just going to be, this is going to be hard. This is tricky. But we need to show you the sky," because there's no way he could know what stars to use, because he'd never

been there. So he wasn't going to be able to just invent, he wasn't going to be able to know what his star compass was telling him without understanding of these constellations.

Christina: So they took him to the Bishop Museum Planetarium and they rolled the sky, they moved it the way he would see it, so they trained him on the sky. And Nainoa later studied in the planetarium as well in order to really understand what the sky was going to do. It was kind of a great solution to the problem.

Christina: And also, I mean, sometimes people think it's like now you've done something that is modern, and so it's not fair, it's like cheating. But of course, if you'd grown up making those journeys, that sky would be known to you.. So it's a shortcut.

John: Yeah. I mean, to me, it just had amazing resonance with the other part of your pincer, which is the enlightenment moment where Cook met Tupaia, Tupaia being a Tahitian, is that right?

Christina: Yeah, he was... Well, he was actually from Ra'iatea, but Tahiti was a stand-in for that. For us.

John: Right. So that moment where Cook and Tupaia are trying to exchange geographic knowledge on totally different bases, but they, nonetheless, there's this fascinating chart... which you will see in the book... which represents and kind of a syncretic, synthesized knowledge.

Christina: Right. Right. Right. I mean, there's all kinds of theories about how that chart was made, because on the one hand, it's basically a chart that Tupaia drew of all the islands that he knew, and it's a lot of islands. And then people are looking at it, going, "Okay, which islands are those?" And some of them, it's clear what they are, and some of them it's really not clear what they are. And then some of them are in a strange orientation in relation to each other. So there are all these theories about how that happened.

Christina: But it is truly one of the great documents of history, because it is a physical, graphical representation of two completely different bodies of knowledge, or ways of thinking about geography, coming together and being fused.

John: Yeah, that's incredibly exciting to me, and—

Elizabeth: And ways of thinking about images and what images are supposed to be telling you.

Christina: Well absolutely. One of the other things about Tupaia, of course, is that there's a whole collection of paintings that he did that were—

John: Also reproduced in the book.

Christina: Yeah. One, I think.

John: A lobster!

Christina: But there are a lot of them, and one of the things, if you look at Polynesian graphical tradition or decorative traditions, it's basically geometric, abstract. Sometimes there's some representation, but stylized. Very stylized. The turtle, whatever, some other kind of thing. And here he is all of a sudden being exposed to people who are drawing naturalistically, and he starts to do it. He starts to do it himself. And it's so interesting. Just a fabulously... I think a brilliant person, Tupaia, and hugely adventurous, intellectually. That's how I see him.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Sort of curious.

Christina: And curious, yeah.

John: Now just to flash back to the '70s now to make the connection, because Elizabeth's going to bring up an article from the '90s... So there's this moment, which you described so compellingly in the book, where you've laid out the backstory of the *Hokule'a*, which is definitely a story of collaboration across cultures. But when it is launched, you describe the crowds in the Big Island watching it leave harbor in Hawaii. It clearly is this profound moment of cultural... I don't know, what's the right word? Empowerment? Renascence?

Elizabeth: Revitalization?

Christina: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think it was understood at the time, but in hindsight is really clearly been understood as a very important moment in Hawaiian self-determination or... yeah, a kind of renascence is what they always talk about it.

Christina: And it coincides with a lot of other things, like the revival of hula, the opening of a school of Hawaiian studies, a whole discipline of Hawaiian studies officially at the University of Hawaii, all these things are happening at the same time. So there's all this interest in language, there's interest in dance, there's interest in tattooing coming back. All of these things are happening in the '70s, and the *Hokule'a* is absolutely symbolic of that.

Christina: And it's really, the *Hokule'a* is absolutely 100% the embodiment, a symbol of Hawaiian pride, and pan-Polynesian pride, because it is, of course, shared in the sense that it's the voyaging history of all of the people of the islands.

John: Well I was actually going to ask you to unpack that one a little bit more, because...

John: Okay, so as an American citizen going to Hawaii, it's really interesting. I've always gone there with a bunch of other 19th-century academics, so you get the 19th-century backstory of Hawaii vis-a-vis the United States, which is... you

know. You can look it up, it ain't good. But I was wondering about how much that is about Hawaii specifically, or Hawaii metonymically. Do people think of that as standing in for a whole Polynesian culture? There's a sense of pan-Polynesian connectedness there—

Christina: Very, very definitely. And what happened was that... The best way to point this out or show this is that when the *Hokule'a* sails on its first voyage with Mau navigating, from Hawaii down to Tahiti, when they arrive in Tahiti... Now they've been out of radio contact, because they have no radios on the canoe, but they have had a companion vessel, which has been in radio contact with Tahiti. When they arrive in Tahiti, there are like 17,000 people in the harbor in Papeete waiting for the canoe, and they're all Tahitians. I mean, they aren't a bunch of Hawaiians who've come down to wait for it. They're like islanders in Hawaii, and everybody is so excited, and that happens over and over and over again. The canoe goes to other islands and everybody is so ecstatic.

Christina: And then, of course, they develop navigational schools involving Cook Islanders and people from the Marquesas and people from Samoa, all over the place.

John: Is New Zealand drawn into that as well?

Christina: Oh yeah. New Zealand's definitely a part of it.

Elizabeth: I mean, this is what seems so interesting and so connected to what is being revealed in the study of this puzzle of Polynesia, is this kind of whole new way of thinking about what these pieces of land are, and how connected they are to each other. And I don't know if this is the moment where I can bring in, because it's sort of all about trying to crystallize that notion...

Elizabeth: So the article that I want to talk about is by... and my apologies to our listeners who will notice if I'm not pronouncing this correctly... Epeli Hau'ofa... who's a Tongan, Fujian writer and anthropologist of Tongan descent. He was born from Tongan missionaries in the territory of Papua. He lived from 1939 to 2009, was trained and practiced as an anthropologist and a sociologist, and he's the author of a number of works, including both works of anthropology and essays and poetry.

Elizabeth: But what I wanted to talk about was a very famous essay that he wrote, published in 1994, called *Our Sea of Islands*, and it's really a kind of exhortation and argument about, rather than seeing these things as islands in the sea, we should think about them as a sea of islands. He argues that Pacific Islanders were, I'm quoting, "connected rather than separated by the sea. Far from being sea-locked peoples marooned on coral or volcanic tips of land, islanders formed an oceanic community based on voyaging." So it really seems like this, the kinds of responses you're talking about to these wayfaring expeditions, are expansions and kind of performances of that idea.

Christina: Yeah. I think it's true that a lot of Polynesians readily gravitate toward that notion of, "We are connected through the sea. We are all one people. We've been separated."

Christina: It's interesting that one of the problems, of course, the consequences of colonialism in the Pacific, is that the islands are separated by nation now, and also by language. My husband, for example, he doesn't speak French. So when we got to French Polynesia, he can't speak to the Tahitians. And they don't really have a language in common, because his Maori isn't that great.

John: If he did have good Maori, could Tahitians and—

Christina: They would do better, yeah.

John: They'd do better.

Christina: They would do a lot better. They would do well. It wouldn't be super smooth, but they would have a lot in common, so... And he can understand a lot of stuff, but it isn't—

Elizabeth: I mean, language loss is also another—

Christina: Yeah, language loss is a consequence of the whole thing. Absolutely. The fact that he doesn't, his Maori is, you know...

Elizabeth: Right. I'm sure he's not the only one, right?

Christina: Right. Totally. He's not. And Hawaiians... Anyway.

Christina: But that sense of connectedness is really... I just actually wrote a little piece about traveling in Polynesia with a Polynesian, because I go behind him when we travel in Polynesia. I stay behind him, and he engages with people, because everybody loves him.

Elizabeth: Yeah, you mention that in the book.

Christina: Yeah.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Yeah.

Elizabeth: One of the things I thought was so fascinating about this essay, and it's really beautifully written and it's written in the context of particular arguments about development and dependency and these nation-based ideas, and he's kind of arguing against that. He describes it as a form of belittlement, this sort of notion that all these tiny little poor islands, and they don't have enough resources, and they're too dependent on remittances, and he's sort of proposing this alternative view based on wayfaring, and proposing things like remittances and

traveling to go to university and other places, or to work in other places as a kind of contemporary version of wayfaring.

John: Isn't it '*wayfinding*', by the way?

Elizabeth: Sorry, wayfinding. Anyway...

Christina: You know, it's interesting, that "Our Sea of Islands" concept has been picked up by so many people. Almost nobody's written about the Pacific since then without using Hau'ofa's terminology.

John: Such a beautiful phrase. I totally thought it was a 19th-century poem or something.

Christina: Yeah, it really is. It really is. And just even in our anthropology, one of the interesting, newer... it's not really new, but it's something that people talk about a lot these days... is these areas of... What do they call them? Interaction spheres. So really, what you have is, people talk about isolated islands, and there are some isolated islands. No matter what he says, Easter Island is far away from everything else. It's hard to get to. And there are breaks between different groups because, again, partly language. Or colonial language. And also, who's running the government.

Elizabeth: He seems a little performative, or sort of hortatory in making the argument. Like he's almost trying to call it into being as he's saying—

Christina: Absolutely.

John: Well I think he says that explicitly at one point. He says, "This sense of why should I teach in a way that creates shame for me," or something like that.

Elizabeth: Yeah, yeah, he's sort of like, "This is a better way to think about it, and let's sign onto it."

Christina: Right. But that big picture of "Our Sea of Islands", where everyone's included and is kind of idealized, and what is on the ground is... and I think this is the thing that a lot of people have kind of recognized more recently... is that, say, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa is a big cluster. There's a lot of interaction there. Tahiti, the Tuamotus, Marquesas, French Polynesia, that's an interaction sphere, and what you have are these interaction spheres. And in the old days, that probably was also true, that there was a lot of interaction and travel in those areas, and this question of how much interaction there was between these spheres is the one that's kind of a little bit unclear.

Christina: How much travel was there between Tahiti and Hawaii, for example? That's a long trip. So, yeah.

Elizabeth: One of the things I thought was so interesting about the essay was he sort of describes it, coming to the idea and giving birth to this argument, and he places it at the moment of driving on the Big Island of Hawaii, and seeing the growth as an island as these volcanic deposits are being put down, and this notion that Hawaii is growing. I just thought that was such an interesting... It's not exactly the same argument, right? It's not the same argument as saying, "Well this is all part of one Oceania." It's like even the places themselves, they appear to be... and maybe this is even more telling in the moment of rising sea waters... they appear to be about to be engulfed, but actually they're not.

John: Okay, so we've put the *wayfinding* and hula revival movement of the '70s, and then also Elizabeth, you're looking in the '90s to this kind of pushback against development, the implicitly imperialistic neo-liberal logic of Development.

Elizabeth: And sort of territorial.

John: And territorial. So in the '90s, you have this sea of islands as a positive identity.

John: How does it play out over the Polynesia sphere? Like in New Zealand, how do these things percolate through? Or do they?

Christina: You know, it's really funny, because I haven't lived in New Zealand, so I often don't really know what's going on there, but I know that there are some interesting sort of... There's a way that I understand this personally, which is that I will never be a member. I will never be included. I can be accepted, but I will never be included, you know what I mean?

John: But your kids?

Christina: But my kids will be.

John: Yeah.

Christina: Absolutely. And I have a special standing as their mother. So it's okay that I can... I mean, when I say to my husband, people... There's always a certain amount of pushback if you write about a culture that you don't belong to. That's just the time we live in. So I—

Elizabeth: Particularly one that has been historically marginalized, yeah.

Christina: Right, marginalized. Absolutely. And by the people that you represent, specifically.

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Christina: So there we go.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Christina: So that's the situation I find myself in, and I worry about it a lot, and I get anxious about it, because I don't want to get attacked. I fear it. So—

John: It's awesome, because anthropologists never worry about that at all. It's so great. They're just so calm about it.

Christina: They're so lucky.

John: Something about the veranda that they sit on, I think. Can you talk about that, Elizabeth? Is it the gin-and-tonics you guys have every night, or what is it?

Elizabeth: So deeply untrue, actually. It might've been true at some time in the past, but...

John: I wish you guys thought about it less, honestly.

Elizabeth: I know, right? I have to say, one of the things I like about this "Our Sea of Islands" article is that he describes "the much-maligned anthropologist". It's, like, sticking up for the anthropologist.

John: That's really funny.

Christina: Hau'ofa is quite inclusive. His vision of what he, in another article that's related to this, it was written a few years later, he talks about how everyone can be an oceanic person, and it doesn't matter where you come from if you care about it and you take it on as a—

Elizabeth: Yeah, and in this one as well, he says, "Conquerors come, conquerors go, the ocean remains mother only to her children. This mother has a big heart, though. She adopts anyone who loves her." And actually, it's, based on what I've been reading, there's been some pushback on that, too, that that's sort of a little bit too positive or—

Christina: Well there's always pushback. I mean, half of his work is pointing out how much division there's been every time people have tried to say, "Let's be pan-this or pan-that," and everybody goes, "No, no, we're Samoans, you're Maori, you're something else—"

Elizabeth: Or, "That's writing us out."

Christina: Whatever. I mean, there's a lot of squabbling. It's inter-family, but it's still squabbling.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Elizabeth: It also seems maybe just a particular moment, like I think you can locate things like this essay in a lot of different fields and a lot of different moments in the 1980s and 1990s, and then, not surprisingly, they get people who come later who say, "Well that actually doesn't pay attention to this or that, or maybe it's going too far in that direction and we have to kind of—"

Christina: I actually had the experience, when I reread it recently, of feeling that it had a generosity to it that I felt had a little bit disappeared in some of the discourse these days. And I understand why, but I feel like there is a sharpness and a kind of territorialism. I mean, it's always a matter of territorialism, and he had a good speaking position. He was an important person, and a lot of people listened to him, so he could afford to be generous, in a way. There are people since then who have been a lot less willing to see that inclusion.

John: So has there been a durability of those distinctive markers of Polynesian-ness? Like wayfinding seems like such a distinctive cultural marker to me. There are certain kinds of things that, if you look at cultural revivals all over Europe in the 19th Century, or the Americas, that are just kind of... like foods, languages, there are certain things that have common... even though they're marked as different, there's a structural similarity.

John: Wayfinding is not like that. Hula is actually interesting. I guess dance is a commonality—

Christina: Tattoo.

John: Tattoo, right. That's really interesting.

Christina: Huge tattooing revival going on right now. Huge.

John: Which I definitely saw in Hawaii, yeah.

Christina: Yeah, and then New Zealand people are tattooing their faces again, which was not done when I was there years ago.

John: And when you say 'people', would one have to be Maori to do that, or would Pakeha also be—

Christina: I don't know. I don't know. I wouldn't do it. I mean, it would be like ...Hmmm...

John: It would be

John: But I mean, there's such a tattooing culture. There's such a general tattooing culture.

Christina: Yeah, yeah, but the face?

John: No. Right. Fair enough.

Christina: I think that would be... It's really—

John: Now tattooing, we should do a tattooing topic, actually. That'd be great. But how about the wayfinding thing? Do people take that up? Is that a... Polynesians generally take pride in that?

Christina: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

John: You see stamps or whatever?

Christina: Yeah, yeah, I think so. I mean, I think everybody... So after the *Hokule'a's* original voyages, it then did this whole series of voyages through the 1990s, where they went to all the different parts of Polynesia, then they went to Japan, they went to Alaska, they went to all these places, and then they did this round-the-world thing for three years. They took the canoe everywhere. I think that that was part... They actually have a vision of their mission as ambassadors, and their ambassadorial vision of themselves is actually beyond Polynesia, so I think it is part of that, creating...

Christina: And then there's *Moana*. I mean, all of the sudden, we have a Disney movie which is about these people and what they did. You can't even imagine that 30 or 40 years ago.

John: Right. Totally.

Christina: You could have Pocahontas, but you couldn't have *Moana*.

John: But like in the Bishop Museum, there's so much to say about the Bishop Museum. First of all, there's a shrine to Peter Buck, to Te Rangi Hīroa, where you see his personal items there... This is a New Zealand Maori guy who became an anthropologist and curator of the Bishop Museum... But also, the way-finding stuff is such a huge part of how the museum presents now. There were these movies where people testifying about what they felt like when they saw the *Hokule'a*. It's just wild.

Elizabeth: Well, I mean, it's such a concrete embodiment of a agency, right?

Christina: That, and also, if you think about it, what is the one thing that would be emblematic of that people? It would be the canoe.

John: Yeah.

Christina: Because that's how they got there.

John: Because that's where you are. I mean, that's the... yeah.

Christina: They can't be there without the canoe. Every one of them has a canoe in his background.

Christina: This is a thing that I... I was thinking about my ancestry and my husband's ancestry, and I was thinking about it, my ancestry's just kind of murky, I mean, I don't know, battles or whatever. And his is canoes, if you go back far enough.

John: Mine is beet fields all the way back.

Christina: Yeah.

John: We had very definite evidence of beets. There's just lots of beets in our family.

Elizabeth: Mine is talcum powder.

John: Really? Interesting. That's great.

John: Well I wish we had more time to talk about Peter Buck, because I think he's incredible, but maybe we should pivot, at this point, to—

Elizabeth: To our Recallable Books?

John: Recallable Books, yes.

Elizabeth: Okay. Yeah.

Elizabeth: All right, well maybe I'll start, because it's sort of connected to what we were saying, in the sense that it's a work by an anthropologist, Nancy Munn. And I think this is sort of an interesting example of the question of who can write about whom, and also maybe a related question that we haven't talked about as much, but I find really fascinating, is *who is generating theory, and who's generating information?* So the stereotype, the... I mean, it's not completely untrue, of European and Northern anthropologists is that they come with their theories and then they're just collecting. They imagine that they're the ones who are providing the thinking and then people in the Global South are just providing the so-called data.

Elizabeth: One of the things that I love about his book, *The Fame of Gawa*, which is by Nancy Munn, is that it's really proposing a theory of value, and it's based on the transformation of trees to canoes, and the voyaging out from Gawa, which is an island that's part of the Trobriand system and is involved in some of the Kula ring mobility that Malinowski wrote about... but it's really about, she defines, at one point, value as the--this is a little bit of a jargony phrase, but—"the expansion of inter subjective spacetime". But it's really this idea of expansion and moving out, and by moving out, you're increasing this notion which she translates as fame, but she really thinks of it as a theory of value, and that theory has been the kind of idea of value as action, as motion, as transforming

the still into the moving, has been picked up by many other anthropologists... probably the most famous one is David Graeber, but many other anthropologists, and really taking it as a theory, not just like, "This is some evidence and we're going to apply our theory to it," but, "Let's think about, this is how Gawans think about it, and what does that tell us about the world, and not just the world—"

John: Man, it really puts the Great American Road novel into a more global perspective. I appreciate that. Jack Kerouac, eat your canoe out. Yeah.

Elizabeth: Right, and it definitely has a masculinist cast, speaking of of Jack Kerouac—

John: That is very interesting.

Elizabeth: Cast to it. So that's my—

John: All right, well there needs to be a *Thelma and Louise* side of it, too. Cool.

John: And Christina, can we ask you?

Christina: Well so, I guess a book that is not... It's fairly recent. It's by Sam Low, L-O-W, and it's called *Hawaiki Rising*, and I'm basically giving it a shout-out because Sam is actually related to Nainoa Thompson. He is a filmmaker, he made a film about the *Hokule'a* a long time ago. He's been a documentary filmmaker for a long time, but he wrote this book about these episodes we were talking about, when they took the canoe to Tahiti in the 1970s, but he did it based almost entirely on interviews with the people who were the players, the people who were there. So it's basically a documentary record... literally like a documentary film... a documentary record of, what is to me I think the single most important episodes in this history, and so it was a huge service to mankind to get that stuff on the record, and he had access in a way that a lot of people wouldn't have because he was kind of related, and so people would talk to him and-so-forth.

Christina: He published it a couple of years ago, and you can get it on Amazon.

John: Yeah. That sounds great.

Elizabeth: And we'll provide a link on our website.

John: I just want to clarify, because I feel like this is a *New York Timesy* kind of thing... so no relation between Nainoa Thompson and Christina Thompson?

Christina: Right, that's right. No relation there.

John: And you've never even actually met him, right?

Christina: I actually haven't. I've met his mother and I've met his uncle. Oh, and his brother-in-law. And his sister.

John: Okay. I'd love to meet the guy. Very impressive.

John: Okay. So I am actually... I sort of want to take a slightly different angle, which sounds academic and then soon veers from the sublime to the ridiculous. I didn't want to cite *The Gulag Archipelago*, but I did kind of want to think about the *archipelagic* in an academic context, so I went looking for archipelagic articles, like articles that thought about islanding... and maybe I just did the wrong kind of search, but I was really struck that since John Pocock way back in the '70s, I think, proposed thinking about a British archipelago, there really has not been a lot of serious upscaling or mainstreaming of the notion of thinking about the significance of "Sea of Islands" thinking, in terms of shaping how/where our paradigms come from. So basically, my recallable book is like, why aren't there more things about the archipelagic imagination?

John: And then the ridiculous turn to it is that I do want to recommend a book that I probably have even recommended it before. I want to recommend Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy, which is... I make no claims that it has anything Polynesian to it at all, though she has this interesting anthropological background, but it's archipelagic. The structure of the books is that people move from island to island. The opening line is, "The island of Gont, a single mountain that lifts its peak a mile above the storm-wracked northeast sea," so it's probably a volcanic island, "is a land famous for wizards."

John: And then the structure, as she herself has said, the structure is basically like every island has its stories, and that people move from island to island and the stories change as the stars change. So if you're interested in the concept of the archipelagic, but you want to read a kids' book, then read *The Wizard of Earthsea*.

Elizabeth: It's a really amazing kids' book.

John: A really amazing kids' book.

Christina: It's actually available now, all six volumes are now available in one volume, with notes by Le Guin, sort of contemporary notes about each piece.

John: Yeah, and actually, her notes about what she was up to, and her notes also about things she regrets about earlier visions of... not so much of race, because I think she's pretty great on race, but on gender, she's... yes. She's interesting on her own, how she feels like she was trapped by that sort of male-centric narratives that she kind of managed to evade later on.

Elizabeth: Well it's a certain kind of feminism that she evokes in that one that she actually gets past in other things like *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

John: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's right.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

John: Okay, so I'm just going to end this really awesome and generous conversation with... Christina, thank you so much. I'm just going to end by saying *Recall This Book* is hosted by John and Elizabeth, music comes from a song by Eric Chasalow and Barbara Cassidy, sound editing's by Claire Ogden, website design and social media is done by Matthew Schratz from the English Department.

John: We always want to hear from you with our comments, criticism, or suggestions for a future episode. You know how to email us directly, you can contact us via social media or our website.

John: And finally... This the main thing. I know I say it over and over, but I always feel it and mean it. If you enjoyed today's show, please be sure to write a review or to rate us on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you get your podcast. You may be interested in checking out past episodes, which include topics like opiate addiction, the iconology of strong female politicians with Manduhai Buyandelger, old and new media, as well as interviews with Sam Delany, Madeleine Miller, and a forthcoming one with the Chinese sci-fi great Cixin Liu 00:41:42. So from all of us here to all of you, thanks for listening.