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Marlo Starr Date

"Blue Caribbean/Black Pacific: Contemporary Women's Poetry and Publishing Practices"

By

Marlo Starr
Doctor of Philosophy

English

_____

Valérie Loichot
Advisor

_____

Erin Suzuki
Advisor

_____

Deepika Bahri
Committee Member

_____

Nathan Suhr-Sytsma
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____

Date

"Blue Caribbean/Black Pacific: Contemporary Women's Poetry and Publishing Practices"

By

Marlo Starr
B.A. Rutgers University–Newark, 2008

Advisors: Valérie Loichot, PhD
Erin Suzuki, PhD

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

"Blue Caribbean/Black Pacific: Contemporary Women's Poetry and Publishing Practices"
By Marlo Starr

Challenging views of island and tropical spaces as ahistorical, "Blue Caribbean/Black Pacific" crosses two disparate geographies and areas of postcolonial study. By interweaving Indigenous Oceanic voyages with Caribbean trajectories and following black Atlantic discourses into the Pacific, this dissertation interrogates the willed lacuna between African diasporic and Indigenous experiences. The comparative literary frame addresses entrenched views of gender and geography that push women and "natives" into the background in both nationalist discourses and transnational literary circuits. By mapping water as connector rather than divider, theorists from each region link islands and coastal spaces into federations. Putting these supposed peripheries into direct dialogue rather than through a metropolitan center creates a meta-archipelago across the Global South. By focusing exclusively on women's poetry, this study contributes new directions to comparative archipelagic studies by considering models of Indigenous and locally grounded feminisms. The women poets explored here challenge masculine literary prestige and patriarchal nationalisms through the formal aesthetic of weaving, which evokes communal senses of identity and interrelationship with the environment. The Caribbean poets under analysis, including Grace Nichols and Mahadai Das from circum-Caribbean Guyana and Olive Senior from Jamaica, recuperate Amerindian epistemologies to articulate relationships to place beyond settler colonial frameworks. Meanwhile, Pacific poets such as Hawaiian Haunani Kay Trask, i-Kiribati Teresia Teaiwa, and Marshallese Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner critique belittling views of islands used to justify colonial violence, from military occupation to atomic weapons testing. Whereas the Caribbean was once conceived as a virginal space awaiting European discovery, the Pacific Ocean is seen as an empty basin for depositing nuclear waste. Juxtaposing different types of exploitation exposes continuities between European imperialism of the past and American colonialism in the present. In bringing women's poetry from the Caribbean and Pacific into critical conversation, the dissertation aims to show how gendered logic dictates which stories are told and which remain unheard—in popular consciousness, in the global literary market, and in academic conversations. Through Indigenous approaches and poetry's imaginative potential, these women writers create visions of resistance and survival based on a shared sense of origins and stewardship of the planet.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Weaving the Archipelagic Imagination

Interrupting the image of male sailors adventuring across uncharted waters, Pacific women scholars ask us to reconsider dominant narratives of travel and progress. In a special issue of *Pacific Studies,* "Women Writing Oceania: Weaving the Sails of the Vaka" (2007), editors Caroline Sinavaina and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui posit that women's labor makes sea voyaging possible. Because women are the weavers of sails in traditional Polynesian and Micronesian societies, "women's social power is materially associated with the actual generation of mobility itself" (5). Sinavaina and Kauanui reverse gendered notions of travel that place men at the helms of ships and strand women at home. Rather than "mere" private, domestic work, weaving becomes an act of cultural production that reinforces communal bonds and feminine lineages, as practices are passed down across generations. Counter to narratives that imagine freedom as an uprooting or untethering from place, the trajectory of the *vaka*, or traditional ocean-going canoe, is enabled by woven sails that carry both the wind and deep traces of home.

In this sense, weaving challenges the conflation of women's bodies with the landscape and, thus, with stasis and passivity. The feminization of the earth is perhaps the oldest and most pervasive trope in colonial literary history.[1] Beyond the symbolic implications of "virgin islands," "motherlands," and analogies that appropriate rape, these gendered metaphors create specific dilemmas in the lives of real women and obscure capital's multiple modes of

[1] Notable examples include Christopher Columbus's imagining of the globe as a giant female breast with a protruding nipple (McClintock 21), European explorers lusting after "virgin" islands, and Paul Gaugin's eroticization of French Polynesia (Teaiwa 250–254). This sexualization of geography represents one dominant tendency in this gendered logic, but metaphors of the nation as a mother ("motherland") or space as a womb also represent common conflations of female sexual reproduction and land.

subordinating women (McClintock 31).[2] In an interrelated (and equally hackneyed) move, Indigenous peoples are also figuratively bound to the landscape and, thus, contained in a pre-modern past. Easily taken for granted, the dusty trope that naturalizes both women's bodies and Indigenous peoples with land proves itself infinitely renewable, an insidious force that continues to appear in modern-day mappings of the globe.

My comparative dissertation seeks to address the entrenched views of gender and geography that push women and "natives" into the background in both nationalist discourses and transnational literary circuits. Interrogating the gendered logic that renders islands as insignificant and land and sea as empty, my study crosses the unlikely areas of the Caribbean and Pacific Islands—two regions that are separated by geography, ethno-cultural and linguistic makeup, and colonial legacy. Despite major differences, these island territories of the Global South are uniquely defined by their archipelagic histories. Postcolonial thinkers of the Caribbean and the Pacific envision archipelagoes that unify their respective regions.[3] By mapping water as connector rather than divider, the archipelagic imagination creates a coalitional identity that networks diverse island spaces and peoples. Because my geographical framing of the circum-Caribbean links the islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles to the South American continent, I refer to "island spaces" to encapsulate islands and coastal connections. Expanding this

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[2] See Shona Jackson's "Race, Sex, and Historical Tension in the Search for the West Indian Subject" for a critique of Antonio Benítez-Rojo's use of womb and rape metaphors in *The Repeating Island.* Jackson contends that, among other issues, Benítez-Rojo's references to the Caribbean as a raped womb "does not address woman's subordination under capital and through multiple modes of production" (213).

[3] As discussed in more detail in the following sections, Kamau Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and Derek Walcott all conceptualize the Caribbean as a unified region using different imagery. In the Pacific, Epeli Hau'ofa and Albert Wendt imagine the islands of the region as connected through shared origins in the ocean and shared ocean-voyaging histories.

archipelagic reach to transgress Eurocentric hemispheric divides generates a "dynamic linking sub-text," to borrow a phrase from Caribbeanist Sylvia Wynter, which calls into question the "presuppositions of the major text" (Wynter 355, 356). For my purposes, the "major text" refers both to dominant literary canons and global cartographies that shape publishing politics. Bridging these Atlantic and Pacific worlds also puts the competing claims of diasporic and Indigenous identities directly into dialogue. Relying on water-based rather than land-based cartographies, this study conceptualizes a meta-archipelago that links the former plantation colonies of the Caribbean—the arc of islands extending from Jamaica to Trinidad and Tobago to the coast of South America—and the Oceanic constellation that connects Papua New Guinea to Fiji to Hawai'i, where Indigenous populations maintain an ongoing political presence.

In interrogating gendered notions of mobility and stasis, I focus on contemporary writings by women, primarily from the 1970s to the present, from these (post)colonial islands and archipelagoes.[4] My study examines the ways in which women writers negotiate literary traditions from which they have been excluded, but it also considers the alternative frames they present to masculine forms of literary prestige. Similar to Sinavaina and Kauanui's evocation of weaving, the women poets under analysis emphasize communal senses of identity and interrelationship with the environment that contrasts with the heroic individualism of the normative male poet. By concentrating exclusively on women's writing, specifically poetry written (mostly) in English, I seek to contribute new directions to comparative archipelagic studies by considering models of Indigenous and locally grounded feminisms represented within

[4] The various geo-political contexts examined here are diverse in terms of the level of formal colonial control. Hawai'i, for example, is currently a colony of the United States, while other postcolonial nations may be free from formal foreign rule but continue to grapple with and resist the economic and cultural dominance of western powers.

these understudied works. Through Indigenous approaches and aesthetics, the women poets in this dissertation create visions of resistance and survival based on a shared sense of origins and stewardship of the planet. Following the global sweep of independence movements that marked the decades following WWII, nations across the Caribbean and the Pacific achieved formal independence but also saw increased capitalist penetration, tourism, and foreign military presence within their regions. In comparing the writings of women poets from diverse (post)colonial contexts, I investigate shared experiences of marginalization based on double jeopardies of Euro-American (neo)colonization and local gender hierarchies that resonate across disparate Atlantic and Pacific identity categories—specifically the opposed positionalities of migrant and native.

Indigenous Pacific and Local Caribbean Feminisms

I stay behind
weaving fine baskets
of resilience

to carry our daughters in.

—Haunani Kay Trask, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (56)

The distant tributaries of my blood.
The tribe that once took succor
in staying together
is now scattered to the fourways [. . .]
the voice of a beloved
stays warm yet still stranded
from the shore of my skin.

—Grace Nichols, *Startling the Flying Fish* (8)

Through their use of weaving imagery, the above epigraphs signal two different senses of how travel and migration have been cast as masculine. In each of the poems, which emerge from respective Caribbean settler and native Pacific contexts, the two feminine speakers remain confined to the land while others venture out, and yet, power is invested in their rootedness. In Native Hawaiian Haunani Kay Trask's "Sons," the speaker is unapologetic that she is yet to bear sons; instead, she is busy braiding "the rope of resistance" for future generations (55). Though she acknowledges that "sons are not / so earthbound" as she, her task is to weave "baskets of resilience" to carry future daughters (55, 56). For Trask's speaker, men might have greater privileges in terms of travel, but earthbound women take up the work of resilience and resistance to colonial oppression. She works in anticipation of a new generation of women, imagining a stridently female Hawaiian future. Meanwhile, Guyanese poet Grace Nichols depicts a rooted feminine presence whose "tributaries of blood" weave across distances. Nichols's mythical mother figure, the Cariwoma, laments the scattering of her tribe while also conjuring an uncommon image of diaspora: rather than depicting uprooted bodies, the speaker physically radiates across geographies. Co-extensive with the environment, she grieves her departed kin yet still feels them warm against "the shore of [her] skin" (8). While dominant theorizations of the Caribbean, such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1992), engraft Guyana's non-island space into the Antilles through a shared plantation history, Nichols's archipelago joins islands and continents through the connective thread of Amerindian presences. Though they emerge from very different contexts, both poems take up questions of travel and ultimately trouble linear notions of national progress: through dwelling in place, each speaker achieves a more expansive identity.

Though she represents a migrant subjectivity descended from former slave populations, Nichols centers Amerindian epistemologies so often ignored in Caribbean and wider postcolonial discourses. In the poststructural critique that characterizes certain dominant strands of postcolonial theory—based in an intellectual tradition that celebrates fluidity, diaspora, and hybridity as liberatory—native prior land claims are frequently dismissed as essentialist and anti-miscegenistic.[5] This does little for Indigenous populations within settler colonial societies, such as the United States, who have yet to experience the "post" promised in the term "postcolonial." Nichols's figure of the "Cariwoma" provides a poetic intervention where theory fails: while "Indigenous people have been pushed to the vanishing point in critical theory" (Byrd 3), the Cariwoma represents a paradox of groundedness in place and outward movement, the connective spirit of the Caribbean who travels with the diaspora without ever leaving home. She also offers a more inclusive sense of feminine embodiment unrealized in western feminism's "universalist" model. Inextricable from the Caribbean landscape, she carries the "Atlantic coastline" and the islands in her "coral bones"; yet, her investment in the local cannot be read as provincial or stagnant, as the supernatural Cariwoma moves fluidly between histories and geographies (9). Traversing the length of the Americas, she contains the histories of Mayans in Meso-America alongside Caribs in the Antilles and the Wapishana in South America (38).

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[5] Tending to privilege the migrant or exiled figure, postcolonial studies can be bracketed under the vogueish label of "travelling theory," says Graham Huggan, and in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Gayatri Spivak points out the occlusion of the native through the norm of the postcolonial migrant (qtd. in Moreton-Robinson 8; Byrd xxxi). Because the diasporic subject comes to represent *the* challenger to colonial hegemony, other subaltern identities, including those displaced in place, are eclipsed. I-Kiribati poet–scholar Teresia Teaiwa, whose writing is examined in more depth in Chapter Three, goes so far as to say that postcolonial theory has abandoned the native (Byrd, xxxii). Additionally, Guarav Desai speculates that this emphasis on exile and movement is based **"**on the rise of a particular form of poststructural critique that questions the privileging of essences, boundaries and fixed identities" (64).

In a Caribbean context, Wynter considers the ways in which women of color do not fit into dominant models of "modern subject"; she is beyond the imagination of western frames, including feminism and Marxist materialism (Wynter 364). Because the white, European woman is "canonized" as the ideal object of desire, she becomes the figure through which men "mediate their respective power struggles" (Wilks 18). Accounting for the "raced" woman's subjectivity, however, would create an epistemological shift, opening possibility for a conception of humanity beyond the "'consolidated field' of our present mode of being/feeling/knowing" (Wynter 364). I use "raced" woman here rather than black, native, or woman of color to emphasize the process by which she becomes "raced." Wynter refers to the absent woman in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* the would-be mate of Caliban. Because Wynter reads Caliban as simultaneously African and Arawak, by extension, his hypothetical partner would also simultaneously represent native and enslaved positionalities. The ethnic conflation speaks to Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd's theory of "colonial cacophony," or the conflicting moral claims of diasporic arrivals and natives produced through colonial processes, a concept that I explore more in following chapters (xiii). Mediating these competing discourses (and against assumptions of a universal "woman" predicated on European conceptions of the human), Nichols's Cariwoma offers a model of female empowerment that is specific to Caribbean localities while also attentive to African and Amerindian histories, arrivant and native identities.

Further complicating discussions of global feminism, Pacific feminist scholars work to distinguish the place of Indigenous women within the category of "Third World Woman." Because "feminism" is often regarded as a colonial import, struggles for gender equality draw from Indigenous traditions. According to Hawaiian literary historian ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui, the concept of *mana wahine*— in which "mana is 'power,' usually referring to the spirit or

essence of something living" and "wahine is 'female'"— can be found throughout Oceania and embodies feminist ideas but use of the term "feminism" is problematic "because mana wahine predates the Western concept" (132). In particular, mana wahine is distinct from western notions of feminism because its power is "ultimately linked to 'āina" or land and ancestry" (ho'omanawanui 201). Understood through the figure of the Hawaiian goddess Pele, who births the land through cycles of volcanic destruction and creation, this feminine power is rooted in *aloha āina* (love of the land) but also represents a dynamic, adaptive, and expansive sense of Indigeneity. As ho'omanawanui explains, the epic of Pele is not documented in one authoritative text but is told through multiple *mo'olelo* (oral or written traditions). Counter to western notions of "fixed" precontact societies, the mythology of Pele embodies the Native Hawaiian concept of *makawalu*, which literally means "eight eyes" and refers to "analysis from multiple perspectives or dimensions" (xl). Beyond the methods through which her story is told, Pele herself, as the goddess of the volcano, resists notions of native culture as stagnant and outmoded. Pele's volcanic eruptions overturn the old order, but for every inch of land that the lava covers, several new inches of soil are produced.

Rather than transcending local particularity or relinquishing place, these ethnically and regionally specific models of feminism emerge from deep relations with the environment. Bringing these Caribbean and Pacific feminisms in conversation with each other, and with postcolonial feminist theory more broadly, reveals stark differences, uncanny parallels, and overlapping agendas between feminist and Indigenous struggles. Building on recent innovations in feminist and trans-Indigenous studies, I examine the concurrent constructions and exclusions

of "woman" and "native" within contemporary forms of colonialism.[6] As a work of literary feminism that seeks to study and raise the visibility of women's writing that provides alternatives to settler colonial frames, my dissertation considers national literary traditions and wider circuits of postcolonial publishing. I ask: how do women writers respond to male-dominated poetic traditions, and how does poetry's relative marginality in postcolonial studies also speak to the marginality of women poets—and perhaps more broadly, to the place of Pacific and Caribbean women in nationalistic discourses?

My title "Blue Caribbean/Black Pacific," whose "blue" and "black" codings are explained in more detail in a following section, foregrounds my approach of reading across geographic and historical contexts—extending the parameters of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1995) to the Pacific and reading the Caribbean alongside native Pacific concepts of identity that emphasize the ocean as origin. In order to draw out alliances between feminist and Indigenous concerns while preserving individual differences, I apply the methods of "reading across," invoked by literary scholar Chadwick Allen, and of reading silences within master narratives, associated with feminist critique.[7] Allen's methodologies in *Trans-Indigenous* (2012) are instructive as he considers ways that Indigenous literatures, such as Maori and Amerindian texts, can be read in relation to each other rather than

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[6] See Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous* (2012), discussed in the following paragraph.

[7] I refer broadly to the feminist method of reading absences but also am influenced, in particular, by Wynter's "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's Woman" (1990), cited in my discussion of alternative Caribbean feminisms. In her examination of the absent figure in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* Caliban's feminine counterpart, Wynter's method is not to privilege gender as the only or ultimate site of analysis; instead, she identifies how the erasure of woman is concurrent to the subordination of racial and ethnic groups (366).

against dominant models. Reading across, then, presents a form of analysis that puts supposed peripheries into direct dialogue rather than through a metropolitan center. I extend and modify Allen's approach by juxtaposing asymmetrical subject positions of Caribbean arrivants and Pacific natives. While there is need for further cross-cultural comparison of Indigenous texts from the Caribbean and the Pacific, my study puts inherently opposed positionalities into dialogue in order to center Indigenous approaches in discourses where they have largely been suppressed. An examination of colonialism's gendered logic reveals how Indigenous removal is not incidental but foundational to the liberal multicultural settler nation-state[8]. Bringing arrivant and native identities in conversation through an analysis of gender exposes underlying settler colonial structures that marginalize women in the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Ocean Roads: Indigenous and Diasporic Crossings

Even with the global turn in literary studies, the Caribbean and Pacific rarely appear in the same critical conversations, in part because of their disparate colonial legacies. The Caribbean, associated with the Atlantic and with European colonialism, became defined as a region through the plantation system, its violent beginnings in the Middle Passage and continuation through the Triangular Trade. The Pacific, on the other hand, is marked by a

[8] In *The White Possessive,* Aileen Moreton-Robinson contends that colonialism functions through a logic of possession, which turns Indigenous land into alienable commodity. Moreton-Robinson writes: "The existence of white supremacy as hegemony, ideology, epistemology, and ontology requires *the possession of Indigenous lands as its proprietary anchor within capitalist economies* such as the United States. This point is rarely addressed in the African American whiteness studies literature, despite its focus on structural conditions and institutionalized forms of power" (xix, emphasis mine). Additionally, the authors of *Asian Settler Colonialism* demonstrate how anti-racist neoliberal discourses remain anchored in a fundamental disavowal of Indigenous prior land claims.

different (and in US political contexts, perhaps newer) brand of imperialism. Though it has endured centuries of varying of levels foreign dominance from both Asian and European powers, the Pacific has most recently been claimed as a strategic military and economic site by the United States, illustrated by the Obama Administration's claim that the twenty-first century is "America's Pacific Century."[9] Additionally, native cultures maintain a continuing political presence in the Pacific Islands in contrast to the Caribbean, where they have largely been (assumed to be) exterminated. Because of these differences, speaking in broad terms, hybridity and creolization have traditionally been celebrated in Caribbean studies, whereas Indigenous Pacific discourses tend to emphasize genealogical and ancestral ties to the land.

Despite these historical and cultural disparities, recent works, discussed below, challenge assumptions about the incommensurability of these Atlantic and Pacific worlds, drawing parallels in order to interrogate colonial power structures. In order to make the case for the need for further comparative study, I briefly outline recent developments in Caribbean and Pacific studies and their respective places in the field of postcolonial studies in order to highlight how "reading across" can work to address gaps in both fields.

In Caribbean studies, informed by creolization theory proposed by Barbados-born Kamau Brathwaite and Martinican poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant's theories of Relation, touchstone

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[9] See then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2011 article touting the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), "America's Pacific Century," in *Foreign Policy* magazine: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/ >. As Yuan Shu and David E. Pease explain in their introduction to *American Studies as Transnational Practice,* the Cold War made the Asia-Pacific important to the US as a strategic region for political, military, and economic expansion. Obama's announcement of the pivot to Asia "was in part an effort to reassure countries that had been uneasy about the impact of China's economic and military build-up in the region," but beyond the TPP—which the following administration abandoned—the turn to the transpacific reflects longer historical patterns of US expansion and a return to Cold War policies (3).

scholarly works articulate the diverse island nations that make up the Antilles as a region through the formation of "New World" Creole identities. The "eruption" of Caribbean history produced through the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent importation of indentured laborers incited a mixing of Amerindian, African, European, and South Asian cultures, a process of creolization that theorists see as uniting the disparate nodes of the region. For example, Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott's Nobel Lecture "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" (1992) famously imagined the region as a fragmented yet fluid archipelago, creating a vision of cohesion through the accumulation of broken pieces. In a similar vein, Antonio Benítez-Rojo's. *The Repeating Island,* published the same year as Walcott's lecture, conceptualizes a Caribbean "meta-archipelago," which Benítez-Rojo explains is no ordinary archipelago because it has "neither a boundary nor a center" (4). He bases his theory on recurring structures across the islands marked by the plantation system, defining the beginning of Caribbean history with the introduction of the slave economy. Following Benítez-Rojo, comparative works such as J. Michael Dash's *The Other America* (1998) and Chris Bongie's *Islands and Exiles* (1998) have been formative in defining pan-Caribbean theories of literature and culture. Indeed, Bongie's work presses against even regional frameworks, concluding his study of the Caribbean with a chapter on Aotearoan/New Zealander Keri Hulme's *The Bone People.* Laying ground for Caribbean–Pacific comparative studies, Bongie looks to *The Bone People* to emphasize a need to balance the recent emphasis on hybridity (in both Caribbean and postcolonial theory more broadly) with more rooted or fixed forms of identity. Most recently, Shona Jackson's *Creole Indigeneity* (2012) critiques masculinist formations of hybrid identity as well as diasporic theories, made popular in wider discussions of black internationalism by Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*. Focusing on Guyana, Jackson contends that the formation of Creole identity is an "indigenizing process," which

assumes prior claim to the land by subordinating surviving Indigenous peoples (5). Indeed, Brathwaite's foundational creolization theory suggests that "African slaves replaced Indigenous peoples as the folk tradition of the Caribbean," suppressing Amerindian political presence in dominant understandings of Caribbean society (Byrd xxxvi). By bringing settler or arrivant colonialism to the foreground, Jackson reveals how the articulation of postcolonial Creole identity in the Caribbean relies on the continued erasure of Indigenous populations. Interventions such as *Creole Indigeneity*, which call for a shift to issues of Indigeneity, also force a reconsideration of the way the Caribbean has traditionally been defined as a region. What unifies Caribbean society is not only the African diaspora but also the subordination of native peoples, whose near-invisibility in Creole discourses demands further examination.

Meanwhile in Pacific contexts, recent cultural theorists also emphasize a regional, archipelagic identity. Despite ethnic and nationalistic differences between the Pacific Islands, influential writers describe a connected Pacific, not wholly unlike the Caribbean meta-archipelago. In the first stand-alone issue of *Mana,* the first pan-Pacific literary journal, Samoan Albert Wendt's essay "Toward a New Oceania" (1976) announced a new era of confidence and celebration of Pacific Islander history following the "wounds of colonialism" (qtd. in Va'ai 207). Wendt's invocation of "Oceania" articulated a sense of regional identity and shared origins in the ocean rather individual islands. According to Pacific scholar Sina Va'ai, the "explosion in Pacific writing" in the 1970s tended to address a common enemy in colonization; however, by the 1980s, writers turned to topics of internal corruption and neocolonial structures in the islands (Va'ai 212). Michelle Keown discusses how the regionalist ideology of the "Pacific Way," a regionalist ideology that emerged in the 1970s, was eroded by neocolonialism and co-optation neo-colonial elites within national contexts (*Pacific Islands Writing* 117). Seventeen years after

Wendt's essay, Tongan anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands" (1993) reinvigorated a sense of archipelagic identity. In "Our Sea of Islands," Hau'ofa refers to Indigenous traditions of ocean voyaging that established a network of inter-island exchange long before the colonial encounter, and as corrective to the colonial perceptions of the Pacific, he argues, "There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' and as 'a sea of islands'" (31). Following Hau'ofa, the anthology *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999), edited by Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, conceptualizes Indigenous Pacific identity as "inside out," preserving local/insular traditions while also engaging with outside forces, such as dynamics of global capital and transculturation.

However, despite its strong tradition of anti-colonial writing, Pacific Island literature is largely ignored by western academia and the global publishing market. According to Keown's *Pacific Islands Writing* (2007), which represents the one of the most recent overviews of the field, while Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean are established regions in postcolonial studies, a survey of recent of books on postcolonial literature "reveals few (if any references) to New Zealand, and almost no references to the Pacific Islands" (*Postcolonial Pacific Writing* 8). In the American academy, this omission is particularly glaring. Despite the fact that the Pacific has historically "been a 'strategic' site of American Empire"—in terms of "capitalism, militarism, nuclearism, tourism, urbanism, missionization, and plantationism throughout the islands"—Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez points out the irony that the Pacific "has also been strategically invisible to the popular and scholarly American imaginary" (622, 623). In addition, Pacific Islander groups are often subsumed into Asian or Asian American designations, which obscures the specific political statuses and investments of Pacific Islander populations. In Hawai'i, for example, where Asian immigrants make up a large portion of the settler population,

the term "Asia-Pacific" collapses ethnicities and blurs native Hawaiian struggles for sovereignty.[10] Formulations of the transpacific as well, which extends from economic discourses of the Asia-Pacific and Pacific Rim, marginalize Pacific Islander histories (Suzuki 352). As Wilson and Arif Dirlik have observed, Pacific Rim discourses routinely ignore the island nations of the "Pacific Basin," and a number of Pacific Island scholars have discussed the tendency in Asian American studies to "exclude, elide, or appropriate Pacific Island histories and perpectives" (356–357).[11] Similar to the way that Indigenous issues are relatively absent in dominant theorizations of the Caribbean, Indigenous struggles in the Pacific are conveniently invisible in the American colonial consciousness and in mappings of both the transpacific and Asia-Pacific.

Recent comparative works seek to address this lacuna by bridging the cognitive distance between the Pacific Islands and their Caribbean neighbors, drawing out historical resemblances and intersections. As indicated by its title, Elizabeth DeLoughrey's *Routes and Roots* (2007), the first sustained comparative study of Caribbean and Pacific Island literatures, shares Bongie's concern with both hybrid and rooted identities. Subverting the myth of island isolation, DeLoughrey's reading methodology draws from two concepts respectively emerging from Caribbean and Pacific theoretical frames. First, Brathwaite's theory of "tidalectics" presents an alternative geopolitical model that engages the dynamic relation between land and sea. Rather

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[10] For more, see Kaunaui's "Asian American Studies and the 'Pacific Question'" and Lisa Kahaleole Hall's "Which of These Things Is Not Like the Other: Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders Are Not Asian Americans, and All Pacific Islanders Are Not Hawaiian." Also see *Asian Settler Colonialism* (2008) edited by Candace Fujikan and Jonathan Okamura.

[11] In her overview of the transpacific in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature,* Erin Suzuki lists Pacific scholars Kauanui, Amy Ku'leialoha Stillman, and Vicente Diaz among those who have critiqued this transnational turn in Asian American studies.

than fixed continents and islands and empty seas, a tidalectic model maps submarine continuities and historical exchanges that transcend the "terrestrial boundaries" of space (3). Second, DeLoughrey links Brathwaite's fluid space–time continuum to the Pacific image of "moving islands" or "etak," a traditional navigational system, which imagines the voyaging canoe as fixed while space moves past the vessel (3). This reconceptualization of space and time provides a rationale for inter-island comparison and engagement between Indigenous and cultural studies. For my purposes, the reconfiguration of space through tidalectics can be extended into gendered zones of "private" and "public," disrupting the presumed fixity of these divisions. The etak, likewise, call into question dominant temporal models of linear progress and thus gendered binaries of activity and stasis. Together, DeLoughrey's pairing of Pacific and Caribbean concepts reconfigures gendered divisions of time and space, which I extend to reconsider women's role in writing history.

Routes and Roots and DeLoughrey's larger body of critical oceanic studies open the way for further comparative study, such as Anthony Carrigan's *Postcolonial Tourism* (2011), which examines how neocolonialism in the form of tourism impacts small island nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific. For my purposes, Carrigan's search for a "middle ground" between Indigenous and diasporic concerns are particularly informative in imagining a sustainable future in postcolonial settings. These comparative works make the present study possible by drawing connections between unlikely fields, revealing confluences not only between different types of geographic exploitation but also between rooted and un-rooted identities.

Adding to this burgeoning field of archipelagic comparatism, I turn attention to women's writing to consider parallel patterns of exclusion that repeat across Caribbean and Pacific geographies. I draw on feminist critique to identify recurring power structures that cut across the

(post)colonial Atlantic and Pacific contexts. DeLoughrey's critical intervention in highlighting the gendered dimension of diasporic discourses drives much of my thinking, as does feminist scholar Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995), which analyzes how the colonial gaze feminizes *terra incognita* as empty and passive while simultaneously gendering Indigenous and colonized populations, which are conflated with the land, as feminine. While McClintock cautions against obfuscating differences between race, class, and gender, she also argues that these categories "come into existence in and through each other" (5); McClintock's examinations of gender's entanglements with race and class are important for my study, in which I consider the feminization of island geographies and their native populations, alongside the marginalization of women within the nation-state, national literary traditions, and publishing markets. Given that "no postcolonial state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state," women from diverse (post)colonial contexts share a dubious relationship to the promise offered by the term "post" (McClintock 13–14).

Therefore, two central themes circulate throughout my dissertation: continuities (and discontinuities) in 1) women's relationships to the local—to the nation and to native identity, which at times overlap and other times conflict—and 2) to the global—to world literary markets and the influence of foreign powers on local culture and environment. Ultimately, against the colonial gaze that compartmentalizes the world into gendered spaces, women's shared experiences of marginalization on both local and global scales generate a more networked mapping, building affinities between disparate ethnic identities, between native and arrivant, and between Pacific and Atlantic. Engaging with local women of color and Indigenous experiences, which do not readily fit into "universalist," western models of feminism, works to deconstruct notions of a universal woman or woman's experience.

Reading the Pacific and the Caribbean through "Black" and "Blue" Filters

My title takes its cue from recent scholarly works that seek to expand the parameters of Black Atlantic discourses, as well as from the concept of the "Blue Revolution," which poses an alternate mapping of the globe, visualizing the sea as a connective force rather than as vacant space. As DeLoughrey explains in the introduction to *Routes and Roots,* the Blue Revolution emerged from the 1982 U. N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was created by "contestations over ocean governance," and called for "a resolution that would configure the ocean and its resources as the common heritage of mankind" (32).[12] Later, Hau'ofa would invoke language from the convention in his 1993 call for a unified identity between islands in the Pacific. By employing the term "Blue Caribbean," I seek to transport Hau'ofa's connective view into Caribbean contexts, envisioning a trans-oceanic Pacific–Caribbean meta-archipelago, but also to emphasize the Indigenous origins of this worldview that Hau'ofa strives to resurrect. In reading the Caribbean through a "blue filter"—through an Indigenous sense of belonging that establishes shared origins in the ocean—I seek to draw greater attention to Indigenous concerns, which are sometimes sidelined by diasporic, creole, and hybrid notions of identity celebrated in the Caribbean. A "Blue Caribbean," for my purposes, takes into account Jackson's examination of settler colonialism and recognizes the continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples under postcolonial governments (Jackson *Creole Indigeneity,* 5). The Caribbean women poets

[12] For examples of scholarship that turns from terrestrial to aqueous frameworks, a shift that has been termed the "Blue Humanities," see Gilroy (1992) and, more recently, Steve Mentz's *Shipwreck Modernities* (2015), Teresa Shewry's *Hope at Sea* (2015), and Natasha Tinsley's *Thiefing Sugar* (2010), as well as Tinsley's work on the "queer" black Atlantic (2008), among others.

discussed in this dissertation challenge national myths and masculine diasporic narratives by calling attention to those who are excluded or left behind. As seen in the works of Mahadai Das and Nichols examined in Chapters Two and Three, critiques of the postcolonial nation and of masculine diasporic discourses lead these settler poets to sympathize with Indigenous struggles over land.

The next part of my title, "Black Pacific," seeks to expand Atlantic-dominant frames of postcolonial study in the American academy by bringing greater visibility to the growing body of Pacific literature in English. I investigate resonances between black internationalism and independence movements in the Pacific Islands. Extending to literary contexts Robbie Shilliam's discussion in *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (2015) of how African diaspora narratives have influenced politics in the South Pacific, I look specifically at the influence of black power movements on the genesis of the "new" Pacific literature.[13] Despite diverse colonial histories, Pacific writers and publishers allied themselves with Atlantic concerns and drew on tropes of black diaspora to articulate their own desires for independence. At the same time, I aim to go beyond identifying affinities between these transnational

[13] Scholarly works published within the last decade also employ the term "Black Pacific" but to a somewhat different effect than I intend. Etsuko Taketani's 2016 *The Black Pacific Narrative* describes Japanese-black-alliances during the 1930s, and Vince Schleitwiler's 2017 *Strange Fruit of the Black Pacific* examines Japan and the US as competing imperial powers before and after the World Wars, tracing African American, Filipino, and Japanese migrations across these territories. Heidi Carolyn Feldman's earlier 2006 book focuses on Cuban and Brazilian music in the Afro-Peruvian Revival and uses "Black Pacific" to refer to South America's Pacific coast. While my use of the term shares some overlapping territory with these previous works—in Taketani's examination of the role of black internationalism in the Pacific and in Feldman's recuperation of Gilroy's Black Atlantic for more continental and land-based identities—I primarily locate the Black Pacific in Oceania, looking specifically at the role of black power in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

movements in order to explore new ground that such a comparison opens up for both Pacific and Atlantic cultural studies. Placing Gilroy's postnational diasporic model in dialogue with Pacific Indigenous struggles for sovereignty highlights limits and paradoxes within each area of study. As Vicente Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui point out in "Native Pacific Studies on the Edge" (2001), interdisciplinary cultural studies have tended to show suspicion (if not hostility) toward Indigeneity, stressing the hybrid and constructed nature of identity (324). While Diaz and Kauanui advocate for stewardship of Indigenous ways of knowing, they also assert that the future of Pacific studies would benefit from more dynamic conceptualizations of Indigeneity. For example, native mobility or preservation of ancient traditions within diasporic communities complicates ideas of "the Native" (324). In a similar vein, Teresia Teaiwa also expresses concern about the nationalist ethnocentricism that can emerge from native Pacific studies ("For or Before" 115). For Teaiwa, Pacific Studies must commit to "making comparisons within and across the region" to avoid pitfalls of ethnic exceptionalism, which also means critiquing Indigenous forms of corruption "as rigorously as the sins of colonialism and imperialism" (117). In this sense, inserting Gilroy's claim that "to search for roots is to discover routes" into a Pacific context makes room for a more dynamic understanding of Indigeneity, one that can exist within and alongside diasporic narratives (Teaiwa qtd. in Diaz and Kauanui 319). My study continues to tease out tensions between hybrid and native by exploring the multiple ways that Indigenous groups define themselves, calling into question a singular Pacific "Native."

Finally, the last part of my title, "Contemporary Women's Poetry and Publishing Practices," identifies the main subject of my study, bringing gender to the foreground in my examination of cross-currents in Pacific and Caribbean poetic discourses and bringing greater attention to women's writing. In calling attention to the alterity of the environment and the

subordination of Indigenous cultures, the poets featured here also speak to the experiences of women within colonial or post-colonial national contexts. Through their poetry, these women writers critique Eurocentric notions of modernity while also writing their way into literary traditions and nationalistic and diasporic discourses from which they have been excluded.

In the field of postcolonial studies, poetry is often sidelined, as the novel is the preferred genre for analysis. As literary critic Jahan Ramazani points out, poetry is understudied because it is considered a "less transparent medium" to uncover politics and history in postcolonial societies (4). The novel, instead, is received as national allegory, presumed to provide a window into the interior conditions of the postcolonial state and, therefore, carries an undue burden of representation. Meanwhile, poetry's rich and varied political dimensions remain neglected. To add to Ramazani's crucial intervention, I argue that poetry penned by women remains an especially under-examined area of study.[14] Though a number of women writers from the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands have received international recognition, fiction generally achieves greater visibility in the global market.[15] While Ramazani seeks to correct notions of poetry as "provincial" by tracing transnational linkages and formal integrations of various cultural traditions, I take up poetry's potential for "indigenizing" diverse influences. Returning to

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[14] For example, in Pacific studies, Albert Wendt, Robert Sullivan, and Craig Santos Perez appear with greater frequency in critical discourses than their female counterparts, and in Caribbean studies, the focus on male poets such as Aimé Cesaire, Kamau Brathwaite, and Derek Walcott overshadows discussions of women writers. Notable exceptions to this trend include essays by Selina Marsh, Margaret Jolly, and Teresia Teaiwa, which concentrate on women writers from the Pacific, as well as books on Caribbean women writers, such as Denise deCaires Narain's *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style* and Helen Scott's study of women's fiction with *Caribbean Women Writers and Globalization.* However, these interventions are few and far between when considered in context with the large body of critical work focused on male authors.

[15] Perhaps the most readily identifiable examples include Antiguan Jamaica Kincaid and Aotearoan/New Zealander Keri Hulme, whose *The Bone People* won the 1984 Booker Prize.

the weaving metaphors with which I opened, the Pacific and Caribbean poets examined here formally interweave Indigenous histories and traditions. As explored in more depth in my close readings in the following chapters, poets braid oral and written traditions and linguistic and visual codes to reflect Indigenous world views.[16] The formal density of poetry allows for an intertwining of multiple geographies in the space of a single stanza, and the paradox of "roots and routes" can be contained in a single line. Particularly among Pacific women scholars and activists, poetry is the preferred medium for anticolonial protest and reanimating Indigenous traditions in written form.

As a more "compact" medium than the novel, poetry presents both advantages and challenges in terms of comparison. Its material histories and transits can more easily be traced through publishing circuits, from local periodicals to anthologies and book-length collections.[17] While writings by Pacific and Caribbean women deserve greater attention regardless of genre, in tracking the place of women in the development of national literary traditions, poetry offers a smaller and denser cross-section to examine intersections between aesthetics and politics. Though my dissertation is largely focused on print circulation, digital media has accelerated the transportability of poetry and fostered the creation of alternative communities and networks online, creating considerable grounds and need for further comparative research

[16] ho'omanawanui's uses the metaphor of haku lei, or braided flower garland, to describe Hawaiian literary traditions and poetic techniques, a move that informs my study and animates much of my analysis in the chapters that follow.

[17] Nathan Suhr-Sytsma makes a similar case in *Poetry, Print, and the Making of Postcolonial Literature* (2017). Referring to the (generally) shorter length of poems in contrast to prose, he writes: "Their brevity enables them to be gathered alongside each other in journals or anthologies in ways that evoke, if problematically, political, racial, and social formations [. . .] The sheer number of poems allows them to ramify into incredibly complex and supple networks of literary exchange" (22).

Reading Across Poetic Archipelagoes

The poets discussed in this dissertation emerge from a diversity of (post)colonial contexts: formally colonized and now independent (Jamaica, Guyana, Vanuatu, and Fiji); colonial and simultaneously part of a first world country (Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, Martinique, and the Marshall Islands in free association with the US); and an island never formally colonized but still subject to the influence of western powers (Tonga). The select group of case studies cannot represent the cultural, political, ethnic, and historical diversities of their respective regions, and likewise, the poets I have selected are in no way meant to represent the totality of views of their nations of origin. Instead, the selected poets engage with specific themes that show confluences between colonial experiences despite (or perhaps because of) diverging relationships with Euro-American colonial powers of the past and present.

The chapters of this dissertation move mostly in chronological order, following women's struggles to be heard in various phases of development of literary traditions during and after formal colonization with some overlap between "generations" of publishing activity. Chapter One begins in the heat of independence movements after WWII and attendant literary and publishing endeavors in the Caribbean and the Pacific. This chapter foregrounds the shared concerns of women poets by tracing the evolution of literary movements in both regions, highlighting relationships between authors and publishers. Grace Mera Molisa (Vanuatu), Konai Helu Thaman (Tonga), Louise Bennett (Jamaica), and Suzanne Césaire (Martinique) are representative of the ways that women have played active roles in shaping poetic traditions in both regions but were also excluded from national literary histories. Looking at formative journals from the Caribbean and the Pacific, I argue that these poets negotiate localized gender

hierarchies as well as global colonial power structures. While francophone writer Césaire is arguably beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on anglophone poetry written primarily during and after the 1970s, Césaire as a historical figure is informative because of her active involvement in revolutionary journals and also marginalization within this history. Additionally, the journals in which she was involved were tremendously influential for Ulli Beier, who would later transport the influence of Négritude to literary scenes in the Pacific.

Chapter Two moves from the global literary market to consider women's struggles to be heard within national and local spaces in the decades after the sweep of revolutionary movements in the '60s and '70s. I juxtapose two poet-activists, Trask from Hawai'i and Das from Guyana, to consider ways that gender complicates identities of native and settler, drawing on Jackson's discussion of affinities between "Creole and native woman" (31). Next, in Chapter Three, I explore women's responses to the masculinist diaspora narratives that overtook critical discussions in the '90s, considering the ways that women poets revive native mythologies in order to revise the male-dominated tradition of epic or voyaging poetry. I pair Guyanese poet Nichols's *Startling the Flying Fish* (2005) and i-Kiribati Teresia Teaiwa's *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (1995) to examine how these "feminine epics" force a reconsideration of celebratory diasporic narratives that ignore those who are "left behind." Finally, in my last chapter, I look to the generation of poets who tackle the ongoing military occupation of the Caribbean and the Pacific established during the Cold War. After discussing Jamaican Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) and Puerto Rican Loretta Collins Kobah's "Vieques, 1961: The Filming of *Lord of the Flies"* (2015), I turn to a close analysis of Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's first print collection, *Iep Jāltok* (2017), to argue that her writing subtly critiques the racist and gendered logic of nuclear imperialism.

Conclusion

In setting up my overarching argument, I began my introduction with a consideration of woman-as-land metaphors in order to draw parallels with views that conflate Indigenous peoples with the landscape. Tropes that naturalize women and Indigenous bodies with the earth are so overused and routine that they might even be considered dead metaphors, yet they remain persistently and covertly relevant. Where the Caribbean was once conceived as a passive womb space awaiting European discovery, the Pacific Ocean is seen as empty basin for depositing nuclear waste. In bringing women's poetry from the Caribbean and Pacific into critical conversation, my aim is show how gendered logic dictates which stories are told and which remain unheard—in popular consciousness, in the global literary market, and in academic conversations. The Pacific poet–activists and Caribbean women in this dissertation choose poetry as the medium to critique colonial logics but imagine Indigenous futures, making poetry a revelatory and powerful site of analysis, not only for recuperating history but also for envisioning alternative possibilities. By juxtaposing different types of exploitation, new and old, I hope to challenge assumptions about what we readily recognize as colonialism and to expose continuities between European imperialism of the past and American colonialism in the present.

Chapter One: Little Magazines and Island Networks: The Politics of Place in Women's Publishing Practices

Modern literary history is written in little magazines.[18] Also known as "little reviews" or literary journals, the periodicals that emerged from modernist print culture represent an ephemeral medium and yet played (and continue to play) a pivotal role in spreading new literatures. Even after they disappear from circulation, twentieth-century literary periodicals archive the stories of postcolonial coalition building, the genesis of nationalist literary movements and the forging of transnational solidarities. *Kovave* (1969–75), the first literary magazine of Papua New Guinea, records one such history that connects the development of a national literary movement to the larger Pacific region and to other literary networks across the Global South. In a number of ways, the emergence of *Kovave* set in motion what is called the "newest literature in the world," a designation that I explore and problematize in this chapter (Subramani x). In terms of look, feel, and mission, *Kovave* was a Pacific reimagining of the significant Nigerian magazine *Black Orpheus* (1957–75). The two magazines, founded by German-born Ulli Beier, share aesthetic and structural similarities: the cover designs across the print runs of both magazines present full-frame Indigenous iconography in woodcut prints or drawings in high-contrast colors, and in the interiors, titles appear consistently in hand-drawn-

[18] Eric Bulson makes a similar claim in *Little Magazine, World Form* in regard to modernist literature*:* "No little magazines, no world form: it's as simple as that" (1). My use of the term little magazine relies on Bulson's description of a "noncommercial, experimental medium produced in limited qualities" concentrated Anglo-European print circuits from 1910–1940 (2). The postcolonial little magazines referenced in this chapter are influenced by the earlier introduction of the medium as modernist form.

style block print, with vignette illustrations interspersed throughout each edition.[19] Beier included an editorial note only in the inaugural edition of each magazine and eventually handed off editorial duties to respective local writers in Nigeria and Papua New Guinea.

Beier introduced Papuan New Guinean readers to African literature, which spoke to Pacific Islanders in a moment of fomenting anticolonial activity. According to Beier, Papuan New Guineans identified with the "cultural anxieties and political issues" articulated by African writers (qtd. in Keown 112).[20] The links between *Kovave* and *Black Orpheus* show the connective force of black internationalism and anticolonial solidarity, materially connecting the Pacific to literary networks in Africa, the Caribbean, and the wider black Atlantic. At the same time, the bibliographic code embedded in the titles of these two magazines evidence the masculinist cast so often associated with anticolonial nationalisms.[21] The titles signal the publications as spaces for men: the word "kovave," Beier's editorial note explains, refers to the cycle of ceremonies initiating a "boy into full manhood" (4). Meanwhile, *Black Orpheus* is titled after French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "Orphée Noir" and refers to the male poet hero of Greek mythology.[22]

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[19] Digital archives of *Kovave* are open to the public through Athabasca University: http://png.athabascau.ca/Kovave.php. Issues of *Black Orpheus* are available through Emory University's Stuart A. Rose MARBL Library, but digital covers can also be viewed through printmaker Josh MacPhee's post on *Just Seeds,* an artists' collective, blog*:* https://justseeds.org/241-black-orpheus/.

[20] Beier hosted Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka and Ugandan Taban Lo Liyong among others while teaching creative writing workshops at the University of Papua New Guinea (Keown 112). In the 1960s and early '70s, African writing dominated syllabi in commonwealth literature courses until Pacific writers began to appear in syllabi in 1973 (Keown 3).

[21] Bibliographic code refers to the extratextual features beyond the main text itself, such as cover design, layout, prefaces, dedications, and other features that all contribute to the meaning of a literary product. For more on reading bibliographic codes and sociological approaches to print history, see George Bornstein's *Material Modernism* (2001).

[22] I'd like to thank Nathan Suhr-Sytsma for this observation about the gender coding inherent in

Examining print circulations by moving between concentric circles of little magazines to the anthologies and poetry volumes that followed, "Little Magazine and Islands Networks: The Politics of Place in Women's Publishing Practices" considers how gender issues inflected Pacific and Caribbean publishing endeavors across the unevenly paced independence movements of the 1960s and '70s.[23] In this chapter, I pay special attention to the ways in which periodicals aimed to articulate a nationalist literature at the regional level, connecting respective island federations in the Caribbean and in the Pacific. In both regions, private/public dualisms shaped discourses about the role of the poet, impacting both the representation of women writers and the representation of gender issues. In creating the image of the writer as a "man of action," the Caribbean's burgeoning literary establishment worked to distance itself from women writers, who were seen as antithetical to this heroic vision (Dalleo 1). Tellingly, Eric Bulson lists the number of major authors who emerged from the "cradle" of little magazines before and after the sweep of independence movements in the Caribbean: "Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Edward Kamau Braithwaite, Andrew Salkey, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, and Roger Mais"—a litany of men and not a single woman (198). In contrast to their scant appearance in Caribbean journals, women were able to gain significant representation as poets in Pacific literary magazines of the 1970s. However, the inclusion of women in Pacific literary contexts did not necessarily equate to an even playing field, as these writers negotiated a different set of issues in terms of the

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the use of the figure of Orpheus.

[23] Across both regions, island nations achieved varying levels of independence at various times. For example, in the Caribbean, Jamaica and Trindad and Tobago both achieved independence in 1962, while Dominica would not become an independent republic until 1978. In the Pacific, Papua New Guinea broke from Australian rule in 1975, while Vanuatu would not gain independence until 1980. Meanwhile, settler colonies such as Hawai'i and Aotearoa/New Zealand remain under foreign domination despite active Indigenous sovereignty movements that date back to the early twentieth century.

representation of gender issues. Hostility toward feminist causes and "women's lib" linked "men with the preservation of [traditional culture] and women's freedom with its destruction," as feminism was often regarded as a foreign import (Marsh, "Black Stone"). As a result, masculinist discourses and depictions of rigid gender roles pervade these early publications. Women poets at the time, who occupied a contested position within nationalist, anticolonial discourses, battled stereotypes that predetermined their place within the new literary canon. While these women tended to address gender disparity issues in their poetry, they worked to disrupt masculinist notions that placed "women's lib" in opposition to Indigenous cultures.

By exploring the publishing activities of women writers who represent the "first generation" or pioneering roles in the formation of national and regional literatures, I consider how women navigated double jeopardies in terms of colonial oppression and local gender hierarchies that determined (and continue to inform) their place in postcolonial literary canons. I focus on a select number of illustrative women poets, primarily Martinican Suzanne Césaire (1915–1966) and Jamaican Louise Bennett (1919–2006) from Caribbean literary contexts, with brief treatment of their near-contemporaries Una Marson (Jamaica, 1905–1965) and Phyllis Shand Allfrey (Dominica, 1915–1986), and Tongan Konai Helu Thaman (1946–) and Ni-Vanuatu Grace Mera Molisa (1946–2002) from Pacific literary spheres. While this very select group of women poets cannot do justice to the range and diversity of writing across these two regions, I aim to identify general publishing trends and patterns that have shaped the reception of women poets. By focusing on the medium of the little magazine as a catalyzing force in the genesis of literary traditions, I argue that Pacific and Caribbean women poets played an active role in shaping these traditions but were hemmed in by or forced to write back to exclusionary nationalist discourses in order to claim their place in these movements.

Beyond a Center-Periphery Model of Print Cultural History

Before turning to an analysis of regional publishing, I briefly review key debates about the symbolic value of postcolonial literary products as determined by their place of production and consumption in order to make the case for the significance of island networks as an alternate field. As "little" is often used pejoratively, little magazines and small island nations might be subject to similar forms of belittlement or dismissal within a world system where power is consolidated on continents. However, these views overlook the archipelagic power of both islands and little magazines to form transnational and transcultural constellations of influence.

Adapting Pierre Bourdieu's conception of a "field of cultural production," Pascale Casanova theorizes a "world republic of letters," in which literary dominance is exerted by metropolitan centers within consecrated nations (Paris, London, and New York City, respectively) upon other economically subservient nations. Caroline Davis, however, raises doubts about this model; she points out that the critical consensus among leading scholars of the postcolonial publishing industry—including Casanova, James English, Graham Huggan, and Sarah Brouillette—assumes "the Western market is the only significant market for postcolonial literature," overlooking local publishing endeavors, like educational publishing in Africa. Stefan Helgesson also indicates blind spots in Casanova's model of global comparatism, which "risks underestimating the inventiveness of a divergent field in its use of the network's transnational ramifications" (13). He refers to the Négritude movement as a counterexample, which "is not a *national* response to a more powerful field, as Casanova's model would have it, but is entirely reliant on the transnational mobility of print to create an unprecedented 'black' transcontinental literary field" (13). Davis and Helgesson both focus their studies on publishing markets in

Africa, and extending their discussion, I bring in another divergent field with the emergence of the transnational literary movement in the Pacific in the 1970s, catalyzed, in part, by the influence of black internationalism and independence movements in and beyond the region. By doing so, I aim to set up an alternative comparative model, putting the supposed peripheries of the literary world in dialogue directly with each other rather than through the western metropolis.

For Bulson, the presence of little magazines in and of themselves offers an alternative field. He contends that Casanova's world republic of letters "fails to acknowledge the presence of anything other than the 'book' as the vehicle for literary transmission" (14). Though the production of little magazines is ephemeral, especially in contrast to the book industry, the little magazine offered an "alternative model of the literary field that emerged during and after modernism, one that was *decommercialized, decapitalized,* and *decentered"* (14). Because the little magazine world was one without capital or prestige, writers on the margins of the global book industry could bypass metropolitan gatekeeping. At the same time, part of the power of this alternative field was the little magazine's dual ability to preserve national specificity while attaining transnational mobility. Postcolonial little magazines, Bulson writes nurtured "national and regional literary fields, which, instead of being isolated from one another, actually fostered transnational linkages that had never existed before" (195). In examining cross-national and cross-regional circuits opened up through these local publishing endeavors, however, I also seek to problematize discourses that frame the "transnational" as an inherently liberatory space or an escape from rigid nationalisms. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey has argued in her critique of celebratory transnational and diasporic frames, often associated with Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic,* regionalist identities tend to re-inscribe rather than transcend nationalist culture's "masculinist paradigm" ("Gendering the Oceanic Voyage" 217).

In postcolonial discourses, the privileging of the travelling or diasporic subject has led to ample discussion of migration and hybridity, inadvertently leaving out more rooted nationalistic and Indigenous positionalities (Moreton-Robinson 8).[24] The enthusiasm around the "transnational" in postcolonial studies perhaps gives insights into why Pacific literature, dominantly concerned with Indigenous subjecthood, "remains a global literary backwater" (Teaiwa 731). As Pacific literary historian Michelle Keown writes, while Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean are established regions in postcolonial studies, a survey of recent books on postcolonial literature "reveals few (if any references) to New Zealand, and almost no references to the Pacific Islands" (8).[25] While Pacific literature may not fit into dominant postcolonial frames that emphasize migration, diaspora, and hybridity, Guyanese literary critic Shona Jackson suggests that this over-emphasis on the travelling subject as counter-hegemonic has negative consequences for other area studies as well:

> migration, labor, resistance, and nationalism constitute an uncomfortable teleology in the rise and depiction of Caribbean literary subjectivities, with negative consequences for the representations of women, non-majority groups such as the Chinese, mix-raced subjects, nonheteronormative sexualities . . . and for Indigenous peoples whose own histories and cosmogonies cannot be located in it. ("The Re/Presentation" 528)

Jackson's critique underlines the need for inclusion of and comparative analysis with Indigenous-centered frames.

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[24] For more, see Graham Huggan's discussion of "travelling theory" in "Unsettled Settlers, Postcolonialism, Travelling Theory, and the New Migrant Aesthetics" (2001).

[25] The inclusion of a chapter on Pacific poetry in the 2017 *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry* suggests a shift in this trend, as well as a special 2016 digital feature on the Poetry Foundation's website, which included a selection of Pacific Island poetry, spurred by the literary activism of Chamorro poet Craig Santos-Perez. Yet, this corrective is slow and belated in mainstream postcolonial studies.

The examination of intersecting material histories through the medium of the little magazine can create common ground by highlighting "common literary-historical trajectory" (Bulson 210). The alternative literary field created through exchanges between African and Caribbean literary magazines, such as *Black Orpheus* and *Savacou,* eventually spread to the Pacific region, embodied in *Kovave* and the proliferation of publications that followed. Yet, this circuit of influence has not been traced back from the Pacific to Atlantic spheres. Critically closing this circuit by placing Pacific literatures in conversation with Caribbean and black diasporic frames opens up possibilities for a re-theorization of the postcolonial or subaltern subject. The model of comparatism proposed here, which emerges from existing material connections, puts competing diasporic and native claims into dialogue in an alternative field beyond the imagination of metropolitan publishing centers.

The above consideration of transnationalism brings me from a discussion of medium to one of form. Though my study relies on larger literary frames, my examples focus more exclusively on poetry. As discussed in the introduction, Jahan Ramazani has observed the overwhelming privileging of the novel in postcolonial studies over poetry. Postcolonial scholars' preference for the novel perhaps follows from Fredric Jameson's famous (and much-debated) statement, "Third world texts [. . .] necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory"—a generalization of "texts" that is circumscribed by narrative (69). Because poetry often (though not always) eschews the narrative structures associated with the novel, its engagements with nationalist and anticolonial discourses remain neglected. Ramazani's theory of a transnational poetics seeks to correct stereotypes of poetry as parochial by tracking the form's ability to straddle multiple histories and traditions. While his theory is informative for my study, I also focus on poetry for its specifically gendered dimensions, which play out in very different

ways in the regional contexts discussed here. In Caribbean spheres, for example, women have been barred from poetry through the image of the normative male poet. Caribbeanist Laurence Breiner explains that, in order to set up poetry writing as a consequential political activity, male writers shunned women poets whom they saw as damaging to the image of the poet as a "serious" public figure (*An Introduction* xv). In this way, gendered public/private divides were intensified in poetry discourses because of the particular anxieties around the acceptance of the form in contrast to narrative genres. Inversely, in Pacific contexts, this territorialism and gatekeeping around poetry is not historically observable in the same ways as it has been in the Caribbean. Rather, poetry has become the counter-discourse for women writers to express and explore gender issues that are shut down in other venues. A survey of early issues of the pan-Pacific *Mana* magazine shows women's names on poems far more frequently than fiction and other literary forms. While novels as well as the short stories (and poems penned by men) published in early literary magazines espouse a masculinist anticolonial nationalism, discussed in more detail below, Pacific women found some freedom of expression in the less-policed realm of poetry.

My survey approach here differs from subsequent chapters in that I seek to offer a more historical and sociological overview in order to position my close literary analysis of specific poets in later generations. "Little Magazines and Island Networks" foregrounds issues of gender that set the stage for women poets who emerge in decades that follow the establishment of new literary movements. The dense and complex publishing networks that crisscross the Caribbean and the Pacific regions present a rich archive that demands further research. Here I interrogate the masculine forms of literary prestige that women writers in the "first waves" of literary

movements are forced to negotiate and against which later generations (explored in the next chapters) continue to write.

The Normative Male Poet in the Caribbean

For a number of critics of Caribbean literary history, the 1971 special issue of *Savacou* and the coinciding Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) in Jamaica marks a turning point—the inauguration of the postcolonial phase in Caribbean letters (Dalleo 175). The double-issue of *Savacou 3/4* broke with tradition through its "pervasive use of dialect" and inclusion of performance poetry and dub and Rasta artists (Brathwaite 9). In his "Foreward" [sic] to the anthology, Caribbean cultural critic (then) Edward Brathwaite, who served as editor alongside Andrew Salkey and Kenneth Ramchand, announces the present moment as one of increasing black consciousness and awareness of the meaning of "cultural authenticity" (8, 9). Whereas the writer was once considered a "hero" and the reader his "pupil," Brathwaite calls for democratization, for the writer to be brought "out of the tower, out of his castle" (9). The anthology's elevation of Creole and everyday language to the literary reflects the movement in search of an authentic Caribbean national voice. The debate that ensued over language and the role of the writer has often been characterized as a battle between "'Tribe Boys' and 'Afro-Saxons,'" or, roughly, a debate between folk, experimental, and spoken poetry, on the one hand, and Standard English and European-influenced forms, on the other (Breiner, "How to Behave" 4). Tobagonian poet Eric Roach, one of the issue's fiercest critics, objected that the Jamaican-dominated *Savacou* was "too 'black,' too political, too inept" (Breiner, "The Ambivalent" 4). While Roach's reasons for rejecting this new wave of Caribbean verse are complex (Roach was also invested in his African heritage but was ambivalent about the Black

Power movement, which he saw as "insufficiently Indigenous"), his objections metonymically reflect the major contentions over the role of the poet and what should or should not considered *real* literature at the time (5). Critical discussions of the *Savacou* debate have primarily recapitulated this war over language and aesthetic standards; however, the focus on language has eclipsed discussions of gender in these debates and the contradictory gendered dimensions associated with oral culture. Of the nearly forty contributors to the Dec. 1970–March 1971 issue, only a handful of women's names are represented, and while Brathwaite calls for the poet to be pulled down from *his* tower, the established norm of the male poet remains unquestioned.

According to Breiner, this notion of writing as a male activity was tied up with anxieties about the "seriousness" or effectiveness of poetry as an anticolonial instrument. Focusing on the work of Brathwaite and St. Lucian Derek Walcott, who are often reductively positioned as respective sides of the Creole versus Standard English debate, Breiner explains the centrality of the concept of "the 'Caribbean man,' the imagined inhabitant of this new world" (*An Introduction* xv). The image of the writer as the "political man of action" who authors the new world history necessitated the exclusion of women writers (Dalleo 1). As Breiner explains:

> It was a struggle to establish that the writing of poetry was a serious and consequential activity for anyone in the West Indies. That struggle played out within the already heavily masculinist conceptual frame of nationalism. In a setting where writing professionally was unthinkable, male writers kept reassuring themselves that writing was not just a pastime. . . anxiety sometimes led them to make a point of distancing themselves from pioneering female poets, many of them affiliated with the Jamaica Poetry League, whose work was insufficiently ambitious or serious by the standards of the national "struggle." (xv)

The notion of poetry as the site of national struggle carried out by male players is perhaps no better embodied than by Rasta poet Bongo Jerry's much-discussed "Mabrak." The poem, which evokes spoken word through experiments in lineation and form (such as use of all caps,

combining words, and vertical arrangements on the page), announces that "brain-whitening," or the European colonization of language and culture, will cease through the power of "MEN language": "MAN must use MEN language [. . .] / SILENCE BABEL TONGUES; recall and / recollect BLACK SPEECH" (15). Here, forgotten black or local language is recuperated by "real men" speaking in manly discourse. DeCaires Narain refers to "Mabrak" as an illustration of the contradictory ways in which Creole is gendered. Bongo Jerry's ideological use of Creole, "incorporates Rasta idiom or 'dread talk'" to produce aggressively male speech (83). In contrast, the Creole usage of pioneering woman poet Louise Bennett, discussed in more detail below, is seen as "naturalistic" women's talk, associated with domestic spaces where "Creole is the norm" (69). In this sense, the respective use of Creole falls along public/private divides, where the male poet's use of "the folk tongue" is associated with public anger and protest and women's Creole speech is read as private discourse. DeCaires Narain observes, "The tone of aggressive masculinity which marks the poetry of this period, and discussions of it, helps to explain the very sparse representation of women's voices in anthologies or individual collections and suggests reasons for the particular difference of the trajectory in Creole-use taken by Louise Bennett, and for the belatedness of the recognition for this trajectory" (86).

Considering the representation of women in the special issue of *Savacou,* not only do women writers make up a small number of the overall contributors but they are set apart from their male colleagues by biographical details in the contributor's section. For example, two women are introduced via their family roles and relations: "Pam MacPherson recently left her Jamaican homeland to go and live in Barbados. (Her husband is in charge of the Caribbean Universities Press operation there.)" and "Dionyse McTair (Trinidad) is an undergrad at U.W.I., Mona, Jamaica. She is Roger's sister," referring to Roger McTair, another contributor to the

issue who is introduced as a new poet concerned with revolutionary consciousness (*Savacou* 173). While these bios were possibly written by the women themselves, they create a striking contrast to those of the male contributors, who are all introduced through political and literary activity (and without any details of their family relations). From one lens, the effect is to further marginalize the women in the issue, presenting them as sisters and wives first, writers second. From another lens, however, the women's profiles emphasize communal connections and relations that go against notions of the writer as a lone hero in "his tower." However unintentional it may be, the women's representation in the issue offers an alternate conception of the writer, one which, ironically, Brathwaite celebrates in his preface despite the fact that male writer heroes dominate the issue.

Complicating the rhetoric of masculinist nationalism in the issue is the figuration of the nation and national landscape as feminine. In "Gender and Sexuality in Postcolonial Poetry," Lyn Innes recounts how the trope of the nation as mother and/or virgin pervades postcolonial contexts across geographies and histories. "The conflation of mother and mother country and the imaging of the nation as a woman are by no means limited to African nationalist iconography," she notes after opening with Nigerian Chinua Achebe's parody of the "nationalist verse" of Négritude poet Léopold Senghor, among others: "Among Caribbean writers, Kamau Brathwaite's *Mother Poem* (1977) equates the poet's mother with Barbados, while Derek Walcott's epic poem *Omeros* (1990) identifies one of its heroines, Helen, with the island of Saint Lucia. Ireland has long been identified as Hibernia, imaged as a frail maiden in need of protection" (222). The idealization of the nation as passive victim or silent mother coincides with colonialist views that feminize colonized populations, conflating people with the land and rendering them as primitive and outside modernity. The double jeopardy created through

intersecting colonial and nationalist ideologies exacerbates rigid gender roles, polarizing between "an aggressive warrior masculinity and a submissive feminine passivity" where "there is rarely acknowledgement of different sexual orientations or continuums, whether gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender" (Innes 224).

Bongo Jerry's poem "Black Mother," which follows "Mabrak" in *Savacou,* treads this well-worn territory by figuring Africa as a mother: "We all know how the West was won by samfie, scank, deceit and gun / by raping Black Mother and disinheriting her children" (17). The speaker figures himself as the offspring kidnapped from his mother, whose raped body he must avenge. However, the poem also takes a noteworthy turn, alluding not only to the colonization of Africa but also to the eradication of Amerindian populations in the Caribbean:

> Jamaica is the nation
> Which the Arawaks were given
> And from which, in Europe's greed,
> Said Arawaks were driven [. . .]
> The same men came to Africa
> With gun and bribe in hand
> Kidnapped me from Black Mother (16)

The passage accords First Peoples status to the Arawaks prior to European invasion and settlement as a plantation colony. Yet, similar to larger tendencies in Caribbean literature, this Amerindian presence is presented as now extinct. As Breiner explains, representation of Amerindian societies is scant in Caribbean poetry and when they are depicted, it is usually only after the colonial encounter. Instead, during the "roll out of independence," there was "indeed strenuous effort to look back to a time before the colonial era, but the pristine world being celebrated was usually located in Africa, not in the Caribbean" ("Postcolonial Caribbean Poetry" 20). In *Creole Indigeneity,* Shona Jackson describes a process in which Amerindian peoples are registered as an "absent presence" while, simultaneously, Indigenous cultural symbols are

appropriated and folded into the nationalist culture. The adoption of Indigenous structures and names, for example, obscures the political status of Amerindian peoples who often seek rights against the postcolonial nation-state. At the same time, the appropriation creates a sense of historical continuity and allows the postcolonial nation to depict its roots as precolonial (9). Jackson argues that assumptions that Amerindian peoples have been wholly eradicated discursively erase surviving Indigenous peoples when, in fact, "the Indigenous presence is much greater and widespread" when taking into account the ways "in which Indigenous Peoples self-identify and articulate historical continuity" (15). In this way, in Bongo Jerry's poem (and in the larger body of stereotypical nationalist verse referenced by Innes), both precolonial Africa and the Arawak nation are gendered in similar ways: they are represented as historically inert after the violation of invasion, while the new generation of male agents, the rightful inheritors to the land, mourn their loss and pioneer a new history in their absence. Similarly, the title of the journal itself, *Savacou,* refers to the "bird-god of Carib mythology with control over thunder and strong winds" (Sutherland et. al. 595). Considering the nationalist intentions of the journal, the use of Amerindian symbology reflects slippages in the term "Creole" in itself, where Creole might indicate native, local, or "Indigenous" identity or, conversely, "native or 'mixed' as opposed to 'pure' . . . bricolage and self-fashioning" (Breiner, *An Introduction* xvi). The positioning of Creole as the folk or Indigenous tradition of the Caribbean discursively eliminates the specificity of Amerindian perspectives (Byrd xxxvi). While exclusion of women from the literary canon is old news (history is filled with wives in the background and in the shadows), considering the suppression of Indigenous peoples alongside women within nationalist literary traditions reveals a wider pattern in the formation of the modern national subject. Minor subjectivities must be evacuated of agency and relegated to the realm of the symbolic in order for

the masculine subject to emerge as the rightful inheritor of the nation, a dynamic explored in more depth through the poetry of Haunani Kay Trask and Mahadai Das in Chapter Two.

Literary "Foremothers"

Before debates over language became crystallized in the 1971 *Savacou* anthology, the normative male poet was well established at the advent of what is seen as the postcolonial phase of Caribbean literary history. Before turning to Louise Bennett, often consecrated as the region's literary foremother, I take a step back to consider the longer context and rise of literary magazines in the region to demonstrate that women have long been actively writing, publishing, and participating in literary networks. The absence of women's names in Bulson's roster, for example, does not mean that women at the time were not writing and publishing. Looking at Bennett's near-contemporaries, I consider how women poets negotiated both gender structures and authenticity discourses. Under these dual pressures, the legacies of women poets occupy a more embattled position than those of their male counterparts. According to DeCaires Narain, "authenticity" was a major mediating factor in the establishment of contemporary Caribbean literary canons:

> Most accounts of Caribbean literature locate its genesis in the late 1950s and early 1960s when several West Indian writers (Naipaul, Selvon, Lamming, Salkey, Harris) who had travelled to Britain in the 1950s, started to get their work published and publicly acknowledged. There *was* a considerable body of writing prior to this, but this writing was generally dismissed as *not truly West Indian*, partly because many of these writers were English, but also because of the unquestioning mimicry of colonial forms and the inscription of colonial ideology that characterized this writing. (4)

This question over mimicry versus expression of a "homegrown" aesthetic shapes the development of the Caribbean literary canon and determines who is remembered as a forerunner or as a mere precursor.

Una Marson, who in 1930 became the first woman in the region to publish a volume of verse, occupies a precarious position between "forerunner" and "precursor." As a black Jamaican, Marson was active in independence movements, participated in extended political activity in England, and also broadcasted with the BBC during the Second World War and wrote editorials for the Jamaican magazine *The Cosmopolitan* (Cyzewski). Yet, despite her involvement in politics and publishing, she has not been readily accepted into the Caribbean literary canon. Patricia Burnett, in her introduction to the *Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* describes Marson as "caught between vernacular and literary traditions": though she was most successful in writing in classical European forms, influenced by Langston Hughes, she also experimented with blues forms and Creole (liv). Yet, as Burnett explains, "One of her weaknesses is the tendency to vacillate uneasily between the vernacular and a faded poetic diction" (liv). Perhaps because of her attempts to venture outside of European traditions, Marson was not well received with the conservative Jamaica Poetry League. According to DeCaires Narain, J. E. C. McFarland, who founded the League in 1923 and published the first Caribbean anthology in 1929, praised the nature poetry of white women members but what was tepid at best about Marson's experiments with a range of forms. Because of her fraught connections to existing literary networks and inconsistent aesthetic, critical consensus has labeled Marson an unstable "literary foremother."[26]

[26] In the abstract to her forthcoming *PMLA* article, Julie Cyzewski seeks to recuperate Marson by combatting dismissive views of her nature poetry, which have been seen as oppositional to her

Meanwhile, Marson's contemporary, Phyllis Shand Allfrey of Dominica, stands out as one of the few women at the time to publish multiple poetry collections. Also active in independence movements, Allfrey, however, is even more marginal than Marson. As a white woman, Allfrey's credentials as "'authentic' West Indian [were] not readily assumed" (DeCaires Narain 30). The comparison of Allfrey and Marson shows how race adds another complicating factor to the multiple structures placed on women writers. In addition, considering Allfrey against the celebration of Nobel Prize-winner Saint-John Perse (1887–1975), the white descendent of plantation owners in Guadeloupe, raises further questions (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 22). Perse was revered by Édouard Glissant and Derek Walcott, despite his "privileged white" childhood, and though gender and race of course only make up two determining factors in a matrix that guides literary prestige, the dismissal of Allfrey on the grounds of authenticity sharply contrasts with the immortalization of Perse (Walcott, "The Antilles"). Meanwhile, neither Allfrey or Marson "has been sufficiently widely read for a case to be made about their influence on contemporary poets" (DeCaires Narain 47).

The Rise of Caribbean Little Magazines and the Role of Suzanne Césaire

Following what is considered the lean years of the early twentieth century, Burnett cites the forties as the beginning of "real movement" toward a Caribbean literature, initiated in large part by the launching of influential literary magazines and the philosophy that "local publishing was essential if the talents of local writers were to be given a climate in which they could

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transnational projects. Considering Marson's BBC broadcasts and involvement in *The Cosmopolitan,* Cyzewski argues that Marson's pastoral poetry has more relevance to her political commitments than previously thought.

develop" (lv). Founded in 1942 in Barbados and edited by Frank Collymore, *Bim* represents the region's first lasting literary magazine, followed by *Focus* in Jamaica in 1943, edited by Edna Manley, and A. J. Seymour's *Kyk-over-al* in Guyana in 1945. While there had been earlier periodicals "they had most been short-lived and there had been nothing to compare to the far-reaching importance of these three" (lv). Burnett explains that the new generations of writers rejected the stodgy derivativeness of the Jamaica Poetry League and also moved to create a transnational literary affinity in the Caribbean: "The early nationalist intentions of these periodicals was from the start combined with a sense of a wider, federationist role" (lv). This expansive vision extended beyond the islands to the African continent, as reviews in both Caribbean and African literary magazines show active exchange between these networks. While these journals published local writers, who would go on to find recognition beyond the region, they formed an alternative network to the metropolitan book publishing industry in Europe and America. As Bulson notes, the little magazines of the West Indies and Africa operated in national, regional, and international spheres. He refers to one reviewer in *Black Orpheus* (1964), who pointed out that

> magazines like *Bim* (Barbados) and *Présence africaine* (Dakar) were "reservoirs for Afro-Caribbean literature" precisely because they published "a great deal of Indigenous writing that might otherwise never by published in English, French, or American journals which demand a kind of compromise from their overseas contributors in order to make their material suitable for their own readers." (195).[27]

[27] The 1948 release of *Anthologie de la poésie nègre et malgache* (Anthology of New Black and Malagasy Poetry in French), edited by Léopold Senghor and prefaced by Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "Orphée noir," coincided with the appearance of *Présence africaine* in 1947 (Banchetti-Robino 125).

The reviewer's claims show how these little magazines provided a platform that would allow local writers to develop a more "local" aesthetic, without being forced to cater to metropolitan or western tastes, but they also relate the cross-regional webs of affinity between African and Caribbean literature. In addition, they speak to the intersecting spheres of influence between anglophone and francophone worlds, as *Bim* published Caribbean writing in English and *Présence africaine,* the revolutionary Négritude periodical, published African writing in French.

This discussion of cross-regional and cross-linguistic literary spheres brings up another "unstable literary foremother" from the francophone Caribbean. A contemporary of Marson and Allfrey, Suzanne Césaire co-founded *Tropiques* (1941–1945) with her husband Aimé Césaire and their colleague René Ménil. As a francophone writer who predominantly composed in surrealist and lyrical essay form rather than poetry, Suzanne Césaire lies outside the scope of this dissertation focused on anglophone women's poetry. Yet, given her active role in one of the most influential and memorialized little magazines in the region and her imbrication in literary networks in contrast to her anglophone contemporaries, Marson and Allfrey, Suzanne Césaire offers an informative historical example of the ways in which women's writing has been marginalized, written out, forgotten, or belatedly recognized.[28]

[28] For more, see T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Negritude Women* (2002), which considers the important and overlooked role pioneering women played in the Négritude movement. Alongside Suzanne Césaire, Sharpley-Whiting explores the writings of Jane, Paulette, and Andrée Nardal, who were also Martinican and hosted salons for black intellectuals (52). In addition, Valérie Loichot points out that the exclusion of Suzanne Césaire "was not an isolated case" in the historical formation of Négritude as movement (151). She explains that "women were flagrantly absent from the list of invited speakers at the 1956 'Congress of Black Writers and Artists' in Paris, organized by the literary review *Présence africaine*" (151).

Published in Martinique under the close scrutiny of the French Vichy regime, *Tropiques* is iconic of the Négritude movement, the "cultural project of poetically and politically affirming blackness" (Seligmann 497). The initiation of the pan-Caribbean–African movement is primarily identified in the founding fathers of Martinican Aimé Césaire, Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, and French Guianese Léon Damas, while the works of Suzanne remain relatively unknown despite the active role this "other Césaire" played in theorizing the movement. In fact, in her close examination of the magazine's archives, Katerina Seligmann argues that the role of the periodical in elaborating a Négritude program has been overstated. Seligmann instead sees *Tropiques* as critiquing colonial racial ideology rather than offering a vision of a reclaimed black identity. However, one of the only two usages of the neologism "négritude" across the journal's print run appears in Suzanne Césaire's essay "Le Grand camouflage" ("The Great Camouflage"), the closing piece in the last issue of the journal in 1945. In addition, Guadeloupean novelist Maryse Condé "identifies Césaire's declaration 'la poésie martiniquaise sera cannibale' ('Martinican poetry shall be cannibal') as the lone woman's voice in the litany of commands issued to describe and dictate the state of Francophone Caribbean literature" (Wilks 129).

Despite Suzanne Césaire's prominent role in the journal, African American and Caribbean literary critic Jennifer Wilks points out that the actual formatting of *Tropiques* flattens the writer to a mere "icon of Négritude" rather than a full partner. While her male counterparts' photos are included following their texts, a 1978 reprint of the journal opens with a photo of eighteen-year-old Suzanne Césaire, subtly emphasizing her as an object of beauty and setting her apart from the male intellectuals. This reduction of Césaire to an icon and muse is less subtly expressed by French surrealist André Breton's essay in *Tropiques,* which exoticizes her beauty as "lovely as the fire of rum punch" (Wilks 110). Breton, a close friend of the Césaires, fixates

on Suzanne's light complexion as a mixed-raced woman, and because she does not overtly reject Breton's objectification, she has been viewed as "infatuated with André Breton's poetry" (Condé qtd. in Loichot 160). Caribbeanist Valérie Loichot, however, contends that a close reading of *Tropiques* reveals a "palimpsest dialogue" between the two writers (163). Through techniques of *métissage* and "cannibalizing" of the Frenchman's words, Césaire layers irony and veiled criticism in her essays, even obliquely referring to Breton as a transient and, by extension, a tourist in the Caribbean (163–164). Loichot writes, "Her cannibalizing of Breton can be seen as an act of revenge against the writer who attempted to cannibalize her, that is, to reduce her intellect and literary production to the image of an exotic beauty" (151). In this sense, Césaire circuitously comments on the gendered structures that exclude her from recognition within the literary establishment while also critiquing the tourist's gaze of the Caribbean landscape.

Her best-known essay, and the work for which her slender volume of collected essays has been posthumously named, "The Great Camouflage" speaks to the author's predicament. The lyrical essay critiques the tourist's exoticizing view of the Antilles to convey historical suffering and violence belied by the region's beauty. The cryptic prose writes back to objectifying discourses, which project calm and stasis onto images of Martinique and the Caribbean islands and also work to mute women's voices by relegating female figures to the realm of the symbolic. "If my Antilles are so beautiful," posits Césaire, "it is because the great game of hide-and-seek has succeeded, it is then because, on that day, the weather is most certainly too blindingly bright and beautiful to see therein" (46). Césaire's formulation suggests an exterior camouflage that protects a secret interior. Blinded by beauty, the outside viewer does not detect the presence of "unruly people" hidden therein (43). Ultimately, reading "The Great Camouflage" in the context of her quarrel with Breton shows how Césaire's critique connects the dynamics that marginalize

women within the Caribbean literary establishment to the touristic discourses that evacuate tropical landscapes of history. In Chapter Four, I revisit this dynamic in relation to "militourism," in which tourism masks colonial military violence.[29] While in Césaire's case, beauty had been thought to ecipse serious intellectual contributions, in the case of Louise Bennett discussed below, bawdy humor and notions of "women's gossip" complicate the poet's consecration as a serious or "real" poet.

Miss Lou: Difficulties in Being Taken "Seriously"

In contrast to conflicted statuses occupied by Césaire, Marson, and Allfrey within the Caribbean literary canon, Bennett's poetry is now seen as "the birth of an 'authentic' West Indian poetry, the moment when the region *finds its voice"* (DeCaires Narain 51). Yet, despite her pioneering role, there was a significant time lag in Bennett's recognition. Among other factors, I argue that the gendered coding of Bennett's image, though very different from Césaire's, particularly contributed to her delayed literary canonization.

Bennett, or "Miss Lou," published poems in the Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner* and also hosted a radio program "Miss Lou's Views" in the 1970s (Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse* 107). She primarily self-published her collections of poetry beginning in the 1940s, following her first book, *Dialect Verses* (1942). Later, the publication of *Jamaica Labrish* in 1966 would be accompanied by an introduction and notes by Rex Nettleford, giving the thick volume of

29 The neologism "militourism," coined by Teresia Teaiwa, combines militarism with tourism, and describes "military or paramilitary force ensures the smooth running of a tourist industry, and that same tourist industry masks the military force behind it" ("Reading Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa*," 251).

Jamaican patois verse a more "literary" feel that worked to correct previous views of Bennett as subliterary to the writing establishment.

In part, the very reason why Bennett is considered a revolutionary who forged a new path for contemporary Caribbean poetry may have contributed to her dismissal during the years in which she was most active in the 1940s through the 1960s. According to Ramazani, as a "dialect" poet, Bennett was looked down on by the Jamaican Poetry League, which never invited her to a meeting or anthologized her poetry: "Because of the Creole orality of her work, she was scarcely acknowledged as someone who wrote, let alone a poet" (*The Hybrid Muse* 110). While the condescension of the conservative Jamaica Poetry League is perhaps predictable, Bennett also was not winning hearts among those who might have been considered her "natural allies—African-oriented, Creole writers" (104). Though Bennett translated Caribbean oral forms onto the printed page, her poems also demean Afrocentric and black nationalist rhetoric alongside imperialist discourses. Ramazani refers to Bennett's poem, "Back to Africa," to show how no one was spared from the poet's irreverence. The speaker mocks nostalgia for an African past: "Yuh haffi come from somewhe fus / Before yuh go back deh!" (qtd. in Ramazani 110). Similarly, DeCaires Narain points out the Bennett's mocking of Rasta culture in the poem, "Pinnacle," in which the "image of the Rasta as the roaring lion of Judah" is transformed to a skittish cat at the sight of the police: "One police look an him haff 'Meaw'! / Mek dem tink is puss a-bawl" (qtd. in DeCaires Narain 85). While DeCaires Narain and Ramazani describe how the poet's trivialization of Dread culture pitted her against the protest poetry of the likes of Bongo Jerry, I call attention to the gendered dimensions of Bennett's performative image and use of language, which barred her from both conservative and more experimental poetry camps. For DeCaires Narain, Bennett's insults to the "Rasta man" indicate a "more conservative trend in

[her] oeuvre" (85), and meanwhile, for Ramazani, this tendency evidences the poet's ambivalence, as she is "unwilling to settle for a poetry of nationalist dogma or imperial rhetoric" (*The Hybrid Muse* 139). However, even outside of these direct jabs at Dread culture, Bennett's performance as a "folksy," gossiping woman and use of Creole associated with domestic (women's) spaces puts her at odds with the "MEN language" of nationalist discourses. In other words, despite her prolific writing in Creole and anti-imperialist fervor, Bennett's performance of gender makes her the wrong type of "folk" for the male poets who valorize "folk language" as antihegemonic. Bennett's open engagement with gender and critiques of masculinist discourses kept her from colluding in a monolithic nationalism but also complicate her status as pioneering Caribbean poet.

Beyond the internal politics of the Jamaican literary scene, Bennett's performance of folk has also inflected her ability to circulate in international market and academic circles, which stands in sharp contrast to her male counterparts. As Nathan Suhr-Sytsma has pointed out, the packaging of Bennett's works undermines metropolitan senses of the literary, positioning the books as humorous verse intended for entertainment value but also for insular Jamaican audiences. For example, *Mis' Lulu Sez: A Collection of Dialect Poems*, distributed by the Gleaner Company in the late 1940s, appears to reach for wider audiences with its inclusion of editorial notes and a glossary, accommodating readers unfamiliar with Jamaican vernacular. Yet, Suhr-Sytsma quips that the anonymous editor stopped writing notes after only the fifth poem, "perhaps facing the realization that no amount of annotation would make Miss Lou's poetry transparent to a public outside the Caribbean" (241). At the same time, translation and accessibility are not the only factors mediating literary prestige. Even the later *Jamaica Labrish,* introduced by Nettleford and with notes accompanying every poem, carries seemingly

contradictory messages about its intended audience. The over 200-page volume (which also appeared concurrently to the publication of critic Mervyn Morris's essay "On Reading Louise Bennett, Seriously" in 1967, signaling the increasing recognition of Bennett's literary value [Dalleo 176]), is adorned by a cover image of a staged photo of Bennett with her hands raised in a comical gesture. With her head tilted and eyebrows playfully lifted, the image depicts a comedian about to deliver a joke, and while matching the raucous and humorous tone of much of the poems, the cover also casts the poet "in a mold at odds with what was expected of a 'serious' (male) poet" (Suhr-Sytsma 241). Notable here is the way in which "serious" and "male" converge in the image of *the* Caribbean poet. Bennett's performance is defined by its brash humor and hard-hitting critique, which emerges from a performance of a specific (and deeply local) kind of feminine embodiment. Not until later generations, exemplified by Guyanese Grace Nichols's *Fat Black Woman Poems* (1984), is this form of irreverent, black, and female embodiment permitted to occupy the space of the *serious,* literary poet.

While male poetry giants such as Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, and Aimé Césaire have achieved wide prestige and readership beyond the Caribbean region, circulating between spheres of the local, the regional, the international, and the "metropolitan," the best-known woman poet from the Caribbean and an innovator in local forms remains a somewhat contested figure. Bennett's publication history raises questions of audience, accessibility, and opacity. In writing in a distinctly local form, she is credited with giving voice to the region. At the same time, this form (as well as her refusal to fit into established norms) limits her circulation among wider audiences.

"Toward a New Oceania": Postcolonial Pacific Literature

Concurrent to the rise of the postcolonial phase of Caribbean literature, symbolically invoked by the Creole-heavy special issue of *Savacou,* a new movement of writing was gaining momentum in the Pacific in the 1960s and early 1970s. Following Papua New Guinea's *Kovave,* a succession of literary journals and later anthologies emerged in various parts of the region, triggered by fomenting anticolonialism as well as the emergence of university systems, such as the regional University of the South Pacific (USP) founded in 1968, which is centered in Fiji but serves twelve island nations, and the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1965. Notably, *Mana,* modeled after *Kovave* and edited initially by Cook Islander Marjorie Crocombe, emerged in 1972 as the first regional literary magazine. While the initial stirrings of the first generation of the Pacific literary movement were heavily influenced by African literatures, the influential magazine was important for creating a connective trans-Pacific literary vision—articulating the Pacific region as a region. Samoan writer Albert Wendt, who would emerge as one of the literary giants of the region, alongside Maori author, Witi Ihimaera, published his groundbreaking essay, "Toward a New Oceania," in *Mana* in 1976. The essay was the first critical survey of Pacific literature in English and used oceanic imagery to connect the diversity of island nations and ethnicities to create a common voice. As Keown explains, the title *Mana* was also selected for its unifying ability: "mana," a "polyvalent" word that conveys spiritual and psychic power, appears across Polynesian and Melanesian languages, and reflected the journal's mission to unite the region (5). Crocombe's introductory essays in *Mana* also invoke sea imagery and Indigenous Pacific voyaging traditions to emphasize common ancestral roots across Pacific cultures: she imagined *Mana* as a "newly-launched canoe richly stocked with literary cargo flowing in from 'every part of the Pacific'" (Keown 5).

The first of four anthologies of Pacific literature edited by Wendt to date, *Lali* (1980), would include writing previously published in *Kovave* and *Mana*, which fostered this multinational vision. The second anthology *Nuanua* (1995) would be followed by *Whetu Moana* (2003), co-edited by Wendt and two Maori authors, Robert Sullivan and Reina Whaitiri, emphasizing writing from Aotearoa/New Zealand, as well as Hawai‘i, which was included in the anthology series for the first time. This pan-Pacific discourse and multi-ethnic vision was not without its challenges, however; the regionalist ideology of the "Pacific Way," which was celebrated in literary publications and reflected wider political activity, was eroded by neocolonial structures and the emergence of a class of postcolonial elites within national contexts (Keown 117). The violent eruption of the 1987 coups in Fiji, a culmination of ethnic tensions between the land-holding Indigenous Fijians and the South Asian descendants of indentured laborers, further undermined the Pacific Way's collaborative promise (Keown 117). Later, the vision of a united Oceania was re-animated in Hau'ofa's watershed 1993 essay, "Our Sea of Islands," which reversed the colonial script of "islands in a far sea" to imagine a collective "sea of islands" (151).

Considering this consolidation of Pacific literature in the late 1960s and early '70s, the designation of "new literature" describes the revolutionary energy and momentum in defining and uniting the Oceanic region. However, similar to Caribbean literary histories which mark the 1950s and '60s as the originary moment, "new" unwittingly creates the misperception that no significant literary activity existed prior to this inauguration. In fact, one of the first novels in the region, *Miss Ulysses of Puka-Puka,* by Cook Island teenager Florence Johnny Frisbie, appeared as early as 1948. Histories that also emphasize the emergence of print literature in English in the Pacific downplay previous publishing endeavors in native languages, such as the Hawaiian

language newspapers that flourished in the nineteenth century and provided a significant and covert counter-discourse to American imperialism prior to annexation in 1898 (ho'omanawanui, *Voices of Fire* xxv). In addition, the emphasis on the introduction of writing as a new technology "has obscured a sophisticated Indigenous understanding of the visual," argues Teresia Teaiwa (731). Histories that mark the 1970s as the origin of Pacific literature unintentionally reinforce a narrative that Pacific peoples were "once a people without writing" (730). Though these histories often refer to the deep history of orature in the Pacific, hierarchical views that frame oral culture as outmoded and print as modern often undergird these narratives. Instead, Teaiwa asks us to consider the visual roots of Pacific cultures and proposes that "Pacific people had technologies similar to writing," referring to the semiotic systems found in *lalava* bindings found throughout Pacific architecture and canoes (735). Teaiwa's important interventions, which I return to in later chapters when considering the poet–critic's own visual poetry, trouble notions that the Pacific Islands have belatedly entered "modernity" through the advent of print literature in English.

Further, the designation of "newness" comes attached with pejorative views that Pacific writers have had to combat within the pages of their own regional journals. From its inception, Pacific writing has worked to correct colonial views that this new literature lacks maturity and is somehow "not up to par" or "unfit" for the classroom (Marsh "Theory Versus" 339; Thaman "Of Daffodils" 42). In a 1978 issue of *Mana*, which had then been taken over by Indo-Fijian writer Subramani, the publication of an essay by USP lecturer Alan Barker riled controversy. Barker's suggestion that Pacific writers gained status through self-conscious attempts to create a nationalist literature rather than quality writing was met with a backlash in the following issue. Though the editor leaves unexplained why the essay was printed in the first place, a number of writers, including Wendt, Crocombe, Thaman, and postcolonial critic Helen Tiffin, answered

back to Barker's condescension. Crocombe, for example, asserts: "The literature produced from these few in the Pacific in this very short time is very good. We are proud of it. Don't expect the first few to produce a William Shakespeare, when England's fifty million people haven't been able to produce another one in many generations" (9, 10). While Crocombe's comment counters Barker's undue dismissal, it insufficiently questions Shakespeare and the English canon as the universal standard of excellence and re-emphasizes Pacific writing as a "fledgling" literature. Anxieties stemming from these accusations of inferiority perhaps explain some of the masculinist trends that shape the rise of Pacific writing in the 1970s.

The Problem with "Civilized Girls"

As discussed previously in relation to the Caribbean, feminist critics have pointed out how anticolonial rhetoric that seeks to present the national culture as "whole" against the colonizer often does so at the expense of minority identities: internal differences of gender, class, race, and sexuality are flattened to generate a unified front against colonial oppression (Chancy 107). Women's rights are delayed or dismissed as independence is the priority, and in Pacific contexts, feminism is often regarded as a foreign and colonial import, meaning that "issues that divide men and women such as domestic violence, rape, or family law can trigger reactive responses from men," or are dismissed as problems of western influence (Jolly 149). This masculinist view is visible in the recurring trope of the "civilized girl" in opposition to the "traditional girl," a whore–madonna binary in which the "civilized" girl with her makeup and high heels comes to stand in for contaminating western influence and the pure traditional girl represents Indigenous culture. Pacific literary critic and poet Selina Marsh identifies how this masculinist trope occurs throughout literary pieces published in the 1970s and '80s and argues

that the stereotype is used not only "to critique Westernization, but to curb any feminist urgings within or outside the community" ("Un/Civilized Girls" 48). Marsh points to a number of archival pieces, from an anonymous poem published in the Solomon Islands' *Kakamora Reporter* in 1972, "Cover Up Your Tits," ("Tell them women's lib / Melanesian style / Means / Cover up those tits"), to Papuan New Guinean writer Das Mapun's poem, "Oh Woman of My People," published in the landmark anthology *Lali* (1980), which figures the female body as the visible site of cultural loss ("Oh woman of my people / Before your lips were brown / Now your lips are red") (qtd. in Marsh 55–56). The stereotype reduces women's bodies to mere ideological battlegrounds, confining "good" women to passive, static roles in which they act as symbols of the national culture rather than active participants in it. Marsh observes that "Educated Pacific women are particularly prone to such societal judgment, including demeaning sexual labeling" (48). Liberal women concerned with women's rights are stereotypically seen as contemptuous to tradition and culture and by, extension, traitors to decolonization efforts.

Fijian critic Arlene Griffen also identifies pervasive misogynistic tropes in both major novels and anthology publications, such as *Lali*. Women are presented as flat, background characters, she argues, in the early novels of Albert Wendt, and domestic abuse and violence against women is casually depicted in the novels and short stories of Wendt, Subramani, and Raymond Pillai (54). Griffen also importantly points out that these misogynistic representations are not limited to male writers but significant women writers like Crocombe also valorize masculinist culture and rely on stereotypical representations of female characters (60).

Against this trend, women poets who appear in the pages of *Mana* and other periodicals throughout the 1970s often discuss gender issues and traditional roles. Samoan Momoe Von Reiche, Solomon Islander Jully Sipolo (Makini), Tongan Konai Helu Thaman, and Ni-Vanuatu

Grace Mera Molisa, who are among the first if not the first to publish poetry volumes from their respective island contexts, frequently take up the position of women in their newly independent nations.[30] In contrast to the normative male poet that defined Caribbean literary contexts, women in Pacific literary circuits found a home in poetry and a space to pioneer their own formal rules. For the purposes of my study, I focus in particular on Thaman and Molisa below. While all four of these pioneering women deserve greater examination (and are explored in more depth in essays by Marsh, the preeminent critic of Pacific women's poetry), my interest in Thaman and Molisa here is spurred by their contrasting publishing careers and the differing ways that they view their reading publics and their roles as poets. Thaman is one of the best-known poets emerging from the "first wave" of Pacific writing, and in contrast to her contemporary women poets named here, explores gender issues but in a "quieter register" (Jolly 150). Molisa, on the other hand, is known as a much more polemic poet who, interestingly, seems to move to a more insular audience as she becomes more active in women's rights issues. I explore both to consider how their publishing practices at local and regional levels reflect their poetic missions.

Braiding Tongan Culture and Women's Rights in the Poetry of Konai Helu Thaman

Tongan-born and educated in the Tongan language, Thaman lived briefly in the US while completing her master's in education at the University of California Santa Barbara, where she was introduced to creative writing in English and began composing her own.[31] She published her

[30] In the case of Tonga, I use the word independent in a different sense, as the island was never formally colonized. A former British protectorate, Tonga achieved independence in 1970, while the others each broke from formal colonial in the 1960s through 1980. At the same time, Tongan writers engage in anticolonial discourse in resistance to foreign influence, industrial development, and capitalist accretion.

[31] Tongan and English are the official languages of the Tongan kingdom. Though Tongan is the

first poem, "You, the Choice of My Parents," in *Pacific Islands Monthly* where *Mana* was included as a section before it emerged as an independent periodical in 1974 (Va'ai 212). She was familiar with the writing of Wendt and Crocombe when she joined the staff of USP but admits that she had not read much; instead, she describes her initiation into the literary scene as gradual: "I found myself becoming a part of the new wave of Pacific writing that had its major source of inspiration . . . the issues of the times, such as independence movements and post-colonial agendas" ("Of Daffodils" 41-42). Thaman's poems appeared frequently in *Mana,* and she published several volumes with Mana Publications, which like the magazine aimed for a pan-Pacific audience: Y*ou, the Choice of My Parents* (1974), *Langakali* (1981), *Hingano* (1987), *Kakala* (1993), and the collected *Songs of Love* (1999).

In an interview, Thaman explains that she was initially repelled by feminism; because she was concerned primarily with anticolonialism and liberation education, she stayed away from the "feminist scene" while studying in the US. She also found difficulty relating to feminist discourses. While Tongan society "was and still is patriarchal," she points out that Tongan "vernacular language itself isn't sexist. You have to explain it's a female child or a male child but we do not have the equivalent of her and him" ("Tui Tu'u Heilala" 8). Later, as her investments shifted to women and education, she came to identify as feminist; yet, even her earliest published poems explicitly deal with gender issues and women's traditional roles, alongside themes of cultural loss, industrial development, and class structure. For example, the short poem "Women's Lib" appears early in her first collection, and while the main text of the

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most commonly used language among the population, which consists of nearly 97 percent Tongan origin, according to the *World Atlas.* However, until the introduction of a 2012 language policy, English had been the primary language of instruction in schools (*World Atlas).*

poem could hardly be called polemic, its title signals an overt interest in women's issues despite public sentiment that regarded "women's lib" with deep suspicion. The seven-line poem reads as an address to other women, a gentle cajoling to step into an uncertain future but ends with a tone of loss:

> If we always knew
> Where we were going
> We'll never take a step;
> So come with me sister
> Let's take a chance and make the break
> After all, we cannot all go back
> To the land. (*You* 1)

In contrast to the ideological stance signaled by the title, the poem's speaker conveys a sense of resignation, acknowledging the impossibility of return: "After all, we cannot all go back / To the land" (1).

The complex tone, which mixes elements of regret and resistance, carries into Thaman's perhaps best-known poem, "You, the Choice of My Parents," for which the collection is titled. Like "Women's Lib," the poem at least appears to engage directly with women's lib rhetoric; yet, the critique of traditional gender roles and patriarchy within Tongan society is not legible within a western feminist framework. Instead, attempts to grasp a universalist feminist message mystify rather than elucidate much of the text. The dramatic situation of the poem is an unhappy arranged marriage, where the bride is the speaker who addresses her groom:

> YOU, the choice of my parents.
> You will bring them wealth and fame
> With your western-type education
> And second-hand car.
> But you do not know me, my prince (13)

At first, the speaker seems to repudiate the practice of arranged marriage and conformity to traditional cultural norms. Its themes appear to be "universal, perhaps because it is largely a

poem about the ever-present conflict between the personal and social," yet, in an explication of the poem, Thaman asserts that literacy in Tongan symbology and culture is necessary to fully appreciate its implications ("Of Daffodils" 46). Rather than outright revolt, the speaker engages in a form of micro-rebellion, a determination that she keeps secret even from her family: her "face is masked with pretense and obedience" though she loves "as a mere act of duty" (*You* 13). Because she has no choice, she outwardly consents to the plans others have laid out for her; yet, all the while, she looks forward to returning to the land of her ancestors:

> But when my duties are fulfilled
> My spirit will return to the land of my birth
> Where you will find me no more
> Except for the weeping willows along the shore. (13)

Thaman explains that "arranged marriages are more common among members of the aristocracy where, in ancient times, women were used to initiate or cement important alliances between two clans of tribes" ("Of Daffodils" 46). The bride in the poem understands her role as a social pawn, which means removal from her family and home, but awaits the day when she will be free. According to Thaman, "The willow trees (common along the inner lagoon of Tongatapu) remind her that real freedom comes with death when, in Tonga (it was believed), the soul goes to rest in *pulotu* (paradise) where there are no conflicts and contradiction" (47). Thaman's willows along the shore reflect traditional Tongan concepts, she says: *fakatangi* (lament or loss) and *heliaki* ("the use of natural features as referents of persons and/or personal traits") (46). In the final line, the speaker transforms into the weeping willows which represent both her homeland and the spiritual world of *pulotu.* Considering these symbolic referents embedded in the Tongan landscape, the poem can neither be read as reductively feminist or anti-feminist. The speaker criticizes her groom who wears traditional tapa cloth but also comes with his "western type

education" and "second-hand car": he is presented as a hybridized figure navigating between Tongan culture and western values. Similarly, the dilemma before the bride is not to choose between western and local cultures, nor is freedom an escape from local patriarchy. Instead, her liberation comes not through transcending the local but in a return to the land of her ancestors, where she experiences a deep sense of belonging.

Read against the anonymous "women's lib" poem in the *Kakamora Reporter* (and alongside the Tongan poet's own "Women's Lib" poem), Thaman's critique of local patriarchal structures leads to an affirmation of Indigenous culture rather than a disavowal of it. As Marsh argues in her survey of writing by select Pacific poets, "To place the problematic label of 'feminist' (with all its Western connotational baggage) on to these poets would be to theorize their voices away from culturally and historically specific contexts, to perpetuate (though under an arguably more 'progressive' mask) the power structures that have rendered Pacific women invisible" ("Theory Versus" 339). For Marsh, not only white feminism but also women-of-color feminisms that are theorized through a western cultural frame, which stresses liberty through individual rather than collective subjectivity, cannot accommodate the needs of Indigenous Pacific women. Thaman's use of culturally specific symbols in her discussion of gender issues shows how her imagining of women's liberation cannot be alienated from local culture and sense of place.

The poet's later collections, *Kakala,* which refers to various species of native plants used in garlands or leis, and *Langkali,* a tree bearing culturally significant "small brown odiferous flowers" also used in leis, draw from the local environment to generate cultural meaning and require an understanding of their symbolic coding (*Langkali* 32). Thaman refers to the poem "Heilala" in *Kakala,* which addresses the most sacred flower of all the kakala and mourns

cultural loss. “For the Tongan reader *heilala* would immediately evoke a sense of importance or value,” Thaman explains. The poem concludes: “we cannot let illiteracy / again keep us apart,” emphasizing “the importance of literacy and education, particularly for women,” which in the context of the poem is necessary for preserving native cultural identity (“Of Daffodils” 44). Thaman’s frequent references to garland flowers and the braiding of leis resonates with Hawaiian literary scholar ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui’s argument about the interwoven strands that make up Hawaiian poetic tradition. For ho‘omanawanui, the lei (which is pervasive throughout Polynesia) is a powerful metaphor for the braiding of languages and native and foreign forms in contemporary Hawaiian poetry (33). Additionally, traditional arrangements consist of multiple layers, a base of leaves and stems worn against the skin and the outer layer of evenly spaced flowers. Extending ho‘omanawanui’s evocation of the lei to Thaman’s writing in English, the ancient practice of lei-weaving works to indigenize other influences by incorporating them into Tonga’s complex symbolic system. In this way, the Indigenous culture is centered but also seen as expansive, weaving in new elements while also retaining ancient roots.

Following *You, the Choice of My Parents,* Thaman’s later collections include glossaries which provide English translations for Tongan words and concepts, as well as other paratextual elements, such as an explanation of the titular *kakala* on the book’s back cover. In this way, Thaman departs from her contemporaries, Makini and Von Rieche, a move that Marsh sees as an effort to pass on traditional forms of knowledge to a wider audience (“Theory Versus” 348). While Thaman asserts the importance of local knowledge, she also provides a way in for unfamiliar readers to gain at least partial access to Tonga’s enmeshed natural and cultural worlds. Though her work primarily circulates in the Pacific and the poet has said she has not

sought to publish beyond the Pacific, the consistent inclusion of glossaries works to increase accessibility to English readers in and beyond Tonga ("Of Daffodils" 42).

Grace Mera Molisa's Critiques of "Custom"

Whereas Thaman's trajectory seems to take her outward, moving to a more expansive audience in her project centered around literacy and education, Molisa moved to an increasingly localized audience as she became more imbricated in feminist activism. Molisa, who was active in politics and government, especially in the formation of the postcolonial nation, was the only woman member of the National Constitution Committee and signatory to the Republic of Vanuatu's constitution (*Colonized People* 29). Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides under joint English and French administration) achieved independence in 1980, and Molisa served as "personal political advisor to the late Father Walter Lini, the first prime minister after independence." After falling out with Lini and the larger political party, she continued to advise the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNKW) but "was herself marginalized in the factional turbulence of Vanuatu's politics in the late 1980s and 1990s" (Jolly 147).

Black Stone, Molisa's first collection, published by Mana Publications in Fiji in 1983, takes its title from the black stone or "*vanua* of Vanuatu, specifically, its black solidified lava base" (Marsh "Black Stone"). The most pervasive theme in the collection is "foreign abuse," in the form of colonial and neocolonial power (*Black Stone* 12). However, a few poems, such as "Marriage" and "Custom," which is one of Molisa's better-known pieces, critique the oppression of women in Vanuatuan society. "Custom / is an English word [. . .]," Molisa begins:

> Inadvertently
> misappropriating
> "Custom" [. . .]

a frankenstein
corpse
conveniently
recalled
to intimidate
women (*Black Stone* 24)

Molisa directly engages with the ways in which women are directly controlled in the name of tradition but asserts that "custom" itself is distorted for patriarchal purposes. As Marsh explains, Molisa's use of the English word "custom" rather than the Bislama pigeon "kastom" also condemns the colonial impact on understandings of traditional culture. "By avoiding the term *kastom*," Marsh explains, "Molisa strategically sidesteps the criticism that her stance is anti-culture. She also avoids succumbing to the insidious dichotomy that links men with the preservation of custom and women's freedom with its destruction" ("Black Stone").

The poet's second collection moves forcefully from a focus on nationalism into examination of gender disparities. *Colonised People* (1987), which was published locally in Port Vila, Vanuatu, by Black Stone Publications, attacks a different form of colonial oppression than the first collection. The cover image, which shows a young woman with a disaffected expression on her face holding a baby, demonstrates which population Molisa sees as still colonized following Vanuatu's independence, as does the dedication. The book is dedicated: "TO THE WOMEN OF VANUATU who toil and labour daily, unrecognized, unrewarded, just to cope with life's chores and burdens and to THE HOPE that Future Generations of Vanuatu Women will be able to enjoy a better Life." Molisa's introduction explains, "In a state of oppression Women are multiply oppressed compared with Men. Such is clear in Vanuatu. Vanuatu is now free of foreign colonial domination but NiVanuatu Women are still colonized," and she claims that because women are "mentally enslaved," they cannot be free until "they are honest with

themselves" (7). The poems that follow are generally arranged in two columns, conveying the opposition between rigid gender roles. The poem "Vanuatu," for example, declares "Vanuatu is / FREE" in the left column while the corresponding text on the right qualifies, "Men are Free. / Women are chattels" (23). The poems are also interspersed with charts, mixing documents and discourses, which evidence the unequal representation of women as compared to men in the labor sector and in government.

The progression across the first two volumes not only shows a shift in concerns but also a turn from a larger Pacific publisher to a local Vanuatuan press. Molisa's last collection marks a further narrowing of her geographical audience in its departure from English to the local language of Bislama. Though this move caters to locals, it possibly increased her overall number of readers through the widening of class. *Pasifik Paradaes* (1995), printed in Port Vila (and funded by the Australian High Commission), is heavily illustrated to increase its accessibility to an audience with limited literacy. A single introductory note in English explains that the book is written in Anglicized Bislama to make it accessible to English readers but places the burden on readers to sound out unfamiliar words: "This book is published in simple Bislama. Bislama is one of Vanuatu's three National languages, the others are French and English. If you have trouble understanding a word, read it out loud phonetically. The Book is written in Anglicized Bislama, especially for English readers, as an introduction to Bislama and Vanuatu" (5).

Pasifik Paradaes provides a brief history and overview of Vanuatu, with a special emphasis on issues of neocolonialism and gender issues, as evidenced by titles such as: "Turism" (Tourism) (13); "Tax Haven" (14); and "Womens Raets are Human Raets" (22). Perhaps surprisingly, Pacific literary critic Margaret Jolly explains that the book was produced for a global women's conference in Beijing (148). Jolly admits that while this may seem a curious

choice in that the use of Bislama would make the book less accessible not only to a global audience but also wider Pacific audiences, the decision matches Molisa's intention to communicate primarily with Ni-Vanuatu women. According to Jolly, "Bislama, the lingua franca of Vanuatu, is the way of talking across the diversity of 110 Indigenous languages . . . and is eagerly embraced by ni-Vanuatu as their language rather than that of their erstwhile colonial masters, who typically spoke it poorly" (148). In this way, Molisa's use of Bislama also cuts across class divides or notions of literature as intended for elites and speaks to Ni-Vanuatu women through the medium of poetry. Jolly emphasizes that "It is important not to dismiss the local significance of such poetry because of this small market because . . . many poems written for women's conferences and church meetings are read aloud at village meetings, made into songs, and (where necessary) translated into local languages," which inspires local women to write poems of their own (148). While *Pasifik Paradaes* clearly seeks to educate, Molisa's acknowledgements section also suggests that her other mission is to encourage future generations of Ni-Vanuatu toward writing and creation. She credits the three artists who illustrated her book and writes "I wish to thank and encourage the young artists whose talents I recognize and hereby expose" (4). Though Molisa espouses a militant feminism in her later volumes, the bibliographic code embedded in her dedications and acknowledgements express her communal vision and desire to empower other women and artists.

Conclusion: Archipelagic Women Writers

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasized the ways in which local publishing endeavors formed island federations, catalyzed by anticolonial sentiment that travelled beyond regional confines to connect Pacific and Caribbean archipelagoes. With the networking power of

the little magazine, new literatures circulated across national and regional frames that developed outside the purview of metropolitan networks. At the same time, though they differed in their articulations, the postcolonial literary movements of both the Caribbean and the Pacific operated through masculine forms of literary prestige that at times extended colonial discourses and marginalized women writers.

While the various Pacific and Caribbean women explored here emerge from different national, colonial, and literary contexts, each resist or write back to these masculine structures in her own way. From Césaire's oblique critique of Breton and larger condemnation of touristic views of the tropics to Bennett's comical deflation of trumped-up masculine nationalism, these Caribbean writers negotiate different structures of gendered private/public divides that exclude women from "serious" intellectual or literary activity. In the Pacific, Thaman and Molisa navigate masculinist discourses that stereotype women as complicit with forces of globalization, while men are the anticolonial warriors who guard traditional culture. Thaman aligns with Césaire's methods through her quiet refusal of objectifying views of women. Also similar to Césaire, Thaman's writing is wedded to the local and infused with the metaphors of her landscape and culture, an aesthetic that allows her to trouble notions of women's rights as threatening to local culture. Finally, Molisa, the most overtly political and feminist of the poets in this chapter, comes to advocate for women's rights through the medium of poetry and her local language of Bislama. Returning to the scant number of women represented in the 1970–71 issue of *Savacou,* the (likely unintentional) emphasis of community and co-authorship in the women's bios offers an alternative to notions of the writer as lonely "man of action." If the male writer hero is an island, these women writers' sense of communal values better reflects the archipelagic power of island coalitions and little magazines.

In the following chapters, I consider the next wave or "second generation" of women poets, beginning primarily in the 1970s in the Caribbean and in the 1990s in Pacific literary spheres. Following in the wake of these pioneering women poets, the later generations continue to negotiate gendered binaries of public and private, tradition and modernity, but in these later decades after the dust of independence movements has settled, they take on new issues as colonial discourses take on different forms and guises, such as militarization and settler colonialism in a late capitalist global economy.

Chapter Two: Islanders and Outlanders: Gendering Settler Colonialism

"More than a feminist, I am a nationalist," claims Hawaiian poet and activist Haunani-Kay Trask (915). While prominent feminist theorists frame nationalism as inherently oppressive to women—in that patriarchal elites defer women's rights and reduce female bodies to symbols to "produce the generic 'we' of the nation"—Indigenous women like Trask spurn feminism as a western, imperial import (Grewal and Kaplan). In this chapter, I examine the tensions between nationalisms and feminisms in the context of settler colonial societies in the Pacific and the Caribbean. By juxtaposing and charting the changing views of two politically active poets, Trask and Mahadai Das of Guyana, I bring heightened attention to issues of gender in two distinct settings that I see as important case studies for understanding settler colonialism's relationship to neoliberal multiculturalism. While Trask, a Kānaka Maoli advocate for Hawaiian sovereignty, and Das, an Indo-Guyanese descended from indentured laborers, might represent polar sides of the issue, I argue that their gendered experiences complicate their relationships to the nation in overlapping ways.

Betrayed by and excluded from their respective settler nations, Das and Trask turn to Indigenous epistemologies, which represent a way of knowing antithetical to the nation-state and, therefore, a conduit to imagine alternative futures. Through their respective aesthetic projects, these two poets intervene in conceptions of territory as disembodied commodity, presenting, instead, "lived geographies" co-extensive with the human body (Rifkin, "Erotics" 176).[32] Extending the materialist approach advanced in Chapter One, I trace the publishing

[32] The phrase "lived geographies" is drawn from Mark Rifkin's discussion of Qwo-Li Driskill's concept of the "sovereign erotic," which relates to the reciprocal relationship between native peoples and native land (176).

histories of each poet to identify unexpected commonalities in their trajectories. As respective settler and "native," Das and Trask occupy conflicting positionalities, but their poetics generate a connective thread through their re-envisioning of the relationship between land and bodies. Because such a vision is unintelligible within the legal and social systems under settler colonialism, their work speaks to poetry's potential for going where politics cannot go—they imaginatively transcend the limits of political discourse within the confines of settler colonial systems.

Guyana, a former British colony and independent South American nation, and Hawai'i, a current US state and occupied Pacific archipelago, occupy very different political statuses and relationships to colonialism. However, through an analysis of settler colonialism and the logics of possession, as theorized by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, common ground emerges between these contexts that highlights the urgency of centering Indigenous issues long overlooked in postcolonial theory. In contrast to dominant settler colonial paradigms where white settlers hold the power, as in the continental US, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, a focus on these two outlier contexts emphasizes the ways in which European and American colonization is extended through minority migrants and settlers.

Within the larger context of settler colonial studies, recent works focusing on Hawai'i and Guyana, respectively, have shifted the field by implicating minority populations in colonial projects. Because of Hawai'i's dominant Asian settler population, it is primarily migrants and descendants of Asian laborers who presently displace native Hawaiians. The 2008 edited volume *Asian Settler Colonialism* elucidates how liberal human rights discourses celebrating multiculturalism in Hawai'i work to mask the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. Meanwhile in the Caribbean, Shona Jackson's *Creole Indigeneity* (2012) also critiques multicultural

nationalism by investigating how Guyanese Creoles assert their right to the land through the performance of modern labor, thus displacing surviving aboriginal groups. The celebration of the postcolonial nation's ethnic diversity obscures the history of Indigenous disenfranchisement, essentially "pass[ing] off Indigeneity as just another tile in the multicultural mosaic" (Wolfe, *The Settler Complex* 3). In this way, though Guyana and Hawai'i are remote from each other in terms of history, culture, and geography, they share structural similarities that separate them from white settler societies. In addition, in comparison to other former plantation colonies like those in the Caribbean archipelago, surviving Indigenous peoples make up a sizable portion of the overall populations of Guyana and Hawai'i, raising the visibility of Indigenous issues in these regions.[33]

By insisting on a native–settler binary, settler colonial theory goes against the grain of postcolonial and antiracist theories that emphasize entanglement, hybridity, and anti-essentialism. Settler colonial studies reframe the narrative of imperial conquest by bringing Indigenous subjects into focus, positing that the disappearance of native peoples—through extermination, displacement, and assimilation—is foundational to colonial societies, such as the US.[34] Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd introduces the term "colonial cacophony" to describe the dissonance between native and diasporic identities. "Cacophony" illustrates how colonial structures pit subaltern peoples against each other, resulting in a discord of conflicting moral claims all competing to be heard. To avoid flattening distinct forms of colonial subordination,

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[33] According to the World CIA Factbook, East Indians and Africans combined comprise 70 percent of Guyana's population, while in Hawai'i, the US Census Bureau reports a 40 percent Asian majority. In both Guyana and Hawai'i, Indigenous groups represent ten percent of the respective populations (compared to one percent in the overall US population).

[34] As Patrick Wolfe explains, the dominant feature of settler colonialism "is not exploitation but replacement. The logic of this project, a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Indigenous population, informs a range of historical practices, that might otherwise appear distinct—invasion is a structure, not an event" (*Settler Colonialism* 163).

Byrd contents that theorizations of the postcolonial that arise out of Indigenous lands must center Indigenous peoples (Byrd xiv). However, critics of settler colonial studies claim that such a formulation ignores the history of oppression faced by immigrants in these societies, and they often dismiss the prior land claims of native nationalists as demonstrations of xenophobic elitism and anti-miscegenation (Sharma and Wright 121). For these critics, settler colonial studies privileges the suffering of Indigenous peoples, while discounting the experiences of migrants of color. At the same time, Sharma and Wright's critique is predicated on assumptions of prior land claims as race-based, which are rooted in western notions of land as property that cannot account for Indigenous relationships to place.

Responding to this debate, my title "Islanders and Outlanders" borrows from the term coined by Pacific anthropologist Robert Borofsky to describe the standoff between natives and foreigners (qtd. in Jolly 139). Borofksy's insider-outsider neologism sets the seemingly insular nationalism of Indigenous movements against migrants in the Pacific Islands. However, I aim to reconfigure this stalemate by considering the ways in which gender oppression cuts across these categories in settler colonial societies. Rather than reading Indigenous and migrant histories as in competition with each other, a focus on gender allows for a way to read across these contexts, placing the narratives of native and migrant women in conversation. Such an approach reveals that though "their historical oppressions are not the same," each group is oppressed by overriding structures of colonial white supremacy (Saranillio 282).

While recent works in settler colonial studies, such as *Creole Indigeneity* or Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive* (2016) do not overtly engage with feminism, they invite a deeper consideration of gender dynamics by foregrounding ideological continuities between patriarchy and possession. Intervening in critical race studies, which generally theorize whiteness

as constructed in opposition to racial "Others," Moreton-Robinson links racism to possessive logics. Through the rationale of patriarchal white sovereignty, the nation is constructed as white property: "racism," she asserts, is "inextricably tied to the theft and appropriation of Indigenous lands in the first world" (*White Possessive* xiii). The white possessive is a *patriarchal* logic in that existing legal and political institutions were founded by white patriarchs. Because these founding institutions defined personhood and property through patriarchy, male supremacy continues to shape how national belonging is articulated even in postcolonial contexts ("The Possessive Logic"). Additionally, Jackson explains that the process by which Guyanese Creoles assume prior claim to land by subordinating Indigenous peoples "is a gendered phenomenon in which the sovereign Creole is masculinist and the Creole and native woman, in a heternormative gender economy, remains as other but essential to this process of becoming" (31). In this way, the possessive logic of colonialism, which displaces native peoples and reduces land to property, operates through a gendered logic that depends on the subordination of both "Creole and native woman." Though their oppressions and positionalities are different, settler and native women are denied full citizenship and personhood in the settler nation-state.

In order to set up the stakes of a gendered consideration of settler colonialism, I begin with an Indigenous perspective through Trask. Counter to the male-centric iconographies that have historically plagued anticolonial nationalisms, including in Guyana, Trask's nationalist movement is in fact a women's movement; led primarily by women, the Hawaiian sovereignty movement is informed by *mana wahine,* a Pacific Indigenous concept of feminine power (Trask *From a Native Daughter,* 94). According to ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui, the concept of *mana wahine* can be found throughout Oceania and embodies feminist ideas predates and exceeds the limits of western feminism (132). In particular, mana wahine is distinct from western feminism

notions because its power is "ultimately linked to ʻāina" or land and ancestry (hoʻomanawanui 201). While anticolonial nationalisms often reduce women to mere symbols of the nation, mana wahine emerges from Indigenous conceptions of people and land as intrinsically related. In addition, considering Trask's references to other histories of colonization, connecting Hawaiʻi to the wider Pacific and to other postcolonial contexts, allows for a more dynamic conception of Indigenous nationalism that allows for potential alliances with other oppressed groups.

Considering these potential alliances, in the following section, I turn to a settler perspective through the figure of Das. Though initially a fervent nationalist in Guyana, after escaping Forbes Burnham's increasingly totalitarian regime in 1980, Das's affinities turn to aboriginal identities also excluded from the postcolonial nation (Dabydeen and Samaroo 256).[35] Ultimately, reading Trask alongside Das brings a more expansive vision of native national identity. Against stereotypes of native nationalism as essentialist and masculinist, Trask presents Hawaiian sovereignty efforts as liberatory for women, and as an exiled settler, Das finds imaginative possibility not in western feminism but in the more inclusive humanity offered through Indigenous ways of knowing.

The Invisibility of US Imperialism in Hawaiʻi

[35] Das left Guyana for the United States following the assassination of Walter Rodney, political dissident, founder of the Working People's Alliance, and mentor to Das, in 1980. As Denise deCaires Narain points out, Das had no doubt that the Guyanese government was behind the murder: in her preface to her second book, Das explains that her American publisher encouraged her to use a pseudonym, but she refused. "I would prefer my own name," she writes. "I will probably be safe for a few years, as the Guyanese government is busy running down dissidents at home" (qtd. in DeCaires Narain 175).

Trask, one of the most vocal advocates for native Hawaiian sovereignty, initially thought of herself as a feminist while studying at the University of Madison–Wisconsin, but after earning her PhD in sociology and returning home to Hawai'i, she renounced all feminist identification. In a 1996 *Signs* article, she writes: "I recognized that a practicing feminism hampered organizing among my people in rural communities. Given our nationalist context, feminism appeared as just another *haole* [or white] intrusion into a besieged Hawaiian world. Any exclusive focus on women neglected the historical oppression of all Hawaiians and the large force field of imperialism" (909). Ultimately, she claims: "Culture is a larger reality than women's rights" (915).

Trask's nationalism has drawn accusations of essentialism from both Indigenous feminists and critics of the term "settler colonialism." Renya Ramirez, American studies scholar and member of the Winnebago nation, points out the reductionism of Trask's statements in that she assumes "*feminism* and *white feminism* are interchangeable terms" and misses how "sexism and racism oppress Indigenous women at the same time" (304, 305).[36] More broadly, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright critique Trask along with other Indigenous rights activists for what they see as "autochthnous" thinking (or assuming a natural connection between people and place) (121). Centering the moral claims of natives, they posit, "render[s] all others peripheral to the realization of decolonization or justice": "In keeping with the anti-miscegenist character of such politics, the numerous past and present alliances across 'Native'/'non-Native' divides are wholly denied, as are the classed, gendered, and sexualized divisions *within* such categories"

[36] Native Hawaiian feminist Lisa Kahaleole Hall makes a similar critique: Trask "continues to frame feminist thinking and activism as white" with "no real acknowledgment of the theoretical work of feminists of color, such as Angela Davis, Mari Matsuda, and Cherrie Moraga, among the many others she has appeared with on panels and at conferences over the years" (27).

(126). While these critiques emphasize the importance of intersectional understandings of identity, they also take Trask's statements out of the historical specificities of the Hawaiian context. Trask stresses her Hawaiian national identity in a way that eclipses other strands of identity, such as gender and class, because it is the one under constant threat of erasure. As Lisa Kaholeole Hall contends, "U.S. colonialism is off the map," in part, because of national mythology that "denies the imperial past and present of the United States" (17, 18). Dominant narratives that describe the US as a "nation of immigrants" obscure the American history of settler colonialism and the genocide of American Indian peoples. Though raised in Hawai'i, President Barack Obama reinforced this mythology in a speech made in the days after his inauguration in 2009: "We sometimes make mistakes. We have not been perfect. But if you look at our track record, as you say, America was not born as a colonial power" (qtd. in Dunbar-Ortiz 116). Because "real imperialism" does not include "the armed takeover of Hawaiian, Mexican, and American Indian lands and peoples in the American psyche," the claims of Indigenous peoples are construed as ethnic elitism, asserting the rights of one group of minorities over others (Hall 19).

Lacking an analysis of genocide, antiracist and liberal humanist discourses are able to dismiss Indigenous nationalisms as elitist. Civil rights (including women's rights) approaches cannot account for Indigenous concerns, which resist assimilation into the nation-state and also stand outside of Enlightenment conceptions of the human. Aiming to shift the dialectics of feminism in much the way that "settler colonialism" shifts the dialectics of our understanding of colonialism, Trask strategically prioritizes nationalism in order to preserve the distinction

between native and settler investments.[37] While this radical presentation seems indifferent to the place of women, examining Trask's statements in context with her publishing history and broader activist career reveals that her construction of the Hawaiian nation cannot be disentangled from Hawaiian women's empowerment.

In her article "Beyond the Horizon? Nationalisms, Feminisms, and Globalization in the Pacific," Margaret Jolly also examines Trask's *Signs* article in relation to her poetry and concludes that her poetry "highlights the gendered dimensions of colonialism" in Hawai'i (143). She compares Trask's views with those of poet Grace Mera Molisa of Vanuatu, considered in my previous chapter. Though Mera Molisa also rejects the term feminist for its complicity with western imperialism, Jolly sees her poetry as much more attentive to women's subjugation and exclusion from nationalist politics. She writes: "Like Trask, Mera Molisa is a strong nationalist but, unlike Trask, she is also a strong critic of male domination, Indigenous and introduced. She espouses feminist values even if she prefers not to identify herself in this way" (146). In part, this difference can be attributed to contrasting geopolitical and historical circumstances in Hawai'i and Vanuatu. While Vanuatu is an independent state with an overwhelmingly Indigenous population, native Hawaiians must legally assert their prior claim to the land through "blood quantum" and compete for rights with other racial minorities.[38]

While I seek to extend Jolly's informative research, especially in terms of her attention to the ways in which national contexts shapes the articulation of feminism, I also complicate some

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[37] I use "strategic" here to evoke Gayatri Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism," in which a subject assumes an essentialized identity, such as "woman," for the sake of gaining political agency and mobilizing resistance with other groups (3).

[38] See J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's *Hawaiian Blood* (2008) for further discussion of blood quantum and the ways that sovereignty politics in Hawai'i are complicated by race politics and policy in the US.

of her claims by emphasizing a settler colonial framework. Jolly announces her intention in writing is to unsettle some of the binaries between "Indigenous and foreign" and "local and global." By putting Trask in dialogue with Das, comparing Indigenous and settler narratives, I aim to preserve the "integrity of the binary opposition between Natives and settlers" while also investigating the ways in which Trask's work allows for affinities with non-native identities (Wolfe 11). Looking closely at developments across Trask's publishing record, I contend that the poet asserts female power through her nationalism, and in doing so, she evokes a form of nationalism that is more dynamic and expansive than in settler colonial national paradigms.

Trask's Strategic Nationalism

Trask's publishing history shows the nuances of her intellectual shift away from feminism not necessarily illustrated by her statements in *Signs.* Two academic works precede her poetry collections: her dissertation-turned-book, titled *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory* (1986), which critiques western patriarchal structures but does not directly address the issues faced by Indigenous or, more specifically, Hawaiian, women, and *From a Native Daughter* (1993), a manifesto of Hawaiian nationalism. On the surface, the progression across these two texts lines up with Trask's self-described trajectory in *Signs*—tracing a neat arc that crosses the border between seemingly discrete categories of "feminism" and "nationalism." However, Trask deploys these categories strategically, as can be seen through a close examination of *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* and *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum.* Examining her two poetry volumes' paratexts—or the features surrounding the main text, such as introductions, editorial notes, and places of publication—situates each book within the specificities of

Hawaiian political contexts.[39] In addition, reading the poetry in relation to each book's material history suggests intended audiences for each work and, ultimately, shows how Trask's articulation of the nation centers Hawaiian women.

Features of Trask's first collection, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994), for example, indicate a white American readership as its primary target. Published by small Oregon publisher CALYX Books, the volume is introduced by Ohio-born poet Eleanor Wilner, who functions as a sympathetic ambassador presenting Trask to an American audience. Wilner's introduction follows Trask's brief preface—in which she gives a telegraphic history of US occupation and military takeover of Hawai'i—and encourages readers not to turn away from uneasy feelings of guilt that Trask's poems are sure to induce. Explanatory notes accompany nearly every poem, indicating that the poet imagines a readership unfamiliar with Hawaiian epistemology and history, as well as present-day political representation, and the dedication ("to the blue-eyed devil and all our years") reads as a bitter address to white America. With its descriptions of haoles "clotted on the beach / in tourist shirts" and "immigrants scrambling / over us," this first collection is perhaps comparable to Jamaica Kincaid's 1988 *A Small Place* (45, 14). Kincaid's now-canonical work of nonfiction prose exposes how Antigua's natural beauty attracts tourists but also masks its violent history. Published by prestigious New York imprint Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, the book also targets American audiences with its descriptions of "fat, pastrylike-fleshed" tourists lounging on Caribbean beaches, unaware of their complicity in colonial structures (13). Though perhaps not meant exclusively for American audiences, both books are

[39] Brandy McDougall also pays close attention to paratexts in her chapter on Trask in *Finding Meaning,* noting the poet's use of notes and change of publisher. McDougall, however, uses her observations to trace *kaona* connections, or hidden meanings embedded in the texts, while I am more interested in ways that Trask navigates tensions between "woman" and "nation."

positioned to circulate most widely in the continental United States because of their place of publication, and therefore, they focus on readerships foreign to the books' settings.

Despite (or perhaps because of its) engagement with white readers, one of the book's most striking themes is its hostility to foreign presence in Hawai'i, expressing repulsion to Japanese tourists and rage against white settlers. The poem "Racist White Woman," for example, begins: "I could kick / your face, puncture / both eyes" (67). While *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*'s overt mission might be to educate haole audiences, the book is not solely preoccupied with foreigners, tourists, and immigrants. A number of poems stand out with their focus on Hawaiian women, portraying them alternately as victims of tourist exploitation and as vengeful warriors against colonialism and patriarchy. In "Woman," for example, the speaker casts native women's bodies as dangerous: like "sharks and mantas / under the surface," her "fanged desires // to be raw / swift / and deadly" (51). In another poem, "Long-Term Strategies," Trask addresses gender inequities in Hawai'i directly by confronting violence against women:

> We can't rape men
> put anything in them
> against their will
>
> pull down their secrets
> chilled by fear [. . .]

Despite women's vulnerability to sexual violation, the poem turns to invoke the power of Pele, goddess of the volcano, to even the score.

> But in Pele's hills
> beneath a bloody moon
> young women dancers
>
> learn castration
> as an art. (57)

Shifting from the patriarchal society, the setting of poem moves into a supernatural landscape protected by Pele. The bloody moon foregrounds the violence in the final couplet but also suggests a magnetic feminine power. The poem's title "Long-Term Strategies" contrasts with the swift physical violence of castration, perhaps suggesting that young women cultivate their "art" over a long period of time and emphasizing the sense of feminine community developed within Pele's sanctuary.

Hawaiian literary scholar and poet Brandy Nālani McDougall sees the poem as an assertion of mana wahine*,* not only because of the young women dancers' refusal to be victimized—they take revenge by learning castration, severing male power through their genitalia—but also through the invocation of feminine power through Pele. At the same time, McDougall emphasizes that ultimately western imperialism, rather than Indigenous men's attempts to dominate women, is the root cause of Hawaiian women's problems. She writes: "Trask stresses rape as a violent enforcement of patriarchy, which was brought to Hawai'i in colonial ideology" (136, 137). However, given some of the criticism leveled at Trask for essentializing native culture, Trask's critiques of both haole and native men and traditions here warrant further investigation.[40]

Trask's claims that national culture takes precedence over women's issues—including "reproductive rights, equal employment, domestic violence," and other public health problems

[40] I keep in mind here Teresia Teaiwa's important point not to valorize Indigenous culture as utopian but to apply critique as scrupulously as with colonialism: "What must remain a hallmark of a Pacific Studies approach to Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing is the willingness to be critical—that is, to attempt objectivity and to try to examine issues from as many relevant perspectives as possible, however difficult that may be to achieve. Such an approach means that Indigenous violence, corruption, neglect, and obfuscation shall be critiqued as rigorously as the sins of colonialism and imperialism" (117).

wrought by colonial history—aligns with other Indigenous women's rejection of feminism (910). As Hall explains, these activists see feminism as "superfluous" because the status of women was higher in their pre-colonial culture; in this belief, overthrow of the colonial order will incidentally restore women's rights. Hall argues, however, that such views ignore the sexualized and gendered forms of oppression that colonialism takes and also invest faith in an impossible return: "whatever egalitarian sexual and gender systems that existed prior to colonial invasion and conquest have been thoroughly colonized by Christianity and capitalism" (27). Trask might be accused of romanticizing native culture or expressing nostalgia for an irretrievable past, but her poems that take on women's issues in fact tell a different story.

In "Nā Wāhine Noa," Trask considers the place of women in pre-colonial Hawai'i. She writes:

> Rise up, women gods.
> Have Hina as your goddess
> virgin, volcanic
> unto herself.
>
> Without master, marriages
> lying parasite men.
> Unto her self:
> a wise eroticism (52).

The poem encourages women to follow the lead of Hina, goddess of the moon; virginal and volcanic, she reproduces without needing a male counterpart, repudiating marriage along with "lying parasite men." The description of Hina's eroticism as "wise" brings to mind influential feminist thinker and lesbian Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic as latent power suppressed by western culture. In contrast to what she calls the "superficially erotic" (or pornographic, which reinforces ideas of female inferiority), Lorde's erotic is a creative energy, "an assertion of the lifeforce of women" (55). In particular, Lorde's description of the source of this power resonates

with Hawaiian epistemology as evoked by Trask. "The very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros,*" writes Lorde, "the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony" (55). Because Hina and Pele birth new islands through volcanic activity, the volcano becomes a site of reproduction. While volcanoes might symbolize chaos and disaster in other contexts, in Trask's writing, they also connote creativity and regeneration: for every inch of earth covered by a molten eruption, new layers of soil are produced by the cooling lava. As explored more fully in the next section, which details the myth of the Pele, natural cycles produce balance and harmony following the chaos of volcanic eruption. Rather than harkening back to a static past by calling upon the goddess Hina, Trask's engagement with Hawaiian tradition emphasizes the dynamism and creativity celebrated in these mythologies.

In "Nā Wāhine Noa," not only does Trask privilege women's power, but she critiques gender divisions within native Hawaiian culture. In a note, Trask explains that the poem title means "'free women' in the sense of those released from the restrictive Hawaiian system of *kapu* (taboo), where among other divisions and proscriptions, the genders were separated, and women were considered defiling" (*Light* 53). Through Hina's rebellion, Trask shows that she is not merely nostalgic for a utopian precolonial state nor does she valorize native culture as pure and beyond critique. At the same time, through the animation of female deities such as Hina and Pele, Trask highlights Indigenous values of *pono,* or balance between opposing principles, in that Pele is invested with the power to overturn existing social orders (ho'omanawanui 203). In this way, Trask's critique cannot be registered through western feminist frames. As J. Kehaulani Kaunanui explains, even within the system of *kapu,* gender hierarchies did not exist in the sense that they do in western society: "Historically, gender was not a stand-alone category, since all

gender roles were mediated by genealogical rank, whereby one's ancestral lineage was most important for determining social positions" (283). Gender binaries of public and private were introduced into Hawaiian culture when "Colonialism transformed the Hawaiian system of balance between women and men. Anglo-American Calvinists introduced Western ideas to Hawaiian society that dictated the domestic subjugation of women in social, political, and economic realms" (284). Because colonization in Hawai'i has thoroughly transformed cultural norms around gender and sexuality, Kaunanui asserts that feminism cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to decolonization; instead, she reinforces Cynthia Enloe's suggestion that women's experiences under colonialism should be "a starting point for articulating nationalist goals" as this reorientation would "[reap] different possibilities for liberation" (286). In Trask's poem, the rebirth of the nation begins not with the general Hawaiian populace but more specifically with "women gods" rising up. Hina's "wise eroticism" becomes a way of reimaging the nation, a resurrection of national culture through women accessing their suppressed erotic power. Similar to Lorde's concept, the erotic then is not only a sexual force but also a political one.

In other poems, this interrogation of gender divisions continues into Trask's consideration of Hawai'i's present-day political climate. Trask targets settler politicians but also native men who ally with the US settler government. In the poem "Missionary Graveyard," which refers to the Christian missionaries who represented the first wave of European influence, Trask addresses a variety of after-effects wrought by colonialism, from urban development to poor diet. However, the poem stands out in the collection in that she lays blame on fellow natives alongside foreign intruders. Referring to John Waihe'e, the first elected governor of Hawaiian ancestry since statehood in 1959, she writes:

a smiling Hawaiian

shaking hands with
money-men, eating
rice and drinking *sake* (15)

Trask presents Waiheʻe as a traitor, enjoying rice and sake with Japanese businessmen. Rather than representing native Hawaiian interests, Waiheʻe sells out to foreign interests and, motivated by personal gain, he smiles as he makes deals with "money-men," indifferent to their impact on native Hawaiian communities.

In an essay, Trask explains that "men are rewarded, including Native men, for collaboration" and, therefore, have more impetus to assimilate to patriarchal American institutions (*From a Native Daughter* 94). She says that for this reason, women have naturally moved to the frontlines of the Hawaiian nationalist movement: "While Hawaiian men have come to achieve their own place in the legislature and the governor's office, Hawaiian female leadership has come to the fore in the sovereignty movement" (94). She goes on to argue, though, that the main reason why women dominate the sovereignty movement is because "women have not lost sight of the *lāhui,* that is, of the nation. Caring for the nation is, in Hawaiian belief, an extension of caring for the family, the large family that includes both our lands and our people . . . Hawaiian women leaders, then, are genealogically empowered to lead the nation" (94). This notion is reinforced in the poem, "Sons," in which the speaker is unapologetic about not having children, especially sons. Instead, she is "slyly / reproductive," generating ideas and books, "the rope of resistance / for unborn generations." While future sons "soar / beyond, somewhere," referring to Hawaiian traditions in which sky deities are male, the speaker steadfastly completes her earthbound work:

I stay behind
weaving fine baskets
of resilience

to carry our daughters in. (55, 56)

The poem concludes that the work of sovereignty and protecting the Hawaiian nation is women's work. Weaving, discussed in more depth in the following chapter, is an important metaphor in women's writing throughout Oceania; the trope emphasizes women's cultural contributions as well as communal bonds, as weaving practices have been passed down across generations (Sinavaina and Kauanui 5). In the poem specifically, weaving does not only refer to domestic labor but also reproduction. In Euro-American public/private divides, women's domestic labor is relegated to the "private" realm outside of national historical time; yet, in the Pacific Indigenous sense of weaving, the practice emerges through relations with the environment, plaiting pandanus leaves and "weaving together disparate materials into a coherent whole" (Sinavaina and Kauanui 5; Rifkin 181). For Trask, women's primary role is not limited to childbearing and rearing but extends into leading and caring for the nation. While the poem does not directly allude to erotics or the "wise eroticism" of "Nā Wāhine Noa," the speaker is "slyly / reproductive" and like Hina, births a new generation without the help of a male counterpart. The future generations of the nation are explicitly daughters; as presented in the poem, the future of Hawai'i is female.

Woman and Nation: Pele as a Nationalist Symbol

Considering the role of women in preserving the nation and the importance of collaboration between women, a recurring theme in Trask's work as represented in the sisterhood of Pele and Hi'iakaiapoliopele, a basic understanding of the myth of Pele is necessary to reading the poems. McDougall points out that western audiences are "familiar with Pele as a destructive

force because of colonial depictions, [but] this is only half the story." Hi‘iakaiapoliopele (or Hi‘iaka), Pele's favorite sister, "greens the earth after the lava has cooled"; the two work in tandem, creating a natural cycle of destruction and regeneration. In the most popular mo‘olelo (a succession of words or story, traditionally passed down orally), Pele asks Hi‘iaka to fetch her lover, a chief named Lohi‘au. In exchange, Hi‘iaka requests that Pele watch over her companion and also perhaps lover, Hōpoe "a woman described as a lehua grove" (124). When Hi‘iaka takes too long to return, Pele destroys Hōpoe in a jealous rage, and Hi‘iaka then strikes back by taking the hula dancer as her lover. An epic battle between the sisters ensures, and a truce is only reached when Pele realizes her sister nearly matches her in strength.

In *Voices of Fire,* ho‘omanawanui explains how this mo‘olelo of Pele and her sister has operated as a political story of resistance and cultural preservation in the face of western takeover. "*Hulihia* literally means ‘overturned, a complex change, overthrow,'" she explains. "The hulihia chants are an integral part of the Pele and Hi‘iaka mo‘olelo and are the climax of the narrative. They refer to the destruction and regeneration of the ‘āina [land] through volcanic eruption, ‘overturning' the established order on the land and building something new" (xl). Because of the narrative's emphasis on "overthrow," it has become an enduring symbol of decolonization and a clandestine way to keep Hawaiian nationalism alive in the US-occupied islands. In Hawaiian-language newspapers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the serialized epics of Pele and Hi‘iaka "significantly outnumber mo‘olelo for all other aka [gods], including male deities (xxiv). According to ho‘omanawanui, "Nationalist messages to kahuli [or resist settler colonialism] are embedded in the mo‘olelo, employing koana [or metaphors of resistance] that spoke to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi of that time period; this message of Hawaiian nationalism continues to speak to us today" (xl).

Though western readers might be familiar with Pele, without this historical knowledge, they miss how Pele is coded as a symbol of nationalism. While the nation is often gendered as feminine in other contexts (such as the figure of "Mother Ireland" in Ireland or "Lady Liberty" in the US or the "motherland" more generally), Pele as a symbol is not a passive or victimized figure awaiting the rescue of heroic patriots; instead, she is figured as a historical agent with powers that surpass those of male deities, and she likewise empowers Hawaiian women to take leadership positions. Trask's consistent references to Pele in *Light in the Crevice Never Seen,* as well as her following collection *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum,* discussed below, invoke both nationalism and feminine power simultaneously. Perhaps even more importantly, Pele's mo'olelo is not only a symbol of resistance but a manifestation of mana wahine in which women's power is synonymous with nationalism. According to ho'omanawanui, "The power of Pele and Hi'iaka is ultimately linked to 'āina; they are simultaneously land and ancestor, and to recall their mo'olelo is to recount the mo'okū'auhau [genealogical story] of the Hawaiian people, which are inextricably linked" (201). In this way, mana wahine as embodied in Pele emerges not only as a path for women's liberation but also decolonization; while settler colonialism depends on a conception of land as separable from human existence, the concept of mana wahine is predicated on the interconnectedness of people and place.

Regional Versus National Belonging

While this first collection expresses fiery nationalism through the figure of Pele, subtle differences in the presentation of the extended version suggest a vision that emphasizes the nation while also looking beyond its borders. Released in 1999, the second edition of *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* includes five new poems and an additional preface by Trask. In the new

preface, Trask again begins by announcing her native Hawaiian ancestry but also emphasizes her roots in the ocean. She writes, “In the archipelago of my people’s birth, every island is a God, every volcano, a deity. The light of our dawns like the color of our skin, tells us who we are, and where we belong. We know our genealogy descends from the great voyagers of the far Pacific” (xv). Trask refers to ancient Pacific voyaging traditions, as described by Tongan anthropologist Epeli Hau‘ofa in his watershed essay “Our Sea of Islands” (1994). Hau‘ofa explains that long before the first colonial encounter with European powers, Polynesians established a network of inter-island connections, “making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries” through canoe voyaging and migration (30). The terrestrial-based thinking of colonizing Europeans and the United States has projected an image of small and bounded islands, but Hau'ofa proposes a new regional identity uniting the islands of the Pacific. “There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands,’” he contends (31). The power of the ocean opens and expands the Pacific universe, and Trask’s reference to her own genealogy in the “far Pacific” places the Hawaiian nation in relation to a much larger oceanic identity.

Trask’s new preface lends a different tone to her work, complicating visions of Hawai‘i as an isolated archipelago hostile to foreigners by opening it up to the wider Pacific. Trask’s more expansive articulation of Hawaiian identity here is resonant with Hau‘ofa’s essay, published the same year as the first edition of her book, and its subsequent reverberations in the field of Pacific studies. This turn also touches on the standoff between migrant and Indigenous communities in the Pacific. In *Once Were Pacific,* Māori literary scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville explores the tensions between Indigenous nationalism and Pacific regional identity, especially in relation to Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As settler colonial states with First

World status, Hawai‘i and New Zealand inhabit a similar place within Pacific studies, as Teaiwa points out, and Māori and Kānaka Maoli navigate overlapping identity politics in currently occupied territories. Te Punga Somerville explains the conflict between Māori land claims and a larger Pacific regional identity:

> Because Māori are fixed to Aotearoa (through Indigenous claims to land), which is in turn fixed to New Zealand (through the occupation of the nations-state of New Zealand, which covers the same geographical area as that understood as Aotearoa), the Māori person venturing to the Pacific is departing New Zealand. In this way, the Māori person *departs from* an originary home. But at the same time, because Māori genealogies and cultural and linguistic traditions are fixed to the Pacific (and, most locally and especially, Polynesia), the person venturing to the Pacific is retracing migration routes, seeking genealogical and cultural sources and tributaries. In this way, the Māori person *returns to* an originary home. (58)

In this sense, Māori "literally, imaginatively, politically and critically *exceed* the borders of occupying nation-states," which can also be said of native Hawaiians, who belong to a particular land-based geography and also the boundless ocean (85). For Te Punga Somerville, the problem then is to conceive of a form of Indigenous diaspora that allows for native peoples to be seen as mobile without compromising their claims of sovereign connection to the land.

While Sharma and Wright describe Indigenous nationalism as "possessive"—as native peoples assert claims to resources that are held "solely by those 'Native' to the place"—Te Punga Somerville's description of multiple and flexible senses of Indigenous belonging troubles rigid ideas of the nation (124). Sharma and Wright's critique emerges from a settler colonial understanding of the nation, in which land is "a thing to be exchanged either for an equivalent quantity elsewhere or for its 'value' in more and/or goods" (Rifkin 176). The possessive logic that Moreton-Robinson identifies is irreconcilable with Indigenous relationships to the land. Similarly, transnational feminist theorist Rita Dhamoon contends that Indigenous national projects cannot be compared to settler colonial nation-states. Counter to settler nations, which

govern through control over territory, "Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility," she writes (27). Considering this vision of multiple origins and shared custodianship for the land, the nation-state "is relegated to one strand of a matrix of relationships" in which Indigenous people operate (Te Punga Somerville xxiii). This attention to a larger regional identity extends into Trask's second volume of poetry.

Alliances Beyond the Nation in *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum*

The publication of *Night is a Sharkskin Drum* (2002) marks a dramatic shift in presentation from the first collection. Whereas *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* is positioned to address outside audiences, the poems in the second collection stand on their own without explanatory notes or even an introduction from Trask. Published by the University of Hawai'i Press (UHP), which as McDougall points out, "distributes its books most widely within Hawai'i and the Pacific," the book is geared more towards a Pacific readership than a continental American one (138). Also telling are the promotional blurbs from two prominent Pacific Island writers, Hau'ofa and Māori author Witi Ihimaera, a noticeable departure from Eleanor Wilner's role as gatekeeper. While Ihimaera and Hau'ofa are best known and celebrated in Pacific circles, Ihimaera's comments present Trask's work as relevant to readers far beyond these regions. He writes: "These poems come from Haunani-Kay Trask, who lives in Hawai'i but writes for all who live in the Africas, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Polynesia—wherever people have been colonized and dispossessed. She does not simply write with a pen; she slashes with it. She is truly a gift from the Gods." Though turned away from an American settler audience and steeped in Hawaiian epistemology (without providing notes for unfamiliar readers), the collection is not marketed for an insider or exclusively Hawaiian audience; instead, it aims to appeal to the wider

Pacific and to colonized people throughout the world.

Perhaps most significantly, Trask dedicates the book not to "the blue-eyed devil" but to Kenyan author and influential theorist of postcolonial literature, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Ngũgĩ, who was also a guest on Trask's public access-television program *First Friday* in 1997, famously bid farewell to writing in English in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), opting to write instead in his native Gikuyu. Ngũgĩ argues that the hegemonic language of English functions as a "cultural bomb," eliminating Indigenous identity, and preserving native languages is integral to cultural survival and decolonization (3).[41] In her *Signs* article, Trask indirectly credits Ngũgĩ's influence as the deciding factor in severing her feminist affiliations. She writes that though she initially "imagined a linking of feminism with Indigenous nationalism," as she "decolonized her mind" she determined that feminism would only impede her efforts to organize among her people (909). While this tip of the hat to Ngũgĩ shows a resolve to cut off from the contaminating influence of hegemonic culture, it might not necessarily be read as an isolationist move. Instead, the presence of other Pacific writers in the front matter shows a more expansive thinking, striving for global solidarity with colonized peoples, creating affinities that cut across national and ethnic lines.

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[41] Ngũgĩ's influence on Trask raises questions about her choice to write in English rather than in the Hawaiian language. Perhaps the most obvious answer is that because the Hawaiian language was banned for a period after annexation into the US in 1898, the number of Hawaiian speakers significantly dropped. In a reading at the 2003 NEH Summer Institute, "Re-Imagining Indigenous Cultures: The Pacific Islands," held at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i, Trask explains that she writes entirely in English (with the exception of Hawaiian words interjected into her poems), which is an experience of writing in captivity: "a kind of living under water, a feeling of suffocation." Because of this experience of alienation from her native language, Trask says that she came to resonate with the poetry of Irish writers W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney, who she sees as facing "similar struggles."

The book follows a tri-partite structure around the mo‘olelo of Pele’s destruction and re-creation of the land. The first section, steeped in Hawaiian epistemology, begins with the awakening of Pele; the middle section traces the history of colonization and resistance in Hawai‘i; and the final section depicts a national resurrection through Pele’s reproduction and regeneration. Also distinct from the first collection is a marked change in form: departing from the left-aligned stanzas, Trask composes using a wavelike or winding line-structure in nearly every poem, a form that evokes much of the Pacific poetry published in little magazines from the 1970s onward (as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation). This choice of form could indicate the influence of other Pacific poets on Trask or a possible deliberate alignment with the poetic styles associated with the wider Pacific region. In addition, the lyric “I” which dominates the first collection, drops off and appears in a total of three poems in *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum.* Instead, Trask tends toward a less subjective voice, observing in a removed third-person perspective or a second-person address. These changes in form perhaps suggest an emphasis on communal identity over individual experience—the poems speak through a communal subjectivity that reinforces the continuities and interrelationships between people and place, between human and nonhuman life. While liberal human rights discourse is concerned with individual liberty, Trask’s aesthetic shifts to an ethics of interdependence.

The first poem in the collection, “Born in Fire,” seems to be addressed at first to Pele, who was born in a flame in her mother’s mouth. It begins: “Born in fire / you came through / the mountainous dead,” but then a perspective shift in the fourth stanza turns to a figure in search of Pele:

> the trembling breast
> of Pele, steaming her
> breath in the trees

drawing your fires
to her craterous womb (3)

The poem may speak to Pele's sisters, who play central roles in the following introductory poems, or it may be addressed to a multiple "you," to Hawaiian women or the women of Pele awaiting the volcano goddess's awakening. A following poem, "Nāmakoaokahaʻi," also evokes themes of birth and awakening. The title names Pele's older sister, the "lizard-tongued goddess," "sister of thunder / and shark," who summons "her family // from across the seas" (7). Though drawn from moʻolelo in the Hawaiian tradition, the poem also gestures at a larger Oceanic identity and genealogic origins in the ocean:

From the red rising mist
of Kahiki, the Woman of the Pit:

Pele, Peleʻaihonua,
traveling the uplands,

devouring the foreigner (8)

The poem calls forth Pele to rise from her caldera, to emerge and devour the foreigner, but according to Trask's glossary in the back of the book, Kahiki, where Pele slumbers, is "Tahiti; place where Hawaiians return upon death" (65). Kānaka Maoli are believed to have descended from voyagers who travelled by canoe from Tahiti, revealing again a sense of multiple and overlapping origins, rooting Hawaiians in both the land and sea, and showing how native identities "exceed the borders" of the nation-state.

Settler Accountability

In the second section, Trask charts the history of western interference in the Hawaiian archipelago, beginning with "The Broken Gourd," which laments "lost / genealogies, propertied /

missionaries, diseased / *haole,*" as Christian missionaries were among the early arrivants in the process of Euro-American colonization (12). The section moves forward in time to describe present-day forms of colonialism, remembering "Forgotten *ali'i* [chiefs], entombed / beneath grandiose hotels" (17). Along with critiques of tourism, Trask targets state political representation and attempts to interfere with Hawaiian sovereignty both from native Hawaiian representatives and from settler politicians. Waihe'e makes a reappearance in the poem "Sovereignty," described as slithering "'running squid water,'" his "treason" compared to Montezuma's betrayal of the Aztecs (26, 27). In "Nostalgia: VJ-Day," titled after the Hawaiian state holiday commemorating the victory over Japan in WWII, the speaker describes a puppet-like Japanese–American senator, imitating American patriotism:

> Japanese senator, smugly
> armless from the great war,
> preposterous manikin
> of empire, feigning an
> accent (American East
>
> coast of late British
> colonial) proving
> acculturation by
> perfect imitation. (22)

In one of the few footnotes in the collection, Trask explains: "The Japanese senator refers to Daniel Inouye, senior U.S. senator from Hawai'i. He lost his arm in the Second World War and has refused to use a prosthesis ever since, choosing to parade his empty sleeve as a sign of his patriotism to the United States of America" (23). As Trask sees Inouye, the senator's performance of national pride replicates a process of mimicry in which immigrants—especially oppressed groups such as Japanese during WWII—must prove their fidelity to the American project in order to gain acceptance.

In her introduction to *Asian Settler Colonialism,* Candace Fujikane explains how the valorization of Hawai‘i as a racially diverse “rainbow” of immigrants works to obscure Indigenous struggles: “Asian political and economic ‘successes’ in Hawai‘i have been represented as evidence of Hawai‘i’s exceptionalism as a multicultural state, proof that Asians have been able to overcome the racist treatment [. . .] to form what several scholars have describes as ‘harmonious multiculturalism’” (3). However, these ethnic histories describing Asian laborers’ victories over adversity “demonstrate an investment in the ideal of American democracy that is ideologically at odds with Indigenous critiques of the U.S. colonialism” (2). In other words, these celebratory narratives obfuscate the original colonial project of using migrant labor in Hawaiian sugar plantations to displace native peoples.

Returning to Trask’s observation that the patriarchal American political system rewards men and discourages women from seeking positions of power, it is perhaps unsurprising that settler women come forward to critique colonial power structures. During a public feud between Inouye and Hawaiian sovereignty leader (and Haunani-Kay’s sister) Mililani Trask, the poet credits the group Local Japanese Women for Justice (LJWJ) with risking status within their own communities to stand with native Hawaiians. The group of Japanese–American women, which formed as a result of the controversy, published an op-ed in the *Honolulu Advertiser,* analyzing “the anti-sovereignty role of certain Japanese leaders in Hawai‘i, like Inouye” as well as the Japanese American Citizens League’s (JACL) support of Japanese internment during WWII (“Settlers of Color” 52). The women not only challenge anti-sovereignty policies but also consider how immigrant complicity in the American imperialist project works against their own interests. Though Trask rages against Japanese presence in Hawai‘i in much of her poetry, she finds a glimmer of solidarity in this group of settler women, who make for better allies than

native politicians like Waiheʻe. According to Trask, "Because these women dared to speak publicly against continued Japanese control over Hawaiian lands, resources, representation, and sovereignty, they have been isolated and severely criticized by the Japanese community" (54). This collaboration between native and settler women does not deny or attempt to disrupt the inherent native/non-native binary, but it does open up possibilities for trans-ethnic alliances without abandoning the nation as a framework. While preserving the specificities of each historical position, Japanese–American women and Kānaka Maoli activists critique colonial structures that oppress both groups in different ways.

In Trask's writing, relationships with settler women and other oppressed groups show the ways in which Indigeneity is adaptive and dynamic, working in and through the nation but also beyond it. As Vicente Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui explain in their introduction to a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific,* "Cultural studies has been remarkably distant, if not hostile, to indigeneity. Yet in this, a deep suspicion toward the stereotypic Native is one characteristic that is ultimately appealing" (324). They advocate for a model of Indigenous belonging that allows for mobility "so long as the native is not lost altogether." Though Trask claims to be a nationalist above all, her poetry shows that she has multiple homes: in the vast Pacific Ocean, with other colonized peoples the world over, and with settler women allies in her Hawaiian archipelago.

Das's Embattled Arrivant Identity in Postcolonial Guyana

To further investigate the roles that settler women play and "the tension among feminists between the nation as a site of liberation or conversely as a site of oppression," I turn now to a different context of settler colonialism—from the US-occupied Hawaiʻi to the figure of Das in

postcolonial Guyana (Dhamoon 20). While Das's early poetry espouses a militant nationalism that works to silence Amerindian concerns in Guyana, she later comes to identify and sympathize with Indigenous struggles for ownership, not unlike the LJWJ in Hawai'i.[42] The progression across Das's publishing career highlights the limits of both nationalism and western feminism for women of color and other marginal identities who cannot do not fit into dominant models. Das's turn toward Indigeneity represents a search for a more inclusive sense of humanity following her expulsion from the nation.

The South American coastal nation of Guyana, a former British colony, achieved independence in 1966. Though geographically separate from the rest of the Caribbean and a part of continental South America, cultural theorists link Guyana to the Caribbean archipelago because of linguistic, historical, and cultural similarities that define the region. Guyanese novelist and essayist Wilson Harris, for example, is often included in the Caribbean literary canon, and the 1940s Guyanese literary magazine *Kyk-over-al* was considered instrumental in defining Caribbean regional literature, alongside *Tropiques* in Martinique and *BIM* in Barbados (Dalleo 97). In addition, Antonio Benítez-Rojo incorporates Guyana's non-island space into his theory of repeating islands, which are marked by recurring structures of the plantation system (Jackson 14). However, unlike the Caribbean islands that make up the lesser Antilles, Guyana

[42] I shift here to the term "Amerindian" to describe Indigenous peoples in Guyana. "Amerindian," which refers to "a member of one of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas," has fallen in use in the US (replaced with "Native American") but is still widely used in Guyana (OED Online). Employed by the state to describe Indigenous groups in legal contexts, "Amerindian" is also used by Indigenous peoples to collectively represent themselves, as with the Amerindian Peoples' Association of Guyana (APA). Though "Amerindian" describes a collective group identity with shared political concerns, Guyana is home to nine distinct Indigenous nations: "Lokono (Arawak), Akawaio (Kapon), Arecuna (Pemon), Macusi, Warrau, Wapisiana, Wai Wai, Patamona and Kalina (Carib)" ("Our Land, Our Life").

retains a sizable Indigenous population. Amerindians make up eight to ten percent of the population and occupy the nation's interior hinterland and coastal forests, while urban Afro- and Indian Creole populations are concentrated on the coastal plain ("Our Land, Our Life").

As an Indo-Caribbean poet, Das figures into a complex set of relationships to place, representing an arrivant identity celebrated in Caribbean discourses but also representing the Indian diaspora, a minority culture within Guyanese society. In one of her best-known poems, "They Came in Ships," Das narrates the sojourn of Indian indentured laborers to the Caribbean in the early nineteenth century, "hearts brimful of hope," which would later be disappointed by exploitation (*I Want to Be a Poetess* 4). The daughter of a rice farmer and a teenage beauty queen, Das (after being crowned Miss Diwali at a Hindu festival in Georgetown at the age of seventeen) later became a paramilitary volunteer in service to the new nation (Bahadur). Das's contested place within the nation as a result of her ethnicity is further complicated by her status as a woman and following the poet's publishing history reveals ways that these tensions play out.

In her examination of the writing of Indo-Caribbean writing from Guyana and Trinidad, Brinda Mehta considers how early immigrant women transgressed traditional boundaries in their crossing of the *kali pani,* or the waters of the Atlantic. According to Hindu belief, Mehta explains, traversing large bodies of water was taboo in that it indicated cultural defilement and dilution of "Hindu essence" (5). However, for women who occupied a marginal status in the nuclear Hindu family system in India, "enduring the hardships of the *kali pani* was a worthwhile risk because it offered the potential for renegotiations of gendered identity within the structural dissolution of caste, class and religion that occurred during the transatlantic displacements" (5). These women, who represented a small minority in comparison to male indentured laborers, operate as role models of transgression to later women writers, and Mehta views *kali pani*

discourse as one of defiant self-assertion and rupture (4). Twentieth-century Das's role in the Guyanaese paramilitary was also a transgression of traditional gender roles, but over the course of her literary career and exile, she reconsiders and renegotiates the gendered complexities of Indo-Caribbean identity.

Das's first collection, *I Want to Be a Poetess of My People*, emerged during the period of political instability that marked post-independence Guyana, in which party factions were split along ethnic lines. Published by the Guyana National Service (GNS) Publishing Centre in 1977—while Das was an active volunteer in the African Guyanese People's National Congress Party—the collection expresses militant nationalism and loyalty to Forbes Burnham's radical regime. According to literary scholar Denise deCaires Nairn, in its early days, it was "strategically important" to the majority Afro-Creole party to include Indo-Guyanese so "not to be accused of exclusively representing the interests of the *African* Guyanese" (170). Das's *I Want to Be a Poetess of My People* functioned, then, as opportune spokespiece for the party.

Though Das later confessed embarrassment of her first book and her naïve political commitments, she was not alone among Indo-Caribbean women in support of the regime. Following Burnham's 1973 mandate that both men and women serve in the GNS in order to enter higher education, Indian women made up ninety percent of the women enlisted in paramilitary services (171). DeCaires Narain sees this trend as motivated by Indo-Caribbean women's resistance to traditional gender norms. Service in the GNS offered options for Indian women, historically confined to domestic roles in Guyanese society. In the wider Caribbean, Joy Mahabir argues that Indian women frequently write about labor and industry in relation to identity. In her survey of Indo-Caribbean women's poetry, she writes: "Poems on labor illustrate the struggles of Indo-Caribbean women to change oppressive colonial and postcolonial systems

of labor and link these struggles with a rejection of traditional gender roles and the assertion of independent identities" ("The *Kali Pani* Imaginary" 143). Labor, then, functions as a trope that allows women to transcend gender social heirachies.

In Das's first collection, the poet historicizes Indian women's indentured servitude, asserting women as rightful inheritors of Guyanese land as they took part in its cultivation. In "Cast Aside Reminiscent Foreheads of Desolation," she addresses her female counterparts:

> I want you to know . . .
> That you have helped build this land,
> That your curved back in the fields revitalized sugar.
> Brought forth, out of your womb a new industry
> Of waving paddy leaves. (8, 9)

This description depicts women's plantation labor but also conflates women with the land, gendering the environment as a feminine womb space, a site of production that gives birth to the nation. This trope recurs in "Looking Over The Broad Breast of the Land I Saw a Dream," as well as other poems, in which the feminized landscape and its female laborers function in a similar role of mothering, both in terms of producing and nourishing the nation. In their ecofeminist reading of the book, Letizia Gramaglia and Joseph Jackson explain "the rural steadfastness promoted by Das' poetry was critical to Burnham's ambitious plan to 'feed, house, and clothe the nation' . . . solely making use of local resources" (126). They explain that "Burnham's ideological commitment to socialism was inextricably linked with the ecology of Guyana" and his plans to seize unused lands for economic expansion. While highlighting ways in which the hackneyed trope of land as woman partners with Burnham's "Male gendered program of environmental exploitation," they find a recuperative interpretation in that Das offers a model of female authority in her need to mother the nation. They refer to Alice Walker's conception of "womanist," a model of feminism that is "committed to the survival and

wholeness of an entire peoples" and claim that despite their problematic affiliations, the poems espouse "womanist" impulses (qtd. in Gramalglia and Jackson, 126).

While their ecocritical reading explores the link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment, Gramaglia and Joseph Jackson also present the nation as the rightful inheritor of the interior land. Projecting an image of empty, unoccupied space, they fail to consider those peoples whom the nation does not account for: Amerindian populations, whose subsistence is endangered by resource exploitation. The exclusive focus on potential environmental destruction discursively erases the presence of Indigenous people, as well as the continual threat of ethnocide they face. As Shona Jackson explains: seizing of the country's environmental interior for economic development requires "reenvisioning of the hinterland not as an Indigenous space where the land rights of Indigenous Peoples attach but as a national space" (Jackson 146). More recently, Indigenous peoples in Guyana have criticized the national motto of "One nation, one people, one destiny" as assimilationist and protested the increasing local and multinational resource mining, a trend that highlights the nation's "failure to recognize and guarantee Indigenous rights" ("Our Land, Our Life"). Considering the suppression of native peoples in nationalist projects exposes the limits of an ecocritical analysis that views land as alienable property.

In "Looking Over the Broad Breast of the Land," Das shows an awareness of the presence of Amerindian peoples but rather than removing them from the national narrative, she folds them into Burnham's vision. Referring to traditional Amerindian housing structures called benabs, she writes: "I saw them weave benab cities in the forest, / Molten factories drinking deep from waterfalls feeding / visions sailing down river" (18). In Das's imagining, the factories become organic, molten, volcanic, and part of the landscape. Industrial development and national

expansion are rendered as natural and inevitable processes, in collaboration with Indigenous society rather than at odds with it. In examining Burnham's socialist project, Shona Jackson explains how the rhetoric of economic development worked to subsume Indigenous desires into national desires. In a 1969 speech, Burnham justified integration and assimilation rather than retention of Amerindian culture by offering his policies as a corrective to "colonial attitudes that kept Amerindians in a state of nature" (147). For Jackson, this logic reflects Enlightenment ideology that bars Indigenous populations not only from being seen as part of modernity but from being seen as human, as it hinges on the core Marxian value that labor not only is the basis for social being but literally makes us human (52). Native populations, "whose modes of sovereign belonging did not and do not derive from an identity in labor," become the ultimate other or "zero sum of humanity" who must either be assimilated into the system of labor or be eliminated (Jackson "Humanity Beyond").

Das's poem, aligned with Burnham's policies, reflects this tension. In order to make sense of the Indigenous presence, which operates outside of the economic system, the speaker assimilates Amerindian life into the Guyanese national plan for industrial expansion. The need of the nation-state to either eliminate or assimilate native peoples speaks to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's point that "Colonialism is not just a symptom of capitalism" (4). "Socialist and communist empires have also been settler empires," they write. "'Both Marxists and capitalists view land and natural resources as commodities to be exploited, in the first instance, by capitalists for personal gain, and in the second by Marxists for the good of all'" (Sandy Grande qtd. in Tuck and Yang 4). While the postcolonial nation is invested in reversing the effects of colonialism, it carries on the legacy of colonialism through the teleology of labor, a logic that is threatened by continuing Indigenous presence.

In her first collection, Das makes little mention of Amerindian people or cultures, except to present them as consenting to Guyanese nationalistic projects, but after being exiled from the nation, Amerindian culture becomes a recurring focus. After fleeing Guyana during a period of violence and political turbulence, Das's subsequent collections—*My Finer Steel Will Grow* with Vermont press Samisdat and *Bones* with Peepal Tree—take on a markedly different tone, one that is much more critical of nationalistic discourses. In her 1982 *My Finer Steel Will Grow,* images of molten factories and fertile wombs are replaced by themes of hiding, surveillance, and exile. Where Burnham is evoked as a solitary figure leading his people through the jungle in the previous collection, he becomes a stalking patriarchal shadow, a "counterfeit general" in the corrupt government of heaven. In the poem "For Walter Rodney & Other Victims," the poetic speaker refers to "he who plays chess with our lives/ growing fat on good wine and Cuba cigars/ . . . while our purses of freedom grow spare" (*A Leaf in His Ear* 55). The poem eulogizes political dissident Walter Rodney, assassinated two years before the book's publication, presumably by Burnham's regime. The brief moments of hope expressed in the collection come through imagining a resurgence of Amerindian culture. In "Untitled iii," the speaker envisions an Indigenous reclamation of the land:

> in the unvanquished footsteps
> of our first pride, we tread;
> with our string of beads and our naked
> spears we come with our shield of courage
> to repossess
> our native waterfall (*A Leaf in His Ear* 50).

The use of "we" and "our"—"we tread," "our native waterfall"—is striking and suggests that, after being betrayed by the nation, the speaker finds possibility not only in Amerindian culture but in a collective stewardship of the land.

This theme continues in Das's 1988 collection *Bones.* While the title might indicate images of sparseness and death, *Bones* is marked by a much more dynamic and self-possessed poetic voice. At times even playful, the speaker of the title poem casts off restrictive notions of femininity: "Grotesque jewels, they hang / in my closet beside prom dresses / and red pumps, " referring to former costumes (perhaps from Das's beauty-queen days) as skeletons in her closet (8). This gendered critique and rejection of traditional femininity extends throughout the collection, with images such as a feral garden that cannot be cultivated and grows monstrous in "The Growing Tip" (51) and the female body rising from the grave with maggots in her hair in "Resurrection" (13).

As with the previous collection, positive assertions of identity come through depictions of Amerindian culture. In the poem "Oars," the speaker opens by declaring, "I am an Indian woman," which at first might seem to refer to her South Asian ethnic identity, but the following lines refer instead to Amerindian culture:

> with long hair
> a band of beads across my forehead [. . .]
> My words, slender oars bear my boat forward
> a keel of silk
> upon the water.
> My fists clenched round these wooden spears
> I row consistently. (44)

Though Amerindian concerns are discounted as antithetical to modernity in the Guyanese political sphere, Das does not represent Amerindian practices as part of an irrelevant and static past. Instead, aligning and identifying with Indigenous groups becomes a way for her to envision a future. The speaker conflates her words with the canoe's slender oars, her poetic practice with Indigenous life, validating both and moving forward beyond national time.

Examining Das's engagement with physical space, Mahabir notes that in "Oars" and other poems that allude to the Caribbean, the descriptions "are so subtle and ambiguous, one can argue that they are not distinctly Caribbean at all" ("Poetics of Space" 4). While Das's "cityspaces of exile" (usually describing Chicago, where Das was studying as a PhD student) are clearly defined, the green landscapes of the Caribbean are abstracted. Mahabir interprets this lack of sensual description as an indicator of Das's estrangement from the Caribbean and observes "in Das' representation of space there is no dialectical contradiction between the Caribbean and exile, since all spaces represent exile" (4). At the same time, while physical markers are lacking, Das does make specific references to Caribbean spaces through allusions to Amerindian traditions and mythology, which easily escape unfamiliar readers but often represent moments of resurrection and survival. In later stanzas in "Bones," for example, the metaphor of hidden remnants shifts from petticoats to the bone-flute of Carib Amerinidian mythology. The speaker describes bones in her closet and insists, "Someone should examine their story":

> After all, it's not that they dwindled
> into dust altogether. Besides,
> these bones could make more than music.
> They're a fire-tried instrument.
>
> They have no wish to stay in the attic.
> They want to be part of the world.
>
> Oh they are hungry for wind to sing
> through their tissue, so hungry. (8)

The bones, which "could make more than music" and "are hungry for wind to sing / through their tissue," evokes the Carib practice of crafting flutes from the arm or leg bones of defeated enemies. According to anthropologist Michael Swan, the object of this ritual cannibalism "was a kind of transubstantiation in reverse" as the flute "contains the living spirit of the dead" (qtd in

Harris 106). DeCaires Narain sees this, as well as images of bones and Amerindian style designs on the book's cover, as inviting connection with Wilson Harris's writings on Indigenous cultures in Guyana (177). She refers to Harris's exploration of mythology as a corrective to early anthropological writing on cannibalism. Harris argues that "designating the Carib Amerindian populations as 'cannibals' allowed Spanish conquistadors to justify the extermination of Indigenous peoples," which largely missed the "intimate cross-cultural exchange involved in ritual cannibalism." He writes: "The bone flute was a confessional organ involved in, yet subtly repudiating, the evil bias of conquest that afflicted humanity" (qtd. in DeCaires Narain 177). By drawing from Amerindian mythology, Das extends Harris's argument to reclaim Indigenous ways of knowing discredited by colonial history.

In addition, for Harris, recuperating the bone-flute is not just about righting past colonial misconceptions but also part of a process of future healing. Not exclusive to Caribs in Guyana, the practice of playing the bone-flute connected Indigenous cultures across the Americas and across time. The bone-flute, Harris writes, "is the uncanny termination of a bridge of rhythm arcing or curving from pre-Columbian Mexico into the pre-Columbian and post-Columbian Guianas in South America" (54). This engagement with the bone-flute metaphor perhaps explains the isolated reference to Mexico at the conclusion of Das's "Bones." "After winter's fallowness":

> [. . .] these white flutes
> send a note out—a golden apple
> from the Mexican border—it takes to air,
> full shape climbing,
> rising
>
> helium balloon forever. (8, 9)

Exiled in North America, Das perhaps finds a bridge home through the bone-flute, connecting

her across the Mexican border and down to Guyana in South America. Whether or not the speaker necessarily imagines a geographic return, the music of the "white flute" rising from the border invokes resurrection or return to life after winter's dormancy. Like the transubstantiation of ancient Carib practices, the notes from the flute materialize in physical form, a golden apple and then a balloon "rising . . . forever," ending the poem with a sense of freedom and sailing out into eternity (9).

In a poem near the end of the collection, "Flute," the poetic speaker not only imagines a bone-flute but transforms into the flute herself: "my body's a hallowed / stick of bone, a flute / through which you pipe / your melody" (46). Her body becomes a hallowed instrument, the word play sonically evoking hollowed as in empty but also hallowed as in sacred, and she beckons her love to play, subtly indicating an erotic union:

> your heavy rhythms
> vibrating in my marrow
>
> Play gently, love,
> my frail reed's single stem
> can scarcely hold
> this rhapsody. (46)

The body becomes a paradox of fragility and power through this act of intimacy, the frail reed of the flute "can scarcely hold" while the marrow contains and vibrates with the heavy rhythm. Compared to Das's depictions of the female body in her earlier works, the mothering womb of the nation in *I Want to be A Poetess* and the exiled and estranged figure in *My Finer Steel Will Grow,* here, the speaker finds connection and belonging, channeling power into her own body through the invocation of forgotten Amerindian tradition.

In the preface to his novel *Palace of the Peacock,* Harris theorizes the bridge of culture generated by the flute as a hidden "labyrinth," dormant yet present below the surface in our

current era, with a potential for healing in conflict-ridden times: "Within such a labyrinth, adversarial twins—not necessarily connected by blood or race—become psychically supportive one of the other in the trials of the Imagination" (56). This process can be used to describe Das's psychic connection to Indigenous cultures of Guyana despite a lack of ethnic or blood identification, but even more so, the notion of a cross-cultural labyrinth illuminates linkages between Das's own ethnic history as a descendent of South Asian indentured laborers and the conquest Amerindians of Guyana. In the poem "Beast," Das describes the violence inflicted on Indian woman who were forced into indentured servitude:

> In Gibraltar Straits,
> pirates in search of El Dorado
> masked and machete-bearing
> kidnapped me.
> Holding me to ransom,
> they took my jewels and my secrets
> and dismembered me. (48)

According to Gaiutra Bahadur, author of *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture,* "the machete that flashes between [Das's] lines evokes the violence against indentured women," who often resisted British recruitment to plantation labor more than men "for a number of cultural and economic reasons." She writes: "British seamen and overseers, who raped and exploited indentured women on ships and plantations, were literally and metaphorically responsible for stealing their 'jewels' and their 'secrets'" ("Postcards from Empire"). While the poem discloses the history of abuse suffered by South Asian women in the Caribbean and South America beginning in the nineteenth century, geographic markers also tell the longer story of colonialism across these regions, prior to the African slave trade and its abolition, which ultimately led to the trafficking of indentured labor from Asia. Though the poem describes kidnapping of Indian women, it begins in the Gibraltar straits, connecting Spain to Africa and out to the wider

Atlantic, where pirates sail through in search of "El Dorado." El Dorado of course refers to the fabled golden city sought after by Spanish Conquistadors, whose present-day symbolic implications are explored more in Chapter Three, as well as British explorer Sir Walter Raleigh, who landed on the Guyanese coast in 1594 ("Postcards from Empire"). Das's conflation of geographic locations and time periods connects different historical incidents and represents them as simultaneous. The genocide of Indigenous peoples in Guyana in the sixteenth century and the kidnapping of Indian women three hundred years later are motivated by the same impulse: the search for El Dorado or capital wealth.

At the end of the poem, the speaker, though still indentured in the Americas, is also held hostage across centuries in the Ajanta caves in India. Her kidnapper lulls her with his "deadly tongue," and the poem concludes:

> In the dark Ajanta caves of my breast
> ever since he has stayed,
> with his measure of venom,
> his exact poison and scintillating glitter.
> At a certain hour, I almost love him. (48)

Ambitious in scale, the poem straddles centuries and multiple geographies, layering structures of colonial violence into a single moment of simultaneity in the present. In the final lines, however, the speaker describes her tormentor with a bitter irony that suggests intimate partner violence rather than large-scale national forms of violence. The trapped figure confesses, "I almost love him," expressing a complicated sense of attachment for her captor often described by women who experience domestic violence. The multiplicity of "Beast," aligning colonial impact on various scales, placing the murder of Amerindians alongside the exploitation of indentured laborers and violence against women, puts these disparate historical experiences on the same continuum, from the search for El Dorado to the present. In this way, Das connects with

Amerindian culture not only through the mystical bridge created by the bone-flute but also through shared experiences of colonial violence.

Through these unseen connections, settler women like Das find imaginative potential and solidarity with Indigenous concerns. Rather than cancelling each other out, these different histories of oppression inform each other. In her poems, Das describes the captivity experienced by indentured women as well as her own experience of betrayal by the postcolonial nation, which leads her to align with other betrayed populations. While on the surface, Das might inhabit an oppositional role to Indigenous concerns, after her exile from the nation, she ultimately comes to explore Amerindian culture and recognize humanity beyond western conceptions of labor as humanizing.

Synchronous Resurrections in the Poetry of Trask and Das

In the last-published collections of both Das and Trask, resurrection is a recurring theme. In poems such as “Resurrection,” Das describes the wrathful female body emerging from the grave but also imagines the breath of life animating the long-dead matter of the bone-flute. In the poem, “Flute,” discussed above, the speaker’s body becomes a flute that receives the breath of song. The return to life through intimate exchange described in the poem resonates with the final section of *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum,* in which Trask envisions the rebirth of the nation through scenes of sexual reproduction and regeneration of the land. Spurning the influence of Christian missionaries in Hawai‘i who instruct women in the virtues of modesty and privacy, the final poem in the collection displays feminine power as erotic, sensual, and epic. In “Into Our Light I Will Go Forever," she animates the landscape, presenting the feminized Ko‘olau, or windward islands of Hawai‘i, in a scene of sexual intercourse:

Into our light
I will go forever . . .

Into the passion
of our parted Koʻolau,
luminous vulva.

Into Kāne's pendulous
breadfruit, resinous
with semen. . .

Into our sovereign suns,
drunk on the *mana*
of Hawaiʻi. (60-62)

The poem describes procreation and regeneration of the nation and also invites readers to celebrate the beauty of Hawaiʻi. Rather than clinging rigidly to a precolonial past, the speaker moves forward into the future, pledging to "go forever" into a shared light, not unlike Das's helium balloon that takes to air and continues to rise forever. For both poets, connections with Indigenous cultures do not leave them oriented to the past but rather to the future.

By placing Das in conversation with Trask, I hope to extend discussions of settler colonialism by bringing issues of gender to the forefront. Because settler and native women share experiences of oppression based on gender, affinities are created between these two subject positions that generate possibilities for alternate frameworks beyond western feminisms and settler colonial ideologies. While inherently oppositional to native peoples, settler women identify a mutual oppressor to both natives and settler minorities when they become aware of these conflicting positionalities. As Moreton-Robinson concludes, across diverse colonial histories and contexts: "White possession is the common denominator we all share" (*White Possessive,* xx). While nation-states might like to keep settlers at odds with native sovereignty

movements, through this dialogue between Indigenous and migrant narratives, we can begin to visualize forms of decolonization that are accountable to Indigenous demands for justice.

Chapter Three: Feminine Epics: Re-Charting the Oceanic Voyage

> "We got to suffer, but without a trajectory [. . .] And I wanted [. . .] to write an epic—to take back some of what the novel has stolen from poetry, and further, to avenge my sex for having 'greatness' stolen from it"—Alice Notley, "The 'Feminine' Epic," 172–174

In her introduction to her 1985 master's thesis—the first feminist critique of the new English literature of Oceania—Fijian critic Arlene Griffen opens not with a survey of island literatures but with a reading of American poet Dorothy Parker's "Penelope." While Griffen sees new possibilities for self-representation in the emerging literatures of Fiji, Samoa, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, she also identifies residual tropes from the English literary canon taught during her grade-school years. The new literature is less alienating for Griffen than poems about English daffodils but is still marked by gendered divides that relegate women to the "private" realm. Griffen quotes Parker's critique of the oceanic voyage from Penelope's perspective: "He shall cut the glittering wave, / I shall sit at home [. . .] / Brew my tea, and snip my thread; Bleach the linen for my bed" (qtd. in Griffen 2). Using Parker's poem to illustrate gender roles that cast men as adventurers and circumscribe women to the home, Griffen asserts that though the new Pacific literatures provide an alternative to the Eurocentric canon, they also unfortunately "contain many Penelopes," which are often presented in unflattering ways (5). In terms of representations of women, major Pacific works repeat rather than depart from colonial literary traditions. For poet-scholar Teresia Teaiwa, Griffen's analysis was groundbreaking as it "explicitly named the misogyny" of major Pacific writers, such as Albert Wendt, Subramani, and Raymond Pillai ("Reading Paul Gauguin" 257). As both Teaiwa and Griffen conclude, while works penned by men challenge colonial structures through island nationalism, they often

enshrine male heroes who author the new national culture while women "sit at home," trapped at their looms.

Chapter Three focuses on twentieth-century postcolonial adaptations of epic and sea-voyaging forms, a poetic tradition dominated by men, and explores how women poets from the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands re-invent the genre to center women's stories and contributions to national culture. Against masculinist narratives of diaspora, which valorize male mobility while ignoring more rooted subject positions, poets like Guyanaese Grace Nichols emphasize a "rooted errantry," a paradox of dwelling and roaming, to borrow Édouard Glissant's term (*Poetics of Relation* 37), imagining the feminine spirit of the Caribbean grounded in the isles but with distant "tributaries of blood" extending into uncharted territories (Nichols 8).[43] Departing from the Greek epic tradition in which male Odysseus charts the course of history while female Penelope waits idly at home, these feminine epics are told through poetic subjects anchored in the local but with boundary-defying powers.

While "Chapter Two: Gendering Settler Colonialism" examined women's relationships to the nation, the current chapter considers the gendered and complex relationships between national and transnational frames, where men are figured as transnational pioneers and women are tethered to the private realm and the national past. The masculine ocean-voyaging epics examined here, which emerge from Caribbean diasporic and Pacific regional contexts, seek to go beyond narrow national frames in order to articulate a multi-ethnic anticolonial identity.

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[43] Glissant develops his concept of a "rooted errantry" through discussion of the Caribbean poet Saint-John Perse. For Glissant, a rooted errantry is the tension between the particular and the universal, between rootedness in place history and the dream of "elsewhere" (30). His theory is in conversation with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, a root structure that defies linear hierarchy by spreading laterally and without center.

However, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey has argued, regional and diasporic frames often re-inscribe nationalist culture's "masculinist paradigm" ("Gendering the Oceanic Voyage" 217). Tropes of travel and nomadism, DeLoughrey points out, are often gendered as masculine, while women are confined to home and hearth (*Routes and Roots* 5). In the dominant narrative of the oceanic voyage, the male hero has the power to cross borders and pioneer new territory; ironically, the vehicles enabling his travel, the ocean and the sailing vessel, are gendered as feminine. His mobility is possible only through the erasure of feminine agency (5). In St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott's celebrated *Omeros* (1990), as in classic examples of the genre, female characters stay behind while male characters embark on transcontinental voyages. Similarly, in Pacific contexts, tropes of oceanic navigation are invoked for their ancestral and genealogical significance; yet, as Teaiwa and DeLoughrey observe, these traditions are often dominated by male figures.

The "feminine" or "feminist" epics explored in this chapter renovate the genre by forcing a reconsideration of celebratory diasporic narratives, refiguring Penelope as a historical agent with her own trajectory.[44] They revise epic traditions—playing with themes of oceanic navigation, memory, migration, formally charting travel trajectories, and sometimes alluding to Greco-Roman mythology (though they depart from Homer's high poetic style)—by centering women's experiences that have been excluded from national narratives. Perhaps unexpectedly, the figure of Penelope, trapped at her loom unpicking each day's work, is recuperated through the very trope of weaving. The Pacific and Caribbean texts examined here generate a counter-aesthetic through formal and thematic evocations of weaving. Against the linear progression of the generic epic, they emphasize intertwining of histories, origins, and temporalities, and against

[44] I take the term "Feminine Epics" from an essay by American poet Alice Notley, quoted in the epigraph, in which she gives a rationale for her 1996 epic *The Descent of Alette.*

images of the individual (male) hero, these interwoven threads generate a sense of communal and shared belonging. Beginning with Guyanese poet Nichols's *Startling the Flying Fish* (2006) and progressing to i-Kiribati poet Teaiwa's *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (1995), this study explores how these feminine epics knit Atlantic and Pacific worlds, expanding dominant conceptualizations of the black diaspora to engage trans-Indigenous perspectives from the Americas and the Pacific Islands.[45] Nichols and Teaiwa do not merely write women into a history from which they have been excluded; they go further to critique the epic as a heteropatriarchal myth-making apparatus. Centering Indigenous approaches to critical theory, Chapter Three considers how the epic's gendered logic contains native subjectivities in a precolonial past, which parallels its confinement of women in the "private" realm. At stake, then, is not only a consideration of the gendered absences in nationalist literatures but also the ways in which progress narratives rely on a suppression of Indigenous perspectives, implicating colonial and postcolonial writings alike.

From Nichols's epic re-historicization of the conquest of the Americas to Teaiwa's expansion of the black Atlantic to incorporate the "black Pacific," these feminine counter-epics foreground Indigenous perspectives so often dismissed or forgotten in diasporic narratives. They not only reverse the epic's gender but critique its gendered mythology: first, by interrupting celebratory diasporic narratives (highlighting the ways in which cultural and geographic displacement is driven by colonial history and global divisions of labor) and, second, by

[45] With "trans-Indigenous," I draw from Chadwick Allen's methodology explicated in *Trans-Indigenous* (2012), in which he brings Native American and Indigenous Oceanic literatures into direct dialogue.

interrogating the teleological, closed narrative of postcolonial epics by presenting Indigenous history as continuous with "modernity."

I begin with a brief history of recent developments in the genre to frame Teaiwa and Nichols's interventions. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to "*the* epic"— evoking "the Big Poem" or the "large public poem"—but my discussion of the genre is by no means comprehensive; instead, I track a particular literary lineage of postcolonial writers, who adapt or depart from Homer to narrate the history of their own national or regional context (Notley 171). In short, I do not attempt to debate or police the boundaries of the genre but, instead, deconstruct the gendered dimensions of the epic voyaging narrative.

"A drifter / is the hero of my book:" Diaspora, Memory, and the Epic Archive[46]

Characterized by tropes of voyage and return, heroic quests, and high poetic style, the epic is defined by its sweeping scope, which also makes it difficult to pin down as a genre. While the epic describes a global phenomenon of oral traditions—including the ancient Sumerian *Descent of Inanna*, the West African *Epic of Sundiata*, and the Amerindian creation stories discussed here (Kellman 1; Notley 174)—the epic is often associated in western popular consciousness and academic discourses with the origins of the western literary canon in Greco-Roman tradition, typified by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Despite this association with European tradition and Greco-Roman classicism, the epic has played an important role in terms of national self-definition in postcolonial literatures. Walcott's celebrated *Omeros*, which helped him win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, is perhaps the most widely known and discussed

[46] Section title alludes to a line addressed by Walcott's character of Homer to the narrator of *Omeros* (qtd. in Farrell 278).

postcolonial epic. Walcott creolizes characters from Homer's *Illiad* and depicts a voyage from the Caribbean to Africa that traverses centuries. Walcott's poem draws on the Greek classics and also follows in the footsteps of canonical Caribbean texts by Martinican Aimé Césaire and Barbadian-born Kamau Brathwaite. Though Césaire's foundational *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) makes no "explicit citation to underline [its intertextual] link," as Justine McConnell argues in *Black Odysseys*, the long poem uses the *Odyssey* as its organizational template (39). Sharing resonances with *Cahier*, Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* trilogy (1973) employs themes of oceanic voyaging, departure, and return to narrate the African diaspora from an anti-colonial perspective. Within this Caribbean epic tradition, poets not only re-historicize the Middle Passage but also adapt Odysseus's journey for other diasporic trajectories, as can be seen with Guyanese poet David Dabydeen's *Coolie Odyssey* (1988), which centers on the experience of Indian indentured laborers in the Caribbean.

Through its depiction of the heroic figure on a daunting quest or voyage, the epic, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, looks to the origins of the nation in that it draws from "a national epic past" or "national tradition" (13). As nationalism has been the "mobilizing force" of cultural decolonization, the epic with its nationalistic intent would seem to be a fitting genre for the postcolonial poet in expressing "resistance against an alien and occupying empire" (Said 223). If the epic is a genre of the past, a valorized and "absolute" past sealed off from the present, as Bakhtin would have it, it also promises return to a lost origin, a unified national memory long suppressed under foreign domination (Bakhtin 15). Yet, as Joseph Farrell points out, the term "epic" carries a sense of imperial corruption rather than postcolonial possibility for some critics. He writes that while a number of classicists and Eurocentric comparatists "expressed little doubt

about [*Omeros*'s] epic character," some critics "are embarrassed by the possibility that *Omeros* might be taken for an epic, and hence as a white man's poem" (272, 274).

This debate over Walcott's debt to Homer and Eurocentric exclusivist claims on the epic evoke lingering colonial hierarchies. Farrell raises racist stereotypes that question the capacity of African nations for producing "epic literature," which are rooted in assumptions that relegate Africa and the Caribbean outside of history.[47] The notion of the epic as national archive perhaps explains its draw as a form to reclaim history and culture. The idealized age of the epic harkens back to a precolonial era or "collective memory [that] was too often wiped out" by colonial rupture and destabilization (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 64). The title of Walcott's 1992 Nobel Lecture "The Antilles: Fragments of an Epic Memory" evokes this relationship between the epic and memory. Walcott writes of a fragmentary multi-cultural archipelago of memory that has survived even through plantation history: "Deprived of their original language, the captured and indentured tribes create their own, accreting and secreting fragments of an old, an epic vocabulary, from Asia and from Africa, but to an ancestral, an ecstatic rhythm in the blood that cannot be subdued by slavery or indenture" (*What the Twilight Says* 70). Combining diasporic African and South Asian histories, Walcott claims that the *Odyssey* is not a European classic but "another Asia Minor epic" and suggests that the trials of Odysseus in particular speak to experiences of diaspora (*What the Twilight Says* 66). At the same time, this turn to the epic and

[47] Glissant takes up this notion in his essay "The Quarrel with History": "History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone 'made' the history of the World. If Hegel relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, Amerindian peoples to the prehistorical, in order to reserve History for European peoples exclusively" (*Caribbean Discourse* 64).

adoption of Homer potentially reproduces rather than critiques the linear, teleological narrative associated with epics of the western canon.

In *Epic and Empire* (1993), David Quint identifies two strands of epics divided between winners and losers. Winners' epics, typified by the Homeric epic and Virgil's the *Aeneid,* represent the normative strand, marked by a closure of history through conquest; these stories center a male hero who becomes a stand-in for the imperial ruler, serving "as a source of inspiration or authorizing model for political domination on a mass scale" (7). Losers' epics, on the other hand, "valorize the very contingency and open-mindedness that the victors' epic disparages: the defeated hope for a different future to the story that their victors may think they have ended once and for all" (9). While Quint explores the relationship between epic narrative and the Roman empire, this consolidation of power through its rendering of hierarchical, closed time remains a defining feature of the genre. According to Quint, "master narratives [or official ideology] . . . are precisely what the epic is in the business of producing" (15). Yet, because criticism around Walcott's epic is often preoccupied with questions of influence and authenticity, critics like Anthony Kellman leave the genre itself intact.

In his critique of *Omeros,* Kellman, editor of the first full-length US anthology of anglophone Caribbean literature and author of *Limestone: An Epic Poem of Barbados* (2008), celebrates the long poem's nationalistic intent but takes issue with Walcott's use of language, which he sees as insufficiently "Creole." Kellman inaccurately generalizes *Omeros* as a work of Standard English without acknowledging Walcott's Creole inflections, but he also valorizes the epic as a form with the unique potential for "authentic" expression. "Wherever the need for sovereignty and self-definition exists," he writes, "the epic remains a valid poetic vehicle for the articulation of such notions" (8). However, because "Walcott insists (out of homage? gratitude?

loyalty?) on imitating a borrowed Western form," *Omeros* does not fulfill its nationalistic intent. Interestingly, for Kellman the goal is a "truly *national* Caribbean epic" (2, emphasis mine), articulating the Caribbean region through a nationalist frame. He proposes that this national epic can be achieved through a unifying "indigenous form" (8); Kellman sees *Omero*s as failing in its reliance on western influences but does not consider who is left out or marginalized in the epic's assimilative national narrative. For Kellman, greater use of Creole would create a more authentic, "indigenous epic." While Kellman's assertions about language feed into a larger debate about postcolonial writers' use of English and other colonial languages, for the purposes of this chapter, I instead call attention to Kellman's description of Creole as native or Indigenous, without considering the place of Amerindians in this homogenous Caribbean nation.[48]

Feminist scholars have long established the ways in which nationalist narratives exclude women and delay women's rights.[49] Yet, even regional and diasporic frames, characterized above by Gilroy and Walcott as extending beyond the limitations of ethnic nationalism, operate through the masculinist impulse so often associated with nationalism. Though diasporic frames reject nationalism as essentializing, "diaspora theory often entails the same masculinist paradigm" as

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[48] For more on this authenticity-and-language debate, see, for example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's farewell to English, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), and Salman Rushdie's defense of his use of English in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). See also Carrie Noland's discussion of Aimé Césaire's use of "impeccable French" in *Voices of Negritude*; though Césaire claimed to "cannibalize" or inflect French, Noland writes that "his poetry exhibits both a respect for and a mastery over the most complex grammatical forms and erudite vocabularies imaginable" (10). Despite his anti-colonial critiques, his use of colonial French continues to spark debate around his reception (9).

[49] See, for example, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's "Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Feminist Practices," in which they claim that nationalisms are inherently oppressive to women.

patriarchal nationalism, obscuring peripheral identities into its assimilative model (DeLoughrey "Gendering the Oceanic Voyage," 217). The absence of women or the treatment of women as flat characters is frequently pointed out in critical discussions of *Omeros*; in the next section, however, I consider the erasure of both female subjectivities and Indigenous positionalities in the postcolonial epic and wider diasporic discourses.

Gender and Genre: Missing Natives in Epics of Diaspora

In Caribbean, postcolonial, and diasporic studies, African and Creole often signify the native or Indigenous populations of the region, discursively eliminating Amerindian perspectives. Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd points out that, in his foundational theorization of creolization, Brathwaite suggests that African slaves replaced Indigenous peoples as the folk tradition of the Caribbean (xxxvi), and in her sustained exploration of this phenomenon of identity displacement, Shona Jackson coins the term "Creole indigeneity" to describe the process by which postcolonial nationals appropriate Amerindian symbols to assert their own right to native lands. Dominant postcolonial epics and theories of Caribbean society reinforce the narrative that Creoles have replaced Amerindians by framing the Middle Passage as the "womb" of history.[50] These rupture narratives cleave precolonial time from modernity with the Middle Passage as the turning point of history. Heroes like those in Walcott and Brathwaite's epics return across the Middle Passage to Africa to find the cradle of humanity. By placing "Africans at the center of Atlantic world history" (Weaver 506), these narratives, like Paul Gilroy's *The*

[50] Here, I refer specifically to Glissant's and Benítez-Rojo's explicit use of "womb" metaphors, discussed in the next paragraph, but also to a more implicit or general narration of the Middle Passage as origin.

Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (1993), work to correct entrenched versions of a "white Atlantic" but also push Indigenous positionalities "to the vanishing point in critical theory" (Byrd 3). In part because of its emphasis on cultural exchange and transnationalism, Gilroy's theory has become metonymic of diasporic thought that problematizes ethnic nationalism, presenting diasporic frames as alternatives to national ones; yet, while acknowledging the important contributions of Gilroy's methodology, Jace Weaver points out that even twenty years after *The Black Atlantic*'s intervention, the conversation about the formation of the "Atlantic world" is limited to racial binaries of white and black (507). In "Literature and the Red Atlantic," Weaver writes:

> Although Gilroy successfully secured for Africans inclusion in the study of the Atlantic world and in many ways transformed the field, he did little regarding other potential groups, in particular Western hemisphere indigenes. Other than his reference to "the 'Indians' they slaughtered," Native Americans make no further guest appearances in *The Black Atlantic*. (507)

While Weaver acknowledges that all academics are limited by their specializations, the erasure of Indigenous peoples is "indicative of what has occurred for centuries," and though numerous scholars have sought to expand the Black Atlantic to "include other Others, they only end up reinscribing the marginality of the indigenes of the Western hemisphere" (507). The continuing omission of Indigenous peoples from Atlantic history demonstrates a fundamental gap in postcolonial theory, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson has argued, which fails to recognize the displacement of Indigenous peoples as foundational to the conquest of the Americas.

The occlusion of Indigenous histories is compounded by origin narratives that "start the clock," so to speak, with the Middle Passage, inadvertently containing "the 'Indians' they slaughtered" in a precolonial past and outside of plantation history. Descriptions of the Middle Passage as a "womb" that birthed Atlantic civilization—typified by Glissant's complex metaphor

of the abyssal womb space in "The Open Boat" (*Poetics of Relation*, 5–10) and Benítez-Rojo's sensational description of a trans-Atlantic rape (5)—narrativize the Middle Passage as a violent yet procreative space. While the metaphor opens pathways for collective grief of an irreducible historical trauma, as a residual trope, it also reinforces notions of the Americas as a *tabula rasa* awaiting discovery. This rendering of a past "no man's land" simultaneously scripts the future, allowing postcolonial nation-states to claim rightful ownership of the land, as discussed in the previous chapter on settler colonialism.

When native peoples are acknowledged, it is often only a brief mention in a list of other ethnicities, writing aborigines into the multicultural nation and effectively disavowing sovereignty claims. In this way, multiculturalism "suppresses Indigenous specificity" by demanding that all identities conform to the neoliberal nation-state (Wolfe, *The Settler Complex* 5). Considering the overriding implications of the womb trope for understanding Indigenous specificity, it is no wonder that the authors of "Decolonizing Feminisms" re-deploy this reproductive metaphor in critiquing settler colonialism: nationalist ideologies, they write, regard the removal and displacement of native peoples as "the merely unfortunate birth pangs of [the nation's] establishment that remain in the distant past" (Arvin et. al 12). They counter that settler colonialism is a set of persisting structures that continue to displace native peoples, "not events" that can be contained in the past. In other words, the womb metaphor works conveniently with settler colonial narratives to naturalize the genocide of Indigenous peoples as inevitable and (however "unfortunate") necessary for the birth of the nation.

While male writers produce a segmented view of time through the womb trope—containing the past to construct an assimilative and unified future nation—the gendered metaphor also enters into women's writing. In his examination of the unconventional strain of

epics either penned by women or featuring female characters, *The Female Homer,* Jeremy Downes considers Nichols's 1983 *i is a long-memoried woman* an epic. Nichols's epic is narrated through a "child of the middle passage womb," who serves as a witness to history through plantation life and into the postcolonial era (Nichols 6; Downes 53). "Because epic poetry traditionally has been seen as one of the most (if not *the* most) patriarchal of genres, a genre that includes women (if it includes women) only as static objects, temptations, and rewards," Downes sees "this assertion of women's individual subjectivity and centrality [as] vitally important" (23). For Downes, Nichols's revision of the epic genre offers a way of creating new myths and a re-casting of identity for women and other marginalized groups (54). In her consideration of transoceanic travel narratives, DeLoughrey also highlights this early collection from Nichols, noting that the poet's "middle passage womb" is "a culturally destructive and creative passage which is somewhat in line with Gilroy's celebration of hybridity" ("Gendering the Oceanic Voyage" 215). Highly critical of *The Black Atlantic,* which she sees as "uncritically validating male transience" while obscuring the experiences of women, DeLoughrey's note foregrounds the limits of Nichols's poetic representation. Despite its feminine narrator, Nichols's early work shares some of pitfalls of Gilroy's work, as DeLoughrey seems to suggest ("Gendering the Oceanic Voyage" 206).

In this way, centering female subjectivities within the male-dominated epic tradition is not inherently emancipatory; just as "letting girls play on the team" does not necessarily change the game, feminine epics may repeat or extend heteronormative or masculinist narratives in a different guise. Considering the limitations of a critique solely focused on gender and identity, this chapter centers Indigenous critical approaches in order to move "past simple identity politics to interrogate the logics of heteronormativity" (Smith 43). Published more than twenty years

after *i is a long-memoried woman*, Nichols's *Startling the Flying Fish* presents a different kind of epic, one that narrates the Middle Passage voyage but extends into a deeper past, grounding its trajectory in Amerinidian histories across Meso-America and the Caribbean. Not only does *Startling the Flying Fish* reverse the gender of the epic, but it also challenges the epic's myth-making apparatus by interrogating its traditional teleological representation of time. Such a move means going beyond the politics of inclusion or pointing out the way the genre has been gendered and, instead, "Indigenizes" the epic in the sense that it brings the whole system into question.

For the purposes of this study of epic narratives, theories that orient Indigeneity as radically other or "queer" to the nation-state illuminate how gendered binaries of travel and stasis also map onto oppositions between diasporic and native subjects.[51] In "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism" (2011), Andrea Smith contends that queer critiques often privilege diasporic subjectivities while dismissing more rooted national and native identities.[52] Lacking an analysis of settler colonialism and genocide, scholars juxtapose "the complicated, queer Mestizo subject with the primitive, simple, Indigenous subject," and in this binary of mobile hybrid/stationary native, diaspora is likened to queerness as diaspora troubles or *queers* the nation (51). Such a formulation extends settler colonial ideology, which

[51] In the context of this chapter, I mobilize the term "queer" to represent a radical alterity in line with Smith's assertion that Indigeneity *queers* or fundamentally undermines the normative logic of the nation-state.

[52] In extending Smith's intervention, I don't disregard Moreton-Robinson's questioning of Smith's ideas of a subjectless critique in the essay cited here (*The White Possessive,* xvi–xvii). While I share Moreton-Robinson's doubts about whether a subjectless critique is even possible, I find Smith useful in that she shifts the discussion from rights (couched in Enlightenment and human rights logic) to justice, which goes beyond Eurocentric Enlightenment assumptions of what constitutes the human.

seeks to exterminate Indigenous presence—killing the native so that "the postmodern subject might live"—but also fails to recognize the ways in which Indigenous nationhood is always already queer to the settler colonial nation-state (51). For Smith, the progress narrative of exile, in which the subject leaves home to attain freedom, depends on the Enlightenment logic of self-determination through "transcending particularity" (52).[53] Similarly, in her examination of the US narrative of national progress, Byrd contends that Indigeneity functions as a form of transit that facilitates the expansion of US empire. As the original "enemy combatant" to the American Manifest Destiny, the "Indian" is the site through which US empire "replicates itself" by transforming "those to be colonized into 'Indians' through continual reiterations of pioneer logics, whether in the Pacific, the Caribbean, or the Middle East" (xiii). In this expansionist logic, the figure of the native becomes the necessary ground or frontier to cross; by killing or relegating the "Indian" to the past, the colonial nation is propelled into the future. In many ways, this progress narrative can be likened to the heroic voyage that characterizes the classic epic, as well as the postcolonial diasporic epics whose heroes transcend local and national frames. Yet, this progressive or transcendent trajectory not only excludes difference but is, in fact, enabled through the suppression of difference.

In the Winners' Epic, self-determination is achieved through conquest. By killing or containing Indigenous presence or confining women to the "private" realm, the transient male hero is free to chart his own epic history. The feminine epics discussed in this chapter critique national memory and memorialization not just by inserting female subjectivities into spaces

[53] Smith develops this framework through Denise Ferreira da Silva's analysis of Enlightenment theory, in which the western subject represents the universal, while its racial others are particular but aspire to be universal (44).

where they have been absent, swapping Odysseus for Penelope, but also by troubling progressive narratives by bringing Indigenous histories to the foreground. Nichols and Teaiwa subvert gendered Enlightenment binaries of public and private by presenting women as historical agents, and they also call into question the closed time of the epic and its valorization and containment of the past. Beyond the limits of a simple identity politics and rights-based discourses of representation and inclusion, Nichols and Teaiwa critique the very "stuff of epic" (Quint 9). Through the counter-aesthetic of weaving—which departs from the passive activity associated with Penelope—Nichols and Teaiwa present Indigenous presence and ways of knowing as continuous with modernity. Ultimately, Indigenous epistemologies are radically disruptive to the settler nation-state and to the epic's teleological narrative.

Epic Intertextualities: Grace Nichols's Interrogation of Caribbean History

In Nichols's fifth poetry collection, *Startling the Flying Fish,* the mythical figure of the Cariwoma speaks through every poem in the book. Cariwoma, a neologism that conflates "Caribbean" and "woman," is an incarnation of the collective spirit of the island region. Her feminine presence hovers over the Caribbean islands but also has the capacity to travel as "those overseas still carry [her] spirit" ("Dedication"). This multiplicity is emphasized by the collection's dense network of allusions, creating linkages between Greek, African, Indian, and Amerindian mythologies and the long history of colonization in the Caribbean. Like Walcott's *Omeros,* Nichols interweaves Hellenic and West African cosmologies, alluding to Greek mythological figures such as Zeus (50), Cassandra, Helen (28), Aphrodite (17), Persephone (5), and Penelope (14), gods of the Yoruban pantheon, Ogun, and Shango (70), and the trickster Anansi (55). On her journey, the Cariwoma also briefly encounters the Indian deities Shiva and

Kali, incorporating the history of South Asian indentured labor in her mapping of the Caribbean (71). Departing from Walcott, however, the collection relies most heavily on Amerindian mytho-histories, extending mutidirectionally—from the Antilles south into the Amazon and north into Mexico—to consider Carib, Arawak/Taino, Mayan, Incan, and Aztec cultures. Moving effortlessly between island and continental spaces, the Cariwoma shuttles between these mythologies and time travels between centuries but creates a connective bridge across the Americas primarily through Indigenous epistemologies and presences.

In her opening acknowledgements, Nichols cites a number of epic texts as inspiration, including contemporary fictional re-imaginings of the pre-conquest Americas, such as Wilson Harris's *Dark Jester* (2001) and Eduardo Galeano's *Memory of Fire* (1985), as well as the Amerindian classic, *The Popol Vuh: The Quiché Mayan Book of Creation*. One of the few Meso-American documents to have survived burning following the Spanish conquest, the creation myth of the Quiché-Maya of Guatemala was originally passed down through oral tradition and is thought to have been originally transcribed in the sixteenth century (Mark).[54] Direct references to the *Popol Vuh,* which narrates the genesis of the world and the eventual creation of humans from maize (corn), are interspersed throughout *Startling the Flying Fish,* perhaps most explicitly in allusions to the mythical plumed serpent, Quetzacoatl, who brings the gift of learning (48). The Mayan epic's influence, however, is most striking when considering its formal elements. According to translator Allen Christenson, the *Popol Vul* was regarded as an "instrument of sight" by the anonymous members of Quiché-Maya aristocracy who transcribed the myth in the

[54] In Meso-American societies, books and codices were in use centuries before the Spanish invasion in the early sixteenth century, but libraries and temple archives were burned by the Spaniards. For more, see Gordon Brotherson and Lúcia de Sá's "First Peoples of the Americas and Their Literature" (2002).

progressive present tense, so that readers would be able to envision genesis "as if it were occurring in the immediate present" (11, 12). Nichols's volume similarly captures this sense of simultaneity; it is narrated almost entirely in the present tense so that sixteenth- and twentieth-century events appear at once in the same unbroken temporality.[55] Also notable is the interrelationship between sight and weaving or textile that inflects both texts.[56] The *Popol Vuh'*s title translates literally to the "book of the mat," referring to the woven mat where the king sat to give counsel to his people but also to the "interlaced fibers of the mat [which] represent the unity of members of the community" (Christenson 56). Unlike the heroic individualism and nostalgia that marks western epics, the Mayan creation story emphasizes community and plural authorship, as the "'authorship' of creation" belongs not to a single (male) deity or age but to multiple creations overturned by catastrophic endings (Brotherson and de Sá 3). In *Startling the Flying Fish,* this theme of polygenesis can be traced through the Cariwoma's shifting between multiple pantheons, moving seamlessly from the societies of the South American Amazon to those of Mexico, and though the multiple histories of the Americas are narrated through the Cariwoma's first-person perspective, recurring tropes of weaving undermine the singularity of her subjectivity. Through the Cariwoma's "weave of words," the past is continuously veiled and unveiled, revealing the Amerindian presence that has endured across these spaces all along (66).

Throughout Nichols's book, related themes of seeing and not seeing, of witnessing and obscuring, shape the Cariwoma's trajectory, not unlike the journey of the *Popol Vuh,* which was

[55] By my count, exceptions to this rule appear in only three poems, which use past tense rather than the present or progressive past employed in the rest of the book (See untitled poems on pages 44, 46, and 47).
[56] Worth noting, as well, are the etymological roots of the word "text" from the Medieval Latin *textus,* meaning "thing woven," which correlates activities of weaving and writing (Howe 19).

preserved for two hundred years after conquest by elders who kept the manuscripts hidden (Christenson 12). Counter to the monolithic linearity associated with the western epic, Nichols's text reflects "the repetitive progression of history" as understood by ancient Amerindians, which "connects and interweaves past futures and future presents" (Byrd 103).[57] The engagement with native temporalities in Nichols's work also resonates with Pacific Indigenous concepts of spiral time and polygenesis or overturning, which are explored in the final sections of this chapter.

Diasporic Threads and Woven Worlds

In the opening pages of *Starling the Flying Fish,* Nichols sets up an opposition between those who stay at home and those who migrate. The dedication reads, "To the memory of my mother who stayed / And to those overseas who still / carry the Cariwoma spirit," demarcating the ones who leave from the ones who are left behind, though even travelers still carry with them the spirit of home. In the opening poems, the Cariwoma critiques "diasporic broodings," interrupting notions of travel as escape from local concerns (56). In exploring the book's oppositions between stasis and mobility and veiling and unveiling, this section first examines the ways in which *Startling the Flying Fish* decenters diasporic frames in the Caribbean—casting diasporic trajectories as extending from imperial structures and global divisions of labor rather than transcending them—and then turns to Nichols's centering of Indigenous histories in the Americas.

[57] I draw from Byrd's discussion of Wilson Harris's novel *Jonestown*. Byrd comments on Harris's character Francisco Bone, who seeks to breach the "sacred, imperial time" of the "composite epics of empires that structure themselves through linearity and consolidation" (96).

Following the inclusion of an Aztec prayer, the book's first lines read: "And I Cariwoma / watch my children / take off" (3). This opening *in medias res*, which inaugurates the Cariwoma's story with a conjunction, is significant as it indicates a break with or extension of something that came before it and also evokes the verb tense of the *Popul Vuh,* ushering the reader into an immediate present rather than a fabled past. The first poem, "My Children Are Movers," describes a mother who stays behind while her children migrate north to Europe and North America; yet, as they relocate, she disperses with them.[58] They travel, and her shape mutates: "making of me new/ triangulars across Atlantic / enmeshing me into / their metropolitan affairs" (3). The "triangulars across the Atlantic" of course recall the Middle Passage and the triangular slave trade, which are encoded into the memory of the Caribbean spirit ("Yes, I Cariwoma watched history happen," she reminds us), but new journeys form new configurations while also re-tracing the original memory (11).

As the Caribbean diaspora expands across the globe, the Cariwoma is the force that unites, maintaining a sense of rootedness in origins but also an adaptability to change. In this way, the Cariwoma's body functions as an archipelago in and of itself, a point that becomes even more evident in the untitled poem that follows a few pages later:

> The distant tributaries of my blood
> The tribe that once took succor
> in staying together
> is now scattered fourways
> on the handkerchief of the wind.
> And long before the phone
> goes dead in its socket
> the voice of a beloved

[58] In the original publication of *Startling the Flying Fish,* the poems are untitled. However, selected poems from the collection were published with titles in Nichols's collected *I Have Crossed an Ocean* (2010). I have included these titles when available to more easily distinguish between poems.

stays warm yet still stranded
from the shore of my skin. (8)

In these lines, the Cariwoma is no longer a phantasmal presence but instead becomes both human body and geography. The metaphor of "tributaries of her blood" conflates human lineage with the earth's waterways, erasing the Enlightenment binary between human and natural worlds, perhaps even between supernatural and natural realms. Instead, this image of co-extensiveness between human and environment presents the Cariwoma's subjectivity as one more aligned with Amerindian perspectivism and ancient Mayan cosmological order. The *Popol Vuh* articulates a vision in which all things, animate and inanimate, are "imbued with an unseen power" (Robert Sharer qtd. in Mark). Speaking more broadly to Amerindian epistemologies in the wider region, Latin American literary historian Idelber Avelar explains that while western anthropocentricism assumes that humans possess a soul or rational faculty devoid in non-human life, Amerindian worldviews make no such claim to human primacy. Instead, they imbue all life with a soul and, by extension, personhood or consciousness (10). In this way, humanity is merely a positional concept, as no "human essence" exists; instead, everything is human, a view that has prompted Indigenous groups in Ecuador and Bolivia (as well as Aotearoa/New Zealand) to "confer on animals, plants, and bodies of water the condition of juridical subjects endowed with rights" (Avelar 1; Dwyer).[59] Intrinsic to this view, and of particular relevance to Nichols's aesthetic and to the Cariwoma's diffuse subjectivity, is the understanding of each individual as part of a larger whole or continuous fabric.

[59] For example, the Whanganui River was granted the legal rights of a human by New Zealand's government in 2017, following advocacy efforts by the Whanganui nation (Dwyer).

Nichols's image of blood tributaries resonates with Amerindian concepts of familial or genealogical connection with environment, reconfiguring space not as mere backdrop to human activity but as interwoven with human life. The tributaries span distances as the tribe "scatter[s] to the fourways" and though the speaker longs for her absent kin, the connection is sustained through blood, anticipating a return to the "shore of [her] skin." The Cariwoma does not merely inhabit the islands as a ghost of the past but instead carries the islands within her: "As tide is to shore / Is just so I hold / these islands / to my coral bones," which allows her to remain rooted and also mobile in the same moment (9). As discussed in the previous chapter, Caribbean literature has a long history of feminizing landscapes, and in doing so, flattens both women and landscape to a mere backdrop for male agents to act out their desires. The Cariwoma, however, conflates human body and geography in a way that renders both as continuous. While traditional woman-as-land tropes evacuate women of agency and land of history, Nichols reconfigures the metaphor to present an interrelationship between living entities. Nichols defamiliarizes typical representations of feminine embodiment by presenting the body as uncontainable and marked by shifting boundaries. As embodied land and sea, the Cariwoma animates the nonhuman world and, simultaneously through this engagement with Amerindian perceptions, disrupts gendered notions of travel and stasis that define the western epic.

The epic's gendered binary of roaming Homer and static Penelope also maps onto theories of diaspora, in which the hybrid diasporic figure is invested with the power to transcend history while the primitive native remains tethered to the past. The Cariwoma resists the epic's patriarchal tendency by putting forward a vision of a feminine figure who is "there and everywhere." Though her home is in the Caribbean, the Cariwoma's body extends much further, as she inhabits multiple worlds simultaneously: "I Cariwoma occupy— / This green space where

the Caribbean / and Amazon collide" (36). The collision between the Amazon and the Caribbean intersplices continental and island territories, and as Shona Jackson has argued in *Creole Indigeneity*, highlighting continental histories within theorizations of the Caribbean raises the visibility of Amerindian presences, which are largely (and mistakenly) believed to have been eradicated in the islands.[60] The Cariwoma crosses these geographies and historical time periods, appearing in the present-day Caribbean and then in the ancient Amazon. She is fluid, plural, and shape-shifting and yet remains, perhaps paradoxically, anchored in her history and in her origins.

Across a number of poems, Nichols de-romanticizes migration as the Cariwoma observes figures looking out to the Atlantic from various vantage points, drawn by the power of the ocean or fantasizing about leaving home in search of a better life. Again and again, she warns them of the sea's false promises**,** but they do not heed her cries. In "Facing Atlantic," the Cariwoma sits "riveted" on a balcony facing the ocean like "some Mrs Noah." She sees "A young male" venturing out into the waters "despite our crescendo of warning" (18). Much later, he surfaces: "his ecstasy zipped up / his body-bag lifted off // Another life —another unreturning dove" (18, 19). Nichols's reference to "Mrs Noah" lightly mocks the biblical story, presenting Noah's wife

[60] Indigenous scholars have called attention to the ways in which the belief in native extinction discursively erases surviving Amerindian groups throughout the Lesser and Greater Antilles, which recent studies show are more numerous than previously thought. In *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean*, for example, editor Maximilian Forte explains: "At some point before 1550, it was recorded that all of the island Amerindians were extinct, a baseline misleading statement oft quoted thereafter by historians up to the present day. Despite such official pronouncement, many small pockets of Taino people survived in mountain retreats of Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. They, and their half-Amerindian kin residing in the Spanish settlements, constituted a living and striving population. A recent survey in Puerto Rico, for example, of mitochondrial DNA revealed more than 60% of the population had a Taino ancestor. Similar tests for the Dominican Republic and Cuba will likely reveal similar results in greater or lesser percentages" (274).

as a stationary figure who watches the male traveler. Listening to the sound of ocean spray, the Cariwoma, who has seen it all, is unimpressed by the ocean's epic power and comments, "Well this is a classic— / the pauses and crashes / the biblical rises" (18). She sees only a repeating history with no thrills in the "biblical rises," and she already knows the would-be fate of the young man who faces the waves and returns in a body bag. The poem's ambiguous ending implies drowning, and though not easily deciphered, his death reinforces a recurring theme in the book where migrant figures find themselves disappointed or deceived by false expectations of travel and mobility. In "Other Ships," for example, the Cariwoma sees the indentured laborers' feet stained with the same mud as "the slave's instep to the fields" (14). She watches the new arrivals sailing in from India and even Ireland in search of work in the Caribbean, and like the "unreturning dove" of "Facing Atlantic," the voyage of these laborers will not end with homecoming. Instead "Their songs of exile / their drums of loss" are "caught in a weaving odyssey / of no return" (14). Unlike Homer's Odysseus, the diasporic laborers will find "No waiting Penelope / unpicking all her work" (14). In the *Odyssey,* Penelope dutifully waits her husband's return; she deceives suitors by telling them she will choose a new husband once her weaving is finished but then each night undoes her work ("Glossary" 95). Yet, for the diasporic subjects of Nichols's poem, their odysseys are woven traps that cannot be unraveled. Through this implicit critique, the poet interrupts the tendency to romanticize migration by likening it to Odysseus's adventure. While Odysseus is destined to return home to his faithful and patient Penelope, the migrant has no such guarantee of return or safety, and as discussed in more depth below, the migrant laborer's travel does not allow him/her to transcend the global web of uneven power relations.

In another poem, Nichols depicts how not only arrivants to the Caribbean are embroidered into this long tradition of labor exploitation but also young Caribbean men and women migrating out to northern metropolitan centers. Early in the collection, the Cariwoma sees a young woman standing on the beach, staring out into the "treacherous Atlantic" toward Miami. She asks the reader to

> Hear this trapped Persephone, perfumed
> with the reckless arrogance of youth:
>
> 'I will have my eternal summer of plenty.
> I will leave these islands, this underworld
> that would crown me *Queen of Poverty* [. . .]
>
> except they share my dreams of an El Dorado—
> No twinkling Arawak gold this time,
> just a piece of life, upward and bright.' (5)

The reference to El Dorado is the first of many allusions to the mythical golden city lusted after by Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century (and thought to be located in present-day Guyana). The hankering after El Dorado is a recurring theme throughout the collection, which the speaker addresses in its multiple iterations. In some poems, El Dorado marks a colonial greed or impulse to possess, while in other instances, the golden city represents a projection of a paradisal fantasy onto an elsewhere. In the poem, the young woman dreaming of a better life is positioned as Persephone trapped in Hades's underworld of poverty, and El Dorado stands for a mythical prosperous future in the United States. However, the Cariwoma knows that migration does not mean escape:

> Who has the heart to tell her
> she'll find no flower in neon?
>
> That she won't escape the voices,
> the nuances—much like her mother's blood (5, 6)

Though she longs to venture out, Persephone is doomed to learn that there is no "out" in a global system that shapes the movement of people.

In her introduction to *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora,* Regine Jackson labors to disabuse readers of the notion that diaspora is a politically neutral or "natural" stage; rather, diaspora is a "'complex product of a long and continuous exercise in colonialism and neocolonialism'" (Trouillot qtd. in Jackson 7). While diasporic frameworks open up ways of conceptualizing identity beyond the nation, Jackson insists that diaspora "does not represent the deterritorialization of political power and migrant subjectivity, but its reterritorialization" (12). Though official colonial administrations have largely ended across the Caribbean, the "internationalization of capitalist accumulation" reproduces old hierarchies in new spatial configurations, and the outward migration to northern metropoles weakens the economic independence of island nations, forcing reliance on the United States (7). Jackson writes:

> After WWII, American private enterprise permeated the Caribbean region with U.S. dollars and business activity, fueling the one-crop or tourism-based economies of places like the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands and Trinidad and Tobago. American interventions helped create an economy heavily dependent upon North America as a market and Haitian migrants as a subservient workforce. Thus, even in the postcolonial period, nominally sovereign states of the Caribbean region that were never formally colonized by the United States find themselves in relations of dependence, subject to varying degrees of American controls and influence. (7)

While Jackson's analysis focuses primarily on the Haitian diaspora, these patterns of dependency and displacement apply to the wider Caribbean, in which the United States maintains a dominant position even after colonial governments have formally withdrawn. While diasporic discourses create a sense of individual agency and mobility, migrants remain entangled in networks of global power relations.

As she continues to weave together different national histories, Nichols traces continuities between colonialisms past and present running the length of the Americas. In "Our Cassandra," Nichols braids Greek, Grenadian, and Guyanese geographies and mythologies (28). The poem refers to Cassandra of Homer's *Iliad.* In the Greek tradition, Cassandra is cursed by the god Apollo so that her prophecies will never be believed ("Glossary" 92). She forewarns of the fall of Troy but is ignored, and similarly, in Nichols's poem, Cassandra's warnings inevitably "fall on the walls / of disbelief" (28). Transported from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean Sea, Cassandra watches history unfold alongside the Cariwoma, who narrates:

> Her sea-far eyes, like mine
>
> Discerning everything—
> from those suicidal Carib leaps
> down to the soft massacre at Jonestown—
> all the bloody reincarnations of history.
>
> Her spirit-shrieks. My global shudders. (28, 29)

The "suicidal Carib leaps" shares a poetic resonance with Nichols's Middle Passage description in *i is a long-memoried woman.* In the poem "Eulogy," the speaker wonders how to honor the names of those lost in the limbo of the Middle Passage, "The leaping suicide / ones," who jumped from slave ships into the Atlantic (17). In *Startling the Flying Fish,* however, "suicidal […] leaps" refers instead to Carib Amerindian resistance to European colonization. Caribs' Leap, a cliff outside Sauteurs, Grenada, is named after the 1651 incident in which, following their defeat by the French, the "last Caribs chose to jump to their deaths rather than submit the Europeans" (Tate). In 2002, the Tate Museum in London exhibited director Steve McQueen's short film *Caribs' Leap,* which also commemorates the event, showing calm sea waters periodically "disrupted by a figure falling vertiginously through the air. The figure is viewed

mid-flight, never seen jumping or landing" (Tate). Nichols, who was writer-in-residence at the Tate Museum 1999–2000, possibly alludes to McQueen's film but also "leaps" from the 1651 Grenada event to the 1978 Jonestown Massacre in Guyana. Jonestown was a commune-style settlement founded by American cult leader Jim Jones, who moved his religious group from California to a remote area of Guyana. More than 900 of Jones's followers, including 300 children, committed murder-suicide by drinking fruit punch laced with cyanide. In the space of one stanza, Cassandra's shrieks echo across three very different moments of conquest, foretelling the destruction of Troy, the European colonization of the Caribbean, and a mass killing in postcolonial Guyana.

How Nichols relates the events of "revolutionary suicide," to borrow Jones's term, in Grenada and Guyana remains somewhat ambiguous ("About Jonestown"). She calls Jonestown a "soft massacre" in contrast to "those suicidal Caribs leaps" perhaps because debate continues about whether the tragedy should be called a group suicide or murder by (Jones's) coercion ("About Jonestown"). Regardless of their different contexts, in the poem, the two events could have been prevented through a long view of history. For the Cariwoma, with her "sea-far eyes" gazing across centuries, these are "bloody reincarnations," repetitions of the same historical patterns. Her allusion to Jonestown takes on even more mytho-historical resonance when considering the fact that Jones acquired pounds of cyanide, shipped into the jungle in batches over two years, with a jeweler's license, claiming that the chemical would be used for cleaning gold (Polk). Like El Dorado, references to gold appear frequently throughout the collection, from the opening Aztec prayer ("Be it gold, it breaks." [xiii]) to allusions of "twinkling Arawak gold" (5), and in the poem where Cassandra's warnings go unheeded, gold links the mythologies of Jonestown to El Dorado. Jonestown's utopian promise ended in murderous ruin; the quest for El

Dorado justified the genocide of Amerindian peoples; and in both histories, the promise of gold, figurative and literal, never materialized.

For Byrd, the Jonestown episode is also a moment where postcolonial nationalism and neocolonial imperialism intersect in fantasies of El Dorado. An American tragedy in the Guyanese interior, the Jonestown massacre is a "capitalist accretion of imperialism that exports death and grief to other nations" (Byrd 79). At the same time, contemporary forms of colonialism are not only perpetuated through foreign imperial powers, such as the US, but also through postcolonial governments. As Benítez-Rojo has argued, the contemporary Guyanese government's attempts to seize Indigenous-occupied territories for resource development and tourism shows how the search for El Dorado continues "beneath the slogan of 'repossessing the interior'" (Benítez-Rojo qtd. in Byrd 90, and in Jackson "Race," 199). In this way, the El Dorado of Spanish legend continues to inform American imperial and postcolonial Guyanese imaginaries: according to Byrd, "conquistadoral logics [underpin] utopian projects and postcolonizing Caribbean societies alike" (94). Throughout the Nichols's collection, El Dorado appears as a symbol of false promises or expectations and of repeating histories. The mythical city represents the centuries-old slaughter of Amerindians as well as present-day neoliberal and neoimperial projects that displace native peoples.

While Nichols's interest in pre-Columbian American history can be traced to her previous collection, *Sunris* (1996), the emphasis on El Dorado shows an increased awareness of the specificities of Indigenous positionalities. In *Sunris,* for example, the female narrator travels through a carnival and reclaims "the various strands of her heritage," including African and Amerindian traces in celebration of her multicultural ancestry (*I Have Crossed an Ocean* 91). In *Startling the Flying Fish,* however, the poet delves deeper in Amerindian histories, citing a

number of fiction and nonfiction works in her opening acknowledgements, from the *The Popol Vuh* to historical novels of the pre-conquest Americas, including the work of fellow Guyanese author Harris. Credited as one of the few contemporary Caribbean writers to engage seriously with Amerindian history, Harris serves as an important point of comparison for Nichols, in terms of both advances and limitations in representing Indigenous traditions.

While critics recognize Harris as a pioneer in addressing the absence of Amerindian history in theorizations of the black Atlantic, opening up avenues for "grievability and accountability to history," Byrd points out that Harris's representations of Amerindians are often stereotypical (xxxvii). Commenting on Harris's 1996 novel *Jonestown,* Byrd writes: "The native presence has no agency of its own, in its own right. It is forever frozen on the precipice of conquest, crouching over campfires, sharing a morsel of flesh played, as Harris might write, on a scrap of music from a bone flute" (88). Given *Startling the Flying Fish'*s similar preoccupation with the moment of conquest—the Cariwoma's dialogues with Cortez and Columbus alongside conversations with Incan ruler Atahualpa and Mayan emperor Montezuma—Byrd's criticism of Harris might be extended to Nichols. Yet, through her engagement with both gender and Indigenous temporal structures, Nichols opens possibilities beyond the limitations of Harris's works. By depicting Amerindian life in the lyric present, in the progressive tense of the *Popol Vuh* and in the poetic time of the "now," Nichols's epic reveals Amerindians to be a constant presence rather than a "persisting past" (Jackson "Race," 209). Additionally, departing from Harris, Nichols contemplates the figure of the Amerindian woman as a site of multiple and embattled signification. Because she "only appears when she is needed" in colonial and postcolonial national histories, to borrow Spivak's phrase regarding the subaltern woman, the Amerindian woman functions as a convenient symbol but is evacuated of any agency of her own

(Spivak 270). Though she might be accused of appropriating Amerindian narratives, Nichols's project begins to move beyond rupture narratives that seal off Indigenous life into a romantic precolonial past or assume the complete eradication of native presence in the Caribbean.

"Read between [her] lines": Women's Bodies in the Space of Cultural Production

At the start of the book's third section, the Cariwoma announces a shift in focus, turning her attention to the South American mainland: "Today I sing / not of breakaway / calypso islands / but of a mainland built for an Amazon—" (35). While the first two sections navigate among multiple geographies, sweeping across the Americas from Miami to Guyana, the Cariwoma turns from these archipelagic interconnectivities to go deep into the "Andean fortress" of the Amazon (35). In contrast to Walcott's and Brathwaite's mystic voyages back to Africa, the Cariwoma's journey into "an Amerindian / pre-history" expands the historical scope of the black Atlantic, complicating dominant diasporic theories that locate origins in the Middle Passage. Nichols's description of "breakaway / calypso islands" in connection to a South American mainland maps the two geographies in relation to each other, positioning the Caribbean islands as "breakaways" from the continent (40). While Benítez-Rojo connects Guyana to the Caribbean through its plantation history, Nichols's Caribbean archipelago, which radiates from the continental interior through the islands, is connected through Amerindian historical presence long before colonial contact.

Yet, as the Cariwoma moves more exclusively into the "green space where the Caribbean / and the Amazon collide," her tone becomes more tentative and self-reflexive (36). The Cariwoma, who watched history happen and is herself an embodiment of history—who, in her water-like omnipresence, confronts sixteenth-century conquistadors and feels the *Nina,* the

Pinta, the *Santa Maria* sailing over her "tongue's edge"—stops short at the border of the forest (21). Instead of playing the role of witness to history, guiding the reader through her visions, the Cariwoma must herself be invited and guided. Observing an Amerindian woman on the river, the Cariwoma questions her own eyes: "Woman paddling canoe / or apparition on river?" (38). The Cariwoma wonders if the woman were to beckon to her with her "rain-forest eyes" if she would have the courage to go "Through the dark // Door-mouth of forest . . . Past the veil of secrecy" (39, 40). The Cariwoma's hesitation is striking when considering her supernatural ability to move across geographic and temporal spaces in the preceding poems; she has unlimited access to history except in this instance facing the "decimated tribes" of Guyana, the "Wapishana / Macusi / Warrau" (38). Still, she observes the woman, whom she recognizes has been taught by history "to be inscrutable," and moving between lines of self-interrogation and imperative to the reader, the Cariwoma instructs, "So watch her closely / and read between the lines—" (39). These lines express a sense of deference and an acknowledgement of the ritual and practice that have remained hidden in plain sight, rendered "inscrutable" for the sake of preservation. The Cariwoma observes the "Cassava-Mama" straining root starch through her matapee basket and laying out "cassava-bread / moons" to dry. She identifies how the river woman camouflages herself: "The way she sifts / like any pork-knocker / a river's residue / from the hard gold of her life" (39). The comparison to a pork-knocker, or gold prospector in Guyana's hinterland according to Nichols's glossary, shows how the woman's labor goes unnoticed and blends in with other activity on the river. Yet, considering that "core Amerindian cultural traditions" have been maintained through techniques such as basket weaving and the processing of cassava through matapee (or matapi) strainers shows how the Amerindian woman rehearses ancestral practices passed down across generations alongside the contemporary pork-knocker (Forte 118).

Gender also plays an important role in that maintenance of these techniques is made possible "by being located in the confines of the domestic household" (118). In other words, women's work in domestic spaces allows for the safekeeping of traditions from colonial corruption and conquest. Like the pages of the *Popol Vuh,* which were preserved for centuries through hiding, Amerindian ways of knowing are assumed to have been eradicated but, in fact, persist undetected and, in this case, are disguised as "mere" women's housework. By looking closer and "reading between the lines," the Cariwoma comes to see that though the tribes were "decimated / scattered," they are "still blooming in pockets // like hidden forest flowers" (38). Opaque to the outsider's gaze, the Amerindian woman performs the work of cultural preservation; her everyday ritual is a testament to survival.

According to Shona Jackson, the figure of the Amerindian woman is an important site "for the imaginary of colonial and postcolonial culture" ("Race" 197). In her reading of Harris's 1960 novel *Palace of the Peacock,* Jackson considers the rape of the character Mariella, an Amerindian woman, in relation to postcolonial discourses that dispossess native peoples of their land. The native woman occupies multiple and contradicting positions in a European symbolic economy, a series of tensions "surrounding the folk, herself, and the land" (196). In postcolonial Guyana, Amerindian folk have no title to land because they are "always *and* already identified with the land," which was long-ago conquered (200). In this self-fulfilling logic, the figure of the Amerindian woman, standing in both for the collective folk and the land, functions as a means to an end. Jackson writes that in Harris's novel: "the land, or its subjection, is feminized through the Amerindian woman and this feminization becomes a *pre*condition of its own subjection or rape" (204). The concurrent feminization of land and equation of women's bodies with land places both in a position of inevitable subordination. In the symbolic system where land is

feminized and the Amerindian woman comes to represent the land (and by extension all native peoples), her subjected position becomes "fixed" in the landscape (207). In Nichols's poem, by contrast, the Amerindian woman's illegibility keeps her image from being co-opted by these possessive logics. Like the Incan citadel of Macchu Picchu in an earlier poem, which shrouds itself in clouds to hide "from conquistador-gaze" (35), the woman keeps a low profile. While colonial and postcolonial rhetoric would symbolically bind her to the land and to the past, out of sight, she continues to move "borderless / like her Bering / crossing ancestors" (38).

In an earlier poem, the Cariwoma also reflects on the ways in which women are written in and out of history but in a very different sense than her encounter with the Amerindian woman on the river. In her address to the villainized figure of Malinche, the Cariwoma considers how women's bodies are mobilized as symbols of cultural corruption in contrast to the woman who preserves native traditions through her preparation of cassava bread. According to Nichols, Malinche was an "Amerindian woman who was the translator for Hernan Cortes during the Spanish Conquest of 1521. She bore him a son who is seen symbolically as the first *mestizo,* a child of mixed race. *Malinchista* later became an insulting expression for betrayal" ("Glossary" 94). In the poem, however, the speaker expresses cynicism about the accepted version of history. She imagines the "fog of centuries" lifting and sees Malinche emerging through the official stories of heroes and villains (26). She beckons to Malinche to come forward and tell her story, "Come, my sister, and talk to me" (26). Malinche responds that she has been "*dogged*. . . *by whispers, rumors, shadows"* but she suggests that *"if Popocatepetl or Iztaccihuatl could speak— not the language of smoke—* / *but the language of words—* / *they would tell a different story"* (26, 27). Malinche refers to two volcanoes located in present-day central Mexico and featured in

Aztec folklore. She imagines that if the volcanoes could speak, they would come to her defense. The Cariwoma responds sympathetically:

> *Malinchista*—they say meaning a sell-out
> *Malinchista,*—a word that shadows your name
> But how long can we stare in the mirror of blame?
> Accept, O prodigal mother of the mestizo—
> This marigold flower for the black cloud of your hair. (27)

The Cariwoma extends a marigold as a peace offering to the outcast woman, scapegoated as an accomplice to colonialism and "prodigal mother" of hybridity. Unlike the ghostly figure in the Amazon forest, hidden behind a "veil of secrecy," Malinche emerges as a complex individual—a figure that history has presumed to understand but whose personal voice and private life have been lost to the archive (40). Nichols frequently references flowers throughout the collection, which symbolize either a product or outcome of history ("flowers / of a blood-shedding mythology—" [41]) or the hope for an alternative future (such as with the young migrant who will be disappointed "to find no flowers in neon" [5] or the children of decimated tribes still blooming "like hidden forest flowers" [38]). In these cases, the flowers emerge as bright spots of revelation and life through the annals of colonial narrative, hinting at parts of the story that have remained overlooked or disregarded. The Cariwoma anoints Malinche with a marigold flower to wear in her hair, showing compassion for the long-cursed woman.

The recuperation of Malinche recalls Gayatri Spivak's search for the unnamed Rani of Sirmur. Interrogating the British colonial archival records relating to the practice of *sati* or widow immolation in India, Spivak considers how women's bodies become the battlegrounds of ideological production: caught between traditional patriarchal structures and colonial impositions, women either come to stand in for tradition or (as in Malinche's case) become facilitators for modernization and hybridization. Reduced to mere symbols, women like Spivak's

Rani are absent from history except where convenient: “The Rani only appears when she is needed in the space of imperial production,” writes Spivak (270). “Caught in the cracks between the production of the archives and Indigenous patriarchy [. . .] there is no ‘real Rani’ to be found” (271). Similarly, in her interactions with both Malinche and the Amerindian woman on the river, the Cariwoma emphasizes the gendered narrations of history, where women are forced bear the burdens of ideology while their own stories are erased from the record.

At the same time, through this problematizing of historical narrative and the ways in which women’s bodies have been contained in the symbolic realm, Nichols opens up space to consider women’s and native agency that have remained hidden—present yet unrecorded in archival memory. She invokes a different sort of archive:

> The prophetic texts
> of the Mayan priests
> long sequestered
> among stones (45)

These prophecies foretell the coming anguish of colonial conquest, and yet the memory is preserved in the stones, behind “lianas (or vines) of time” and under the “green cathedral” of the forest survives a “half-hidden congregation” (42, 51). Against assumptions of Indigenous extinction or what Taino scholar Jorge Estevez calls “paper genocide,” the forests and ruins across the Americas mark native endurance beyond conquest (qtd. in Forte 11). Following a series of linked poems that describe the murder of the Aztecs and then the Taino, the Mayan god Quetzacoatl makes a surprise appearance. Emerging with a riotous waterfall headdress:

> Quetzacoatl
> comes sailing to my door
> on his raft of snakes [. . .]
>
> Gently blowing
> all of Meso-America

through the flute of my ears. (48)

The sudden appearance of the mystical feathered serpent of the Mayan creation story after several pages detailing the conquest of native peoples across the Americas bears particular significance. A harbinger of resurgence, the creation deity comes bearing gifts and also blows the entirety of Meso-America through the "flute" of the Cariwoma's ears.[61] Given the *Popol Vuh's* long tradition detailing multiple creations followed by catastrophic endings, the Quetzacoatl's appearance here suggests new creation and resurrection emerging from the destruction of colonial conquest. According to Christenson's gloss, the dragon-like god is thought to have been the first to bring maize, which would become the substance of human flesh, out of the mountain of Tonacatepetl. Human life corresponds to the agricultural cycles of harvest and new growth of maize in that "man's destiny is to live and die in endless cycles" (181). Though Quetzacoatl belongs to Mayan and Aztec mythologies, in Nichols's imagining, he is not bound to a single geography but instead moves fluidly across the Americas, bearing his message of Amerindian rebirth across borders.

Native Desire as a Time Machine

In the final section of Nichols's book, the Cariwoma moves out of "an Amerindian / pre-history" to consider living Indigenous descendants (40). In the book's opening poems, the Cariwoma grieves or cautions against migration from the Caribbean islands, and Nichols brings the theme full circle in her closing poems, which look to the "first women" and "first men" who

[61] See my discussion of the Amerindian bone flute in Chapter Two, as referenced in the work of Wilson Harris and Mahadai Das. Though Nichols does not appear to make an explicit reference here, the resurrection and reanimation of the body through the playing of the bone flute shares poetic resonances with the image of ears as a flute.

gave birth to the tribes of the Americas (84). "The Children of Las Margaritas," a poem inspired by a photograph from Sebastião Salgado's "Migrations" exhibit, describes descendants of with Amerindians dancing in the State of Chiapas, Mexico. The figures raise their hands in praise of "Tlaloc," the Aztec rain god, or perhaps "Mary or Jesus" or the Mexican goddess of "ripening maize, Chicomecoatl" (83). Ultimately, "Like their ancestors before them," they dance for "justice, recompense / for old and new violations" (83). By considering the descendants, who like their ancestors, demand justice for abuses "old and new," Nichols begins to develop an image that sheds light on current forms of colonial power, confronting its crimes as part not only of a distant past but also of a continuing present (83). As a response to Salgado's "Migrations," which captures mass migration and displacement of peoples across the globe due to environmental disaster, war, and economic disparity, the poem brings issues of migration and Indigeneity into direct confrontation. Within the context of mass migration, Nichols emphasizes ancestry and Indigenous roots, depicting a scene with dancers in joyful resistance, communing with the gods of Aztec cosmology and in "bright / Quetzal colours," whose feathers, Nichols explains, were "precious to the Aztecs" (83, 96). In this way, Nichols creates an unlikely connection between Salgado's images of migrants, refugees, and economic exiles and Amerindian struggles for survival. In the poem, the extinguishment of the Aztecs is not part of a closed chapter from which society has moved on, but, rather, part of a persistent history of displacement in an era of globalized capital.

In the book's middle section, the speaker grieves all the "tribes decimated / scattered." Yet, she also recognizes the ways in which Amerindian peoples are "still blooming in pockets // like hidden forest flowers" (38). In the closing poems, Nichols highlights Amerindian survival in the form not only of culture but also of genealogical inheritance. According to Shona Jackson,

predominant assumptions about Indigenous disappearance discursively and routinely make surviving Amerindian life invisible. However, against historical tropes of "anti-Indigeneity," more recent efforts have "sought to account for Indigenous survival beyond simply culture, language, and 'pure blood' status by identifying autochthonous genes in the larger population of islands such as Puerto Rico," showing that Indigenous life is more widespread than what is recognized in the public's consciousness ("Re/Presentation of the Indigenous Caribbean" 520).

The persistence of Indigenous peoples in the Americas is in and of itself a testament of resistance, proof that elimination of Native populations was neither inevitable nor a natural progression of history as the "modern" world supplanted the outmoded "pre-modern" one. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz articulates, "Surviving genocide, by whatever means, *is* resistance" (xiii). In a poem mixing lore from Trinidad and Guyana, the speaker lyrically invokes a future return; she imagines eating labba (or wild animal in the rodent family) and drinking creek water, a combination which is fabled to return the eater "to end their days in Guyana," and also eating Cascadura fish, which will eventually transport the eater home to Trinidad ("Glossary" 93, 91). In three couplets beginning with a repetition of the past conditional tense "As if I'd [. . .]," the poem builds in suspense to the climax in the final stanza: "Here where trade winds breathe islands / and scarlet ibises sear the horizon / and faces startle with their sudden / cheek-bones of survival" (86). The time of the poem is thrust out of a potential past into a realized present, emphasized with the repetition of "s" sounds in the final couplet, (in the words "fa**ce**s**,**" "**s**tartle," "**s**udden," "cheek-bone**s,**" "**s**urvival"), sonically accumulating and culminating in the final revelation of "survival." This rhythm propels the poem forward to its "startl[ing]" conclusion: those thought to have been decimated continue to live on.

Through her depiction of Amerindian resistance in the form of survival, Nichols begins to show recognition of the native agency that remains unrealized in Harris's work. Even more powerful is the way in which this depiction disrupts the teleological history of the epic. In the epic's generic trajectory, the hero voyages out to new worlds and inevitably returns home; in Nichols's epic, the return or conclusion of the journey comes in the form of recognition for what has endured and survived across the long course of history. In his essay "Queering Indigenous Pasts, or Temporalities of Tradition and Settlement," Mark Rifkin considers how reimagining temporality in queer ways ruptures the present; the "unexpected (re)appearance of what had thought to be long gone" creates a "perverse proximity" to the past (138). In this sense, Native survival is, in and of itself, queer to the settler nation-state. As Rifkin writes: "To the extent that non-Natives view Indians as remnants of an earlier era, Native peoples occupy a queer position within settler articulations of both history and the contemporary moment" (138). By presenting native displacement as continuous with contemporary processes of globalization and emphasizing the ongoing presence of Amerindian life, *Startling the Flying Fish* disrupts the closed time of the epic.

In contrast to the fictional representations of Amerindian culture in Harris's work, which foreclose and contain Indigenous agency in a pre-modern past, Nichols's concluding poems look to traces of Amerindian survival as conduits for imagining a future. In part, the differences across these works might be attributed to questions of genre. While Harris's fictional novels bear the burden of representation, lyric poetry, as Jonathan Culler theorizes in *Theory of the Lyric*, operates as an event in and of itself rather than the representation of a past event. "The formal dimensions of lyrics," Culler writes, "—the patterning of rhythm and rhyme, the repetition of stanza forms, and generally everything that recalls song or lacks mimetic or representational

function—contribute to their ritualistic as opposed to fictional aspect, making them texts composed for *re*performance" (37). In this way, "'The lyric is, at bottom, a statement about this world rather than the projection of a fictional speaker into a fictional world'" (Hamburger qtd. in Culler 350). Lyric poetry then operates through a different temporality and logic than narrative fiction, making sense and constructing worlds through sound and rhythm. For poet Susan Stewart, the performance and ritual embedded in the sound of poetry creates its own distinct form of social action. With each reading and recitation, the poetic event is reproduced. As Stewart proposes: "the sound of poetry is heard in the way that a promise is heard. A promise is an action made in speech . . . Something that 'happens,' that 'occurs' as an event and can continually be called on, called to mind, in the unfolding present" (qtd. in Culler 353). Thinking of lyric time, and Nichols's poems in particular, as promise—as speech action invested in the future rather than monument to past event—allows for an engagement with Amerindian epistemologies that renders them as continuous, part of an "unfolding present."

Through this queering or indigenizing of time, Nichols's collection ends in a history that has not yet happened. The Cariwoma, who again and again warns of repeating cycles of history, stands in a place of uncertainty and potential in the book's concluding lines. In the last stanza, the Cariwoma announces, "And I am on the edge / of this new world / awaiting the footprints of my arrival" (88). The impossible temporality of these lines—the Cariwoma waiting for her own past arrival in the future—represents a space of desire which confuses delineations between past, present, and future. This lyric desire resonates with Eve Tuck, Angie Morrill, and Maile Arvin's description of Native desire as a "kind of time machine": As Tuck et. al. explain, "'[D]esire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*. . . . Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future'" (25). While Amerindian life is so often

relegated to the "*not anymore,*" in the Cariwoma's weaving and re-weaving of time, the "*not anymore"* transforms into the space of the "*not yet."* Forming her own epic tradition, "With no boat or ship to darken / the hem of her horizon," the Cariwoma awaits her own footprints in the sand (88).

"In command of their own vessels": Women Writing the Pacific Voyage

In her examination of the influence of the *Odyssey* on African diasporic writing, McConnell refers to Robert Sullivan's *Star Waka* (1999) as a "Maori interpretation of Homer" (13). While McConnell is careful not to situate the modern African, Caribbean, and American works in her study as mere derivations or to hold up Homer's forerunner to the western canon as the standard of literary "excellence," her passing characterization of Sullivan's work as a Maori adaptation of Homer perhaps overstates its debts to the Greek tradition (13). *Star Waka* is in conversation with the *Odyssey* ("I belong to cosmology. Dig, Odysseus?"), but its larger themes of voyaging and return are a reinscription of Indigenous Pacific transoceanic migration, structured around ancient navigational techniques that used the stars as a guide (Sullivan 89). McConnell's brief treatment of *Star Waka* places the multicultural Maori work primarily in a western literary lineage rather than prioritizing its roots in ancient Polynesian voyaging traditions and orature. At the same time, Sullivan's *Star Waka* aligns with Homer's model in other ways not addressed by McConnell: through its occlusion of female subjectivities, it preserves the epic as a male-dominated genre, in which a male crew mans the ship in a universe where women's absence is largely left unnoted.

The previous section, which explored Nichols' sprawling epic history of the Caribbean and the wider Americas, focused on the ways in which an analysis of genocide and Amerindian

subjectivity reconfigures origin narratives of the black diaspora. Nichols's work creates potential for examining the ocean-voyaging epic through issues of Indigeneity. Turning to Pacific literature, this section considers epic literatures that center Indigenous subjectivities while also emphasizing women's participation in cultural production. These narratives, which work to correct colonial views of the ocean as *aqua nullius* or empty space, figure the ocean as island connector and common ancestor. The recuperation of voyaging histories and resurrection of Pacific Islander identity as ancient voyagers mark post-independence literatures across the region, beginning in the 1960s, as described in Griffen's thesis with which this chapter opened. Beyond literature, expeditions like the launching of the *Hōkūleʻa* vaka, or ocean-going canoe, from Hawaiʻi to Tahiti in 1976 symbolize the cultural revolution in the Pacific, moving from isolated ethnic nationalisms to a regional imaginary of networked pan-Pacificism. As DeLoughrey explains in her chapter "Vessels of the Pacific: An Ocean in the Blood," the vaka has become the culminating symbol of Pacific regionalism, articulated in Epeli Hauʻofa's foundational essay "Our Sea of Islands" (1993). Hau'ofa advances the notion that the Pacific does not consist of isolated islands in a far sea but "a sea of islands," interconnected by Indigenous voyaging and trade routes that predate Captain Cook's eighteenth-century voyage (Hauʻofa 151).

At the same time, as DeLoughrey meticulously recounts, this invocation of transpacific crossing has generally been imagined and represented through "masculine Pacific voyagers" (*Routes and Roots* 97).[62] In particular, DeLoughrey critiques former prime minister of the Cook

[62] The 2016 release of the Disney animation *Moana* has transformed this gendered notion of travel in popular consciousness as the fictional character Moana is now the world's most famous Pacific voyager. While the film has been met with enthusiasm in some Polynesian communities, who are pleased to have their heritage represented in popular media, a number of Pacific scholars

Islands Thomas Davis's historical novelization of the "Polynesian settlement of Oceania" *Vaka: Saga of a Polynesian Canoe* (1992) (134). She sees the novel as "upholding a chiefly masculine elite as the progenitors of the region" (134). Epic narratives such as Davis's are characterized by "gendered divisions of time and space," which reduce women to symbols of national past and tradition while men navigate the public realm and pioneer new histories (Chatterjee qtd. in DeLoughrey, 134). In this way, masculine Pacific regionalism shares some of the pitfalls of Caribbean regionalism and diaspora frameworks, which seek to transcend the limits of ethnic nationalism but reproduce its patriarchal hierarchies. For this reason, DeLoughrey writes that "the concept of the region, even when stitched together by the transpacific vaka, cannot provide a panacea for the ethnic and gender hierarchies that flow over from colonial and national frameworks" (134). She goes further to show how these narratives are products of colonial rather than precolonial history, in that records of ancient oceanic voyaging do not evidence the same gendered divides:

> The infrequent representation of women in Pacific maritime narratives is not an accurate reflection of the region's orature. In fact the scholarly archive records countless Pacific women travelers including sea deities (Hine Moana, the wife of Kiwa), female voyaging companions (of Tangi'ia, Ru, Tane, and Rakanui), autonomous women voyagers (Hineraki, Pele, and Nafanua), and a few female navigators (Hine, Nei Nim'anoa). The women appear in Davis's original sources, directing and organizing transoceanic voyages, yet he excludes them from his historical novel. (138, 139)

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have vehemently critiqued the film as an appropriation and corruption of native culture, even calling it "Polyface." Perhaps most relevant for my discussion of gender and voyaging is Vicente Diaz's point that *Moana*'s defeated antagonist, the "lava witch," appears to be a corruption of Pele, goddess of the volcano. By valorizing a formulaic, western feminism in its depiction of Moana's journey, the film discounts Indigenous feminist traditions embodied in the figure of Pele. See Diaz's op-eds, "Disney Craps a Cute Grass Skirt" and "Don't Swallow (or be Swallowed by) Disney's 'Culturally Authenticated Moana.'"

For DeLoughrey, the point is not merely to observe this historical inaccuracy but instead to interrogate the postcolonial production of the sea-faring epic as a masculine voyage. Extending this analysis, I look to corrective voyages penned by women, who recuperate voyaging foremothers but also disrupt gendered dualisms that conflate rootedness with stasis and passivity (and thus femininity).

Responding to the male-dominated tradition, Pacific women scholars, poets, and activists reconsider narratives of oceanic travel, seeking out female voyaging ancestors and troubling gendered notions of mobility. In a special issue of *Pacific Studies* (2007), women from diverse locations across the Pacific directly address gender divides within voyaging narratives. In their prologue to the issue, editors Caroline Sinavaina and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui write that through the title "Women Writing Oceania: Weaving the Sails of the Vaka," they strive to "mark a historical continuum of women's cultural labor, both intrinsic and emergent, across vast reaches of space and time" (5). For Sinavaina and Kauanui, weaving emerges not only as an important metaphor for women's domestic labor and bonds between women but also as a way of re-examining the supposedly male tradition of the voyaging epic. They write:

> While traditional voyaging is often presumed to be a male domain in many parts of the Pacific, we here invoke a female lineage of sailors exemplified by Pele, Nafanua, and Ne'i ni Manoa, for example, as voyagers in command of their own vessels. We call upon these genealogies of mobility and weave the sails of our own voyages. A second more subtle but profound, aspect of mobility informs the actual production of the sails, generally overseen and performed by women, in an involved process of harvesting, treating, and plaiting pandanus. As the weavers of sails, that is, wind-powered 'engines,' women's social power is materially associated with the actual generation of mobility itself. (5)

In marking the elisions in the Pacific voyaging archive, Sinavaina and Kauanui's project is two-fold: they challenge contemporary narratives that assume male-populated ships, and they also strive to make visible the behind-the-scenes collaborative work that makes voyaging possible.

Against the epic's celebration of individual heroism, which so often presents a male hero at the helm of the ship, the women-centered narratives of "Women Writing Oceania" invoke communal labor and shared heroism through the trope of weaving. They work to recuperate female lineages through diverse Pacific oral narratives: Pele, goddess of Hawaiian mo'olelo (or oral or written tradition), ancestral Samoan warrior Nafanua, and the navigator of Gilbertese mythology, Ne'i ni Manoa (also spelled as "Nei Nim'anoa"). Through these female figures, they trouble the normative image of the male sailor-hero while also presenting women as historical agents "in command of their own vessels" (5). Related and also notable is not only this historical investigation but the project's framing, which emphasizes rather than conceals the editors' personal and private struggles in the process of publication. Though they had intended to release the collection years before its 2007 publication, Sinavaina and Kauanui acknowledge significant delays "due to debilitating illness that beset both of us en route: breast cancer in one instance, and in the other, immune disorders, injuries, and clinical depression" (1, 2). They open their preface by considering threats to Indigenous survival in postcolonial Oceania, and rather than focusing on globalization and economic forms of neoliberalism, they instead call out varieties of physical, mental, and spiritual illness as colonial residue: "At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves plagued by high rates of stress-related disease, such as cancer, cardiovascular disorders, alcoholism, drug abuse, obesity, diabetes, domestic violence, and mental illness" (1). In this way, they link their own illnesses to larger colonial systems and emphasize colonialism not as an event but as an enduring structure that continues to shape domestic life in the islands. Similar to their attention to weaving and women's unseen contributions, so often dismissed as menial domestic labor, Sinavaina and Kauanui consider the unseen stresses wrought by colonialism, which filter from supposed "public" realms into private

lives and bodies. They recognize the emotional labor of decolonization and suggest that this burden is often left to women, continuously working in the background and behind the scenes, to carry.

By thematically highlighting weaving, these Pacific scholars and artists trouble gendered divisions that mark space and mobility, but beyond theme, considering weaving as a formal and aesthetic trope also allows for an understanding of Indigenous culture as dynamic and adaptive rather than insular and static. In her discussion of the Hawaiian epic of Pele, goddess of the volcano, and her sister Hi‘iaka, noted by the editors of “Women Writing Oceania” and discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui draws repeatedly on metaphors of weaving in order to describe the intertwining of oral and written traditions and the engrafting of new traditions and narratives into existing mo‘olelo. Against notions of a fixed and pure pre-contact society, destined for extinction following the fatal impact of “modernity,” ho‘omanawanui describes transitional and multiple texts in mutual “exchange and flourishing with other Polynesian influences” (xxxii). The adventures of Pele and Hi‘iaka are recorded in multiple and diverse traditions rather than a single, authoritative text, allowing for adaptation and revision. ho‘omanawanui likens the braiding of mo‘olelo and the incorporation of new influences and techniques to the weaving of a lei flower garland. Considering the cultural symbolism attached to local flowers and traditional techniques of garland weaving, the lei offers a model of hybridity that emphasizes continuity over reinvention and place-specificity over relinquishment of place.

Continuing this thread of adaptability and multiplicity, ho‘omanawanui emphasizes the importance of *hulihia* discourses to the Hawaiian epic, which resonates with themes of polygenesis and cycles of creation and destruction as described in the Mayan creation myth, the

Popol Vuh. "*Hulihia* literally means 'overturned, a complex change, overthrow,'" she explains. "The hulihia chants are an integral part of the Pele and Hi'iaka mo'olelo and are the climax of the narrative. They refer to the destruction and regeneration of the 'āina [land] through volcanic eruption, 'overturning' the established order on the land and building something new" (xl). The celebration of "overturning" carries important symbolism for anticolonial movements in Hawai'i but also presents Indigenous epistemologies as dynamic rather than conforming to a rigid and static past. Extending notions of weaving that emerge from Nichols's history of the Americas—which emphasize community and reconfigure space and time as one continuous fabric—in Pacific contexts, weaving images evoke alter/native conceptions of time that disrupt the epic's linear progression. As discussed in more detail below in relation to Teaiwa's epic, the symbol of the spiral, which can be imagined even in the intertwined vines of the lei, is pervasive across Pacific cultures and represents different "political and spiritual principles" (Marsh 340). In terms of temporality, the spiral is a structure that defies linear verticality by imagining the movement of history as continuous repetition with difference.

Roots and Routes in *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa*

Teaiwa, whose writing is featured in the *Pacific Studies* special issue, prefigures "Women Writing Oceania" with her poetry collection *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* (1995). Teaiwa's first (and only print) poetry collection centers on the poet's search for her adopted ancestor Nei Nim'anoa, "one of few female figures in the male-dominated field of Pacific Island navigational traditions" (ix).[63] The collection is structured around a paradox of "rootedness and routedness," a

[63] Teaiwa's second collection *I Can See Fiji,* which blends poetry and music, was released only in audio format as a CD.

contradiction that Nei Nim'anoa embodies as a voyager who was also born from "the first tree" whose "roots went down under the ocean" (xi). Given her status as a woman of mixed ethnic and cultural identity, African American on her mother's side and Banaban and Gilbertese on her father's side, Teaiwa describes her identity as a kind of "limbo"; however, through the work of Gilroy, she has come to understand that "to search for roots is to discover routes" (ix). Teaiwa's pairing of Gilroy and Nei Nim'anoa works to expand notions of the black Atlantic, tracing the black diaspora into the Pacific but also considering the role of gender in shaping diasporic narratives (ix). Teaiwa sees herself as an heir to "two oceanic histories," with ancestry in both the Atlantic and the Pacific, and seeks to "disrupt/transform dominant representations of blackness or dominant understandings of race and racism" by considering this dual inheritance ("Black and Blue" 146, 145).

Though structured as a quest and relying on tropes of maritime voyaging, Teaiwa's collection upsets traditional notions of the epic through its depiction of a personal and "private" trajectory. Rather than valorizing and containing the national past, Teaiwa's journey chronicles her "search for emotional and intellectual roots," blending personal memory with public history (ix). Departing from the high poetic style of classical epics, *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* primarily features visual or concrete poems and reads like a personal note- or sketchbook, with some shorter poems that make humorous observations or engage in word play (for example, the three-line poem "Marxist Scents" offer this tongue-in-cheek taxonomy: "Perfume is ruling class. / Deodorant is middle class. / Sweat is working class.") (48). Adding to the collection's notebook feel, date and location markers accompany every poem. The poems, composed during various stays in Fiji, Hawai'i, England, Paris, Washington DC, and California, span from the 1980s to the mid '90s. As the poet was born in Hawai'i, raised in Fiji, and completed her PhD in History

of Consciousness in California, her search for the navigator of Gilbertese myth takes place across these geographies, moving between mundane conversations with her grandparents, scenes from academic life, and fantastical encounters with her ancestors (82). In this way, the collection reads like a traveler's log, where the everyday difficulties of negotiating a mixed-race identity in the Pacific occupy the same space as ancient myth and navigational history.

Through its emphasis on personal experience, Teaiwa's journey might be read as anti-epic; yet while epics, in Bakhtin's view, narrate the national tradition, Teaiwa's search for roots narrates the silences in this tradition, offering a feminine counter-voyage. In one poem, the speaker considers the myth of "Mother earth/Father sky," in which women's traditional role is to remain on land while men take to the skies (12, backslash in original). She laments: "Men have wings / while / Women only have feet" (12). Though the speaker envies male mobility, as she moves through the collection, she demonstrates the power to move between temporalities and questions the very notion of linear progress. Near the poem's conclusion, the speaker declares, "You know that Progress is a foreign concept," and though some say that women must remain on the land while men belong to the sea and sky, she asserts, "*You know the Law of Gravity is an imported concept"* (15). These lines imply that even if women are associated with land and men with the sky, gendered notions of travel and stasis have been attached to these mythologies through colonization. In the title poem, "Searching For Nei Nim'anoa," which appears late in the collection, the speaker determines to follow in the footsteps of her precursor who travelled before her: "If I don't find her // Tao [perhaps] // She'll find me" (67). Teaiwa's imagining of Nei Nim'anoa is notable here in that she does not depict a long-dead foremother who has already charted her course but instead an active ancestor who is also in search of her descendent. In this

way, Teaiwa's voyage is not a linear progression in which she moves through the tabula rasa of time and space, but instead, the past is interwoven and alive in the present.

Illustrations drawn by the author's sister, Katerina Teaiwa, accompany each section and reinforce the book's themes of continuity and connectivity. For example, the first section "Within the Blood" begins with a drawing of a woman–coconut tree hybrid. With palm frond hair and arms, one leg forming the trunk and the other a human leg with a knee resembling the joints of the palm tree, the drawing presents the human body as co-extensive with non-human life. A series of sea turtles scale her leg and torso, and depending on the viewer's interpretation, the turtles might be tattoos, three living turtles, or perhaps a representation of one turtle's progression across time. Additionally, a fallen coconut at the tree–woman's feet contains what appears to be a human fetus, representing the tree as literally birthing human life. This entanglement between human and environment reflects Indigenous views of the spiritual world as "synonymous with the physiography of the land" (Moreton-Robinson 15). As Moreton-Robinson explains, speaking from an Australian context but also more broadly to Indigenous relationships to place, "Indigenous women perceive themselves as being an extension of the earth, which is alive and unpredictable. Hence their understanding of themselves, their place and country, also reflect this view. In their life histories, Indigenous women perceive their experiences and others' experiences as extensions of themselves" (14). In Teaiwa's drawing, the boundaries of the self are diffuse: the human body and human reproduction are interconnected with the natural world, and the image also creates a sense of simultaneity, with the past, present, and future occupying the same moment. With outstretched arms, the tree–woman faces away from her future offspring, who she cannot see on the ground behind her; rather than watching the future supplant the present, the woman seems to continue to gaze into the past as new life

develops. This reflects the Polynesian adage, "We face the future with our backs" (Marsh 340). As Selina Marsh explains, the pervasive Pacific symbol of the spiral and the spiral structure of temporality "confronts and defies the Western linear hierarchical way of thinking, urging the mind's eye toward a center that allows for the possibility of multiple centers" (340). Through this plural sense of self and spiral temporality, ancestry is not contained in a distant past but simultaneous and living with the present.

Similar to the way the book refuses to partition time, space is also not contained in compartmentalized geographies. Instead, different histories of colonization are presented as entangled and overlapping. In an early poem in the collection, "Travellers," Teaiwa aligns two different diasporic trajectories, one in the Pacific and one in the Atlantic:

> Banabans
> deprived
> of their land
> and
> spirited
> across the sea
> to
> a foreign country
>
> Africans
> deprived
> of their blood
> and
> spirited
> across the sea
> to
> a foreign country (4)

In contrast to its title, which suggests individual agency and mobility, the poem describes two historical instances of forced migration. The first stanza refers to the resettlement of Banaban islanders to Rabi, Fiji, in 1945 and 1947. The population removal allowed the British Phosphate Commissioners to mine the island, and according to Teaiwa, transfer its phosphate to

Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia to be used as soil fertilizer ("Glossary" 80). The second stanza, of course, refers to an event spanning nearly four centuries—the capture and enslavement of Africans, spirited across the Middle Passage, to the Americas. The mirroring of the two moments in almost identical stanza formations elides significant historical differences: while twentieth-century Banabans were compensated for their relocation (which turned out to be an uneven bargain, as expressed in the book's following poem), the millions of Africans shipped across the Atlantic were enslaved in a foreign land if and when they made it through the journey. Yet, the pairing of the two moments forces a connection between past and present and places them on a historical continuum. Given that Teaiwa's father was one of the i-Kiribati "displaced to Fiji from the mine-devastated [Banaba]" and her mother is African American, the poet literally embodies these two histories—as the poem's section title suggests, these Atlantic and Pacific histories converge "In the Blood" (Clifford).

In the following stanzas, the poem moves forward from the moment of removal to present-day food imperialism. While African Americans are sustained by "synthetic protein," the poem contends, Banabans live and die on "canned protein, white starch and / phosphate money" (4). The jump from the Middle Passage to late capitalist economic disparity, focusing on racial inequities around access to food, is a temporal leap as well as a geographic one; the poem draws a line between American and Pacific minority communities, as both are oversaturated with industrial foods. In her introduction to a forum for women with mixed African and Pacific identities, Teaiwa expresses concern that "apart from a few acclaimed writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and a handful of other scholars, the Pacific has been ignored by African and Afro-diasporic artists and scholars" ("Black and Blue" 145). Teaiwa's poetic project makes connections between black diasporic and Pacific worlds more apparent, which disrupts

"dominant representations of blackness" (145). The poem not only highlights repeating patterns of displacement and subsequent economic inequities but also braids Indigenous and diasporic trajectories (145). Though Pacific issues are not even on the map in black diasporic discourses, as Teaiwa points out, both are produced through overlapping and enduring colonial structures, which are predicated on the removal of Indigenous peoples.

In the following poem, Teaiwa continues to weave these colonial histories and geographies, this time superimposing colonizers rather than colonized peoples. In "Mine Land: An Anthem (To the tune of 'This Land is my Land')," Teaiwa continues to discuss the mining of Banaba while raising questions of native complicity:

> This land is mine land,
> It used to be our land,
> But then we leased it to greedy miners,
> Who only saw it as something called phosphate,
> And used it for their prosperity. (5)

While the "greedy miners" in the poem refers to the British Phosphate Commissioners, the poem spoofs the alternate American national anthem penned by Woody Guthrie, implicitly overlapping British and American neocolonial histories. In response to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," Guthrie's 1944 lyrics have been revered as a secular patriotic hymn (Clayton). Though Guthrie's original lyrics protest wealth inequality and notions of "private property," Lakota Sioux chief Henry Crow Dog has pointed out the song's colonial impulse: the land was not "made for you and me" but "stole by you from me" (Clayton).[64] Teaiwa's choice to use a beloved American anthem to tell the story of Indigenous Banaban removal by British forces suggests that the poet is

[64] The phrase "stole by you from me" is Pete Seegar's addition to Guthrie's song, inspired by Henry Crow Dog's illumination of how the song erases the history of native dispossession (Clayton).

unconcerned with distinguishing between American and British forms of imperialism. Instead, the colonial impulse is traced back to the same possessive assertion of "my land."

In contrast to Guthrie's recurring lyric, "This land is your land, this land is my land," Teaiwa positions notions of "mine" and "our" as antithetical. Instead, the shift from "our land" to "mine land" constitutes a loss in both senses of "mine"—the excavation of resources has left the land empty and the move from communal to individual ownership has resulted in the loss of the nation. Though Guthrie's song champions a more socialist view of communal property ownership, this sense of property relies on an inherent disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. Through the erasure of Indigenous history, US citizens occupy the place of natives who can rightfully claim ownership of the vast, unwritten frontier. In Teaiwa's version, located in the Pacific's imagined "frontier," the speaker's assertion that "This land is mine land" is immediately undermined each verse with "It used to be our land"—this pronominal shift skews the us/them binary by, instead, setting "mine" against "our." Though the speaker claims ownership, the islander is exiled from Banaba and resides in "the Fiji Islands" while "Ocean Island fertilizes their land" (5). The poem touches on the complexity of Indigenous subjectivity: removed from their native land, Banabans become settlers in Fiji, and meanwhile, their native soil is transported to sustain settler colonial projects in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Though the Banabans were consenting, the severing of people from place is a violation that disallows the very possibility of peoplehood. As Rifkin explains, the "logic of removal" requires a disembodied view of land: "There is not an intrinsic relation to place; to put another way, the Cherokee Nation can be conceptualized as separable from any particular place. Within U.S. policy, the collective Indigenous subject that consents to the expropriation of land [. . .] is not constituted through an embeddedness in a lived geography that provides the condition of

possibility for peoplehood" ("The Erotics of Sovereignty" 176). In Teaiwa's poem, though natives were "left [with] a bit of their money," the ultimate result of the commodification of land is the death of the nation and "all kinds of poverty" (5).

Teaiwa writes back to American mythology by appropriating Guthrie's anthem and briefly references British literary tradition in "Thoughts composed at Tintern Abbey," following William Wordsworth's ghost through abbey ruins, but she also makes formal innovations that represent a new tradition (42). Through visual and concrete techniques, Teaiwa's poems emphasize the movement and direction of language. In "Slow Dance," for example, the words wind down the page imitating two dancers:

swaying
moving
step (32)

Analyses of modernist aesthetics of concrete poetry provide partial insight into Teaiwa's visual poems. In *Modern Visual Poetry,* William Bohn works to define visual poetry through its combination of visual and linguistic constructions. He writes that visual poetry interrupts traditional reading experiences by stressing the materiality of the text: "In the rush to grasp a poem's meaning [. . .], no attention is paid to the composition itself, which is treated as if it were transparent. Above all, therefore, visual poetry strives to motivate (or remotivate) the signifier, to restore its fundamental identity as a material object" (16). While Bohn focuses on the rebirth of visual experimentation within the modernist movement, this notion of a non-linear or indeterminate reading process takes on another dimension in Teaiwa's project. Concrete poetry (in opposition to what might be thought of as abstract or conceptual in traditional written poetry) asserts its presence through spatial syntax: "liberated from the tyranny of the sentence," the concrete poem invites multiple interpretations, writes Bohn (235). "Since words are free to

establish multiple relations," the reader must determine the order and direction of reading (235).

Even more powerfully, Teaiwa herself theorizes visual traditions within Pacific cultures as a form of writing or composition. Questioning the notion that people of the Pacific were once "without writing," before the introduction of print technologies, Teaiwa considers recurring symbolic structures that pre-date and extend beyond the page. She refers to Tongan sculptor Filipe Tohi's theory of "*lalava*—or *lalava-ology,*" referring to the practice of coconut bindings or lashings found in architecture and canoes through Pacific cultures ("What Remains" 734). Examining these bindings reveals varying patterns and "a system of symbols that can be broken down into the equivalent of linguistic morphemes," meaning that semiotic systems and narratives are woven into Indigenous structures (735). Teaiwa extends this notion of writing to the complex symbolic systems encoded in Polynesian tatauing practices, such as those discussed in Albert Wendt's "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body." In this way, the blending of poetry with visual imagery has deep roots in Pacific culture and is embedded in the very fabric of daily life, in the tataus that function as clothing or the structures that provide shelter or transport (Wendt 400). More than critiquing the sign, then, Teaiwa's visual poems represent an embodiment of traditional Pacific worldviews.

Teaiwa's poem "Foremothers" represents the strongest example of this multi-directional and highly visual poetry as each stanza configures into a new shape in the poet's imagining of a meeting among three of her female ancestors from three different continents. In Teaiwa's Indigenous poetic project, the spatial composition asserts physical presence, calling attention not only to the materiality of language, but also to feminine embodiment. In tracing her female lineage, the speaker's words morph into different forms:

Nei Kieuea,
Bertha and Zenobia

sat
at the
three corners

of the circle (8)

The three women, from the Pacific, the Americas, and Africa, who represent three strands of the poet's genealogy, join together in a circle that is shaped like a triangle on the page. Both the content, which turns a triangle into a circle, and the spatial composition interrupt the eye's linear right-to-left progression. As the women sit together, they sing and initiate a stick game, and as they exchange sticks, the circle continues to morph:

The circle
took the shape of
a stingray
then
a lion
then an eagle

to the clouds over America
through the golden plains of Africa
From the floor of the Pacific Ocean

inni
p n
s g
e c
lcri
(8, 9)

As the women exchange sticks with increasing speed, their circle takes the shape of various animals, moving from sea to land to sky, echoing Teaiwa's earlier questioning of the "Mother

earth/Father sky" binary. The following stanza moves in an ascending stair-step pattern, which read from bottom to top shows the genealogical movement from the Pacific to the Americas, and then whirls into a "spinning circle," in which the letters reverse order. The women then step into the fire, and when she awakes, the speaker anoints herself with their ashes (10).

While the modernist experiments discussed by Bohn work to critique the sign, Teaiwa's use of textual innovation goes further to generate an experience of simultaneity. Rather than using traditional lineation to represent her blood lines, the poet writes her foremothers into the same temporal and spatial moment. Instead of drawing a triangle that connects three continents, the poem's mapping continues to evolve, reverse, and change directions through the three women's mutual exchange. They move between the elements, between physical and spiritual worlds, and merge with non-human life. In "Foremothers," the line as a unit cannot contain this experience of simultaneity, which connects all things, the living and the dead.

In the final poem, "Nei Nana," written in fragment-style prose recounting memories of the poet's grandmother, the closing lines first present English phrases followed by their translation in Gilbertese. The speaker asserts: "The man stayed on the land. Te mmane ae bon tiku iaon te aba. / And the woman voyaged. Ao te aine ae bon mamananga." (77). In these closing lines, honoring a grandmother at the end of a journey in search of matriarchal lineage, Teaiwa ends with Gilbertese rather than English. Reversing the common assumption that voyaging is a "male domain," as Sinavaina and Kauanui point out, Teaiwa leaves the man on land while the woman journeys out. The book ends, then, with the beginning of a voyage.

Conclusion

At the opening of this chapter, weaving is coded as an inconsequential domestic activity. For Griffen, the new journeys depicted in the literature of Oceania look like the old ones from the western literary canon in that both are riddled with "Penelopes." The woman trapped at her loom and unpicking her work stands in for the stagnation, stasis, and unimportance associated with female characters within dominant epic narratives. In romantic diasporic narratives, as well, Penelope might symbolize the world that the migrant is eager to leave behind. She represents the past and the "private" realm; and in this view, the future is written only through movement into the "unknown." Within these narratives both the sea and the travelling vessel enabling (male) travel are gendered as feminine, flattening both women and the environment to the backdrop of history. In Nichols and Teaiwa's feminine epics, however, weaving emerges to disrupt teleological progress narratives. Rather than menial labor, the activity of weaving operates through the paradox of "rootedness and rootedness," which preserves lineages of tradition and local specificity while expanding to incorporate new influences and experiences. In addition, the conflation of women's bodies with nature is not done away with but instead reimagined to move beyond Enlightenment conceptions of the human. These feminine epics emphasize interrelationship and reciprocity with place, presenting their island geographies as alive with history.

Against the image of the individual male hero conquering new terrain, weaving generates a sense of community and shared labor, much like the interlaced strands of the mat for which *The Popol Vuh* is named. In Teaiwa and Nichols's epics, the aesthetic of weaving embodies values of interrelationship and accountability to place, and the material from which they weave is the cloth of time and space. The spiral structures encoded thematically and visually in Teaiwa's poetry generate a sense of simultaneity, where the past is alive in the present. Whereas Teaiwa's

weaving patterns can be likened to braiding and winding together, like the strands of the haku lei garland, Nichols's Cariwoma weaves a continuous fabric, seamlessly connecting the entirety of the Americas. Through this continuity, Amerindian and black diasporic experiences occupy the same temporality. As the flying fish leaps and threads her body through water and air, the Cariwoma's constant weaving creates a kind of time machine. While Amerindian life has long been assumed to be dead in the Caribbean, Nichols's remapping of space and time creates a "perverse proximity" between the past and the present, revealing what has survived all along (Rifkin 138). Through the interweaving of history, the "*not anymore"* of Amerindian life transforms into the space of the "*not yet"* (Tuck et. al. 25).

Chapter Four: Paradise and Apocalypse: Critiques of Military and Nuclear Imperialism

> "It is such supreme folly to believe that nuclear weapons are deadly only if they're used. The fact that they exist at all, their presence in our lives, will wreck more havoc than we can begin to fathom [. . .] They are the ultimate colonizer. [. . .] The very heart of whiteness."—Arundhati Roy, "The End of the Imagination" (qtd. in Williams, epigraph)

On the morning of January 13, 2018, people throughout Hawai'i scrambled to take shelter after an emergency alert announced that a ballistic missile was headed for the islands. Given its proximity to North Korea in comparison to the continental US, Hawai'i was the first state to prepare for nuclear attack when Pyongyang bolstered its arsenal in 2017 (Persio). For nearly forty minutes, panicked and confused civilians awaited destruction before government officials announced that the alert was false—a test of the alert system gone wrong (Wong). Though the immediate relief would soon turn to anger, as reported by *Atlantic* correspondent Alia Wong, the false alarm represented the residual threat faced by native peoples displaced by the United States's militarization of the Pacific. Poet and literature professor Craig Santos Perez, who lives in Hawai'i but grew up in Guam, commented: "It feels deeply unjust, especially for the native people whether it's in Guam or here in Hawaii who have to witness every day their sacred lands being used as military bases and being polluted and desecrated as well [. . .] our islands are not only basis [sic] of war but they're also targets of other foreign militaries—so in a sense we're both a weapon and a target" (qtd. in Wong). In a moment of crisis, Santos Perez's reflections on the dual status of US-occupied Pacific Islands as both weapon and target echo his previous commentary about the strategic invisibility of the Pacific Islands in the American consciousness. When increased threats from North Korea suddenly put Guam on the map in international news circuits, Santos Perez observed: "The only time the world sees us is when the crosshairs of a missile is upon us." This is despite the fact that Guam has the "highest ratio of US military

spending and military hardware and land takings from Indigenous populations of any place on earth" (Catherine Lutz, qtd. in Santos Perez).

"Paradise and Apocalypse: Critiques of Nuclear Modernity" considers both the material and the psychic impact of the militarization of tropical islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific, focusing primarily on Jamaican poet Olive Senior's *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) and Marshallese poet–activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's first print collection, *Iep Jāltok* (2017). Interrogating the spatial mythologies that have made islands the preferred geography for the US to test weapons and launch foreign wars, the chapter considers a spectrum of environmental violence, from chemical poisoning to atomic annihilation. In the above epigraph, Arundhati Roy contends that nuclear weapons have the power to destroy even if their threat remains conceptual. The false alarm in Hawai'i attests to the psychological terror wrought by the very existence of the bomb. Similarly, this chapter seeks to shift attention from the explosive spectacle of the bomb to other, "slower" forms of violence that attend the rise of nuclear weapons technologies.

Jetñil-Kijiner, a spoken word artist who gained international visibility during her performance at the 2014 Opening Ceremony of the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit, connects the global crisis of climate change to colonial legacies of nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands and wider Pacific region. Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the sacred Hawaiian grounds of Kaho'olawe were seized for weapons testing, and though activists were eventually able to reclaim the site in the '90s, the Hawaiian archipelago continues to function as a key US military site for training, testing, and launching foreign wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (El Dessouky 260). After the world's first atomic testing in the New Mexico desert and subsequent bomb droppings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the US selected the Bikini and Enewetak atolls in the Marshall Islands as ideal "proving grounds" for its weapons testing

program and tested over 65 nuclear weapons over the course of the Cold War. Though US weapons testing ended in 1980, Bikini Atoll remains uninhabitable and the lasting impacts of displacement and irradiation of land, water, and peoples is yet to be reckoned with by the US government ("Bikini Atoll Nuclear Test"). Meanwhile, though no analog to nuclearization exists in the region, islands of the Caribbean were also seized for weapons testing and military training. The environmental degradation and health risks caused by forty years of (non-nuclear) bombing in Vieques, off the coast of Puerto Rico, is outright denied by the US (Pelet). In her poetry, Senior describes myriad forms of environmental violence and militarization across the Caribbean region, and Puerto Rican poet Loretta Collins Klobah, who is briefly discussed below, addresses the militarization of Vieques specifically.

"Slow violence," as coined by eco-critic Rob Nixon, emerges as a key concept when examining the militarization of island regions as an ongoing structure rather than an event. Nixon describes slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Slow violence includes radiation poisoning and radioactive fallout, deforestation, climate change, and other environmental catastrophes that unevenly impact the environments of the "poor" and are often discounted by western nuclear powers. Considering Nixon's term in conversation with Roy's statement, chronic terror and inter-generational trauma can also be understood as forms of slow violence.

Focusing specifically on American frontier mythology and expansionism, I argue that reading Pacific and Caribbean literary works in conversation brings to the surface ways that local island struggles can be seen as part of global processes, intersecting with wider racial and gender dynamics in the production and testing of atomic weapons. I build on Paul Williams's *Race,*

Ethnicity, and Nuclear War (2011), which examines the role of racial hierarchies in Cold War politics, connecting the history of slavery in the Atlantic to nuclear testing in the Pacific. Because both the creation of nuclear armaments and "New World slavery" have been justified through scientific and Enlightenment discourses, Williams places nuclear weapons technology on a continuum with "'the racial oppression on which modernity and [. . .] western progress as excessive barbarity relied'" (Gilroy qtd. in Williams 148). Those who consider nuclearism as a technology of white supremacy have seen the bombing of Hiroshima (however problematically) as emblematic of American imperialism, and consequently, a number of recent studies identify affinities between Asia-Pacific and African diasporic experiences.[65] However, these studies tend to overlook the Indigenous populations of the Pacific islands, despite their sustained and enduring experiences of nuclearization.[66] Turning from the event of Hiroshima to structural forms of slow violence and militarization that specifically impact tropical island geographies works to address the lacuna between African diasporic and Indigenous experiences.

This chapter has two overarching aims. The first is to center Pacific Island literatures in a growing body of scholarship on US imperialism that identifies cross-ethnic intersections and

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[65] Notable works on Afro-Asian alliances and intersections include Schleitwiler (2017); Taketani (2004); Raphael-Hernandez and Steen (2006): Mullen (2004); among others.

[66] As Pacific scholar Michelle Keown observes, while increasing attention is being paid to US imperialism in terms of "territorial expansion within the continental Americas, the Caribbean and the Pacific Rim," the Pacific Islands represents a "relative lacuna" within these studies (932). Notable exceptions include the essay collection, *Archipelagic American Studies* (2017), edited by Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, which looks at chains of US colonialism beyond the continent, in the Caribbean and the Pacific, as well as *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (2010), edited by Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, which links "Japan and U.S. colonialism through militarization (Guam, Okinawa, the Marshall Islands, the Philippines, and Korea)" (xv). Particularly relevant for my study is *Militarized Currents'*s intervention in claiming militarization in and of itself "as an *extension of colonialism* and its gendered and racialized processes" (xv).

solidarities but fails to acknowledge the specific social and political status of Indigenous positionalities. Without an analysis of genocide or the ways in which Indigenous removal is foundational to colonial expansion, the experiences of Bikinians and other small populations of the Pacific might appear confined to their remote island homes. Their displacement is rendered unfortunate yet inevitable in the face of "modernizing" forces; however, figuring Indigenous removal into the continuum of western progress's "excessive barbarity," in the words of Paul Gilroy, shows how military occupation in the Pacific Islands has global and planetary implications.

Borrowing Santos Perez's phrase, my second aim is to consider the gendered dynamics which contribute to the "strategic invisibility" of militarization in the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands in the American consciousness. Senior and Collins Klobah explore how touristic views of the islands enable various forms of environmental violence, and Jetn̄il-Kijiner exposes the racist and gendered logic that turns the Pacific into a basin for nuclear waste. As discussed in more depth below, touristic gazes of tropical landscapes and small islands feminize these spaces as passive and ahistorical, which preconditions and justifies colonial exploitation. While a single island might appear small and isolated on the international stage, I argue that these Pacific and Caribbean poetries critique military imperialism by demonstrating how colonial structures operate in tandem, creating a visible archipelago of colonial expansion.

The Missing Pacific in "Black Pacific" Narratives

Drawing on a range of post–WWII literatures, Williams points out black writers' solidarities with Japan following the bombing of Hiroshima. For black writers of the Atlantic, from both the Caribbean and the United States, the racial chauvinism expressed through atom-

bomb-dropping in the Pacific echoed domestic racism and segregation at home. American writer Langston Hughes, through the fictional character of Simple, "was one of the first to voice the widely shared attitude of blacks and some whites that it was no coincidence that the Bomb was first used against yellow-skinned Japanese, not white Germans" (152). Williams also refers to Caribbean poet and critic Kamau Brathwaite's "Mont Blanc," which critiques the American inventions of atomic bombs and napalm as pinnacles of white power, as well as the nuclear protest writings of American Alice Walker and Jamaican-American June Jordan, among others (165, 171). However, a single poem by Jamaican poet Olive Senior, "rain," provides the controlling metaphor for Williams's argument that nuclear weapons are a technology of whiteness. In the poem, which describes the Vietnam War, the words are arranged as diagonal daggers of rain. Playing children scatter when they feel the "cutting / edge" of the raindrops (Senior 63). The poem shifts from the Vietnam War to the US's 1945 dropping of the atomic bomb on Japan. Instead of the black rain reported in "popular memory," according to Williams, Senior creates an image of toxic "white rain":

hiro
shima's children
also played
until white
r c
a a
i m
n e (Senior 64)

Senior racializes the atom bomb as "white rain," a symbol for both nuclear destruction and white supremacy. While Williams acknowledges ways in which this trans-national solidarity between racial minorities and Japan might be problematic, as this "empathy would not likely be extended—by the national resistance movements in Asia fighting Japanese imperialism in the

1940s, for instance," Senior's poem expresses the global threat shared by diverse groups in the face of "white rain" (149).

Though nuclear war risks the annihilation of the human race, it is justified through discourses of liberty and national progress. Williams explains that nuclear weapons function as "white" technology in two broad ways:

> First, because the weapons themselves symbolize the achievements, atrocities and attitudes of European and American modernity, and second, because the post-nuclear-war future that such weapons could make possible is deemed to reproduce a (European) colonial or (American) frontier dynamic in which white Europeans and their descendants defend and enlarge their societies at the expense of non-white peoples. (15–16)

Against this white Euro-American notion of progress as described by Williams, a growing body of scholarship traces black and Asian solidarities, forging a global community along what W. E. B. Du Bois has termed the "world-belting color line" (Schleitwiler 2). The "black Pacific" has emerged as a new paradigm of black internationalism, an extension of and complement to Paul Gilroy's black Atlantic.[67] Yet, Etsuko Taketani, whose work investigates these very Afro-Asian networks, points out that recent scholarship that deploys the term "black Pacific" tends to miss the Pacific altogether. Taketani's *The Black Pacific Narrative* (2014) explores African Americans' "imagined community" with the Pacific between the World Wars, including

[67]As footnoted in this dissertation's introduction, a number of recent scholarly works employ the term "Black Pacific" but to a somewhat different effect than I intend. Etsuko Taketani's 2016 *The Black Pacific Narrative* describes Japanese-black-alliances during the 1930s, and Vince Schleitwiler's 2017 *Strange Fruit of the Black Pacific* examines Japan and the US as competing imperial powers before and after the World Wars, tracing African American, Filipino, and Japanese migrations across these territories. Heidi Carolyn Feldman's earlier 2006 book focuses on Cuban and Brazilian music in the Afro-Peruvian Revival and uses "Black Pacific" to refer to South America's Pacific coast. Robbie Shilliam (2015) also uses the term "black Pacific" in his examination of how African diaspora narratives have influenced politics in the South Pacific, and unlike the others, employs "Pacific" primarily to refer to the Pacific Islands.

contradictions and complicities in African American support of Japanese imperialism (26). She observes, "With the focus on the Pacific Rim and Asian nations, this scholarly discourse, albeit unwittingly, erases from maps many small islands and atolls within the Pacific that the US forces occupied to secure air control" ("Archipelagic Black" 115). Transpacific scholars have observed how usages of "Pacific," "Pacific Rim," and "Asia-Pacific" work to discursively obscure the Pacific Islands. "Asia" comes to stand in for the wider Pacific in multiple ways. As literary scholar Christopher Connery explains, the term "Pacific Rim," which emerges from Cold War economic contexts in the late 1970s and '80s**,** "is an economically determined discourse that functions as the mythology of multinational capitalism within a national sphere" and is psychically centered in the United States–Japan relationship (36, 32). Commenting on postcolonial scholarship, Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho make a similar point in their introduction to *Militarized Currents*: "The Asia-Pacific label is known more for its designation of countries on the Pacific Rim than for countries in the Pacific itself. In this geographical configuration, attention is paid to Pacific Rim countries like Chile, Hong Kong, and Singapore, whereas an examination of countries in the Pacific like Nauru, Fiji, and Samoa is often lacking" (xxxi). Where the Pacific "Rim" is foregrounded through economic currents and exchange, the Pacific Ocean and its islands recede into a basin of negative space.

By centering Pacific Island literatures that critique US military and nuclear imperialism, I seek to supplement the burgeoning field of the "black Pacific" by interrogating colonial erasures of the Pacific Islands. Unlike the important studies that trace historical confluences between black and Asian communities, I instead question ideas of the Pacific that inform what Vince Schleitwiler calls the "Afro-Asian imaginary." My aim is not to discount or displace these innovative works that reconfigure dominant, black-and-white understandings of race, nor is it to

assert that the Pacific Islands ought to be the nexus of these archipelagic chains of anticolonial solidarity; instead, I question the mechanisms that continue to erase or suppress the Pacific Islands despite (because of) their strategic military importance to the US empire. In mapping the populations clumped together by the "world-belting color line," I ask what an engagement with the specificity of Indigenous subjectivities and an examination of repeating patterns of slow violence across Atlantic and Pacific worlds bring to these discussions of American racial chauvinism. In an almost uncanny move, US military and economic discourses also refer to the Caribbean "basin" when imposing new policies, as described by Senior's poem "Caribbean Basin Initiative." While these basin and rim discourses are far more prevalent in Asia-Pacific contexts, the relegating of island worlds to a "basin" trivializes Caribbean and Pacific nations in similar ways that ultimately justifies military occupation.

In the black imaginary as described by Williams, the US's atom-bomb-dropping on Hiroshima looms large as a symbol of white supremacy and American imperialism, yet the dozens of bombs dropped on the Marshall Islands as part of the US's weapons testing program, including the 1954 explosion of the *Bravo* device—which is thought to have been nearly one thousand times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb—have not made the same impressions in public memory (Keown 936). However, considering the US's pervasive military presence, weapons testing, and chemical dispersions through war technology in the Caribbean, more structural commonalities emerge between the experiences of Caribbean and Pacific Island "basins."

In interrogating the spatial mythology of "rim" and "basin," I look to three interrelated sets of optics: geographic scale; aerial perspectives; and the dichotomy of "spectacle and secrecy." The first refers to the privileging of continents over islands, where countries on

continents are assumed to be more important, more "worldly," than island nations (*Archipelagic American Studies,* 18). In previous chapters, I explored Epeli Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands," which contests belittling notions of islands by proposing a vision of inter-island connection through the power of the ocean. The dismissive views of "smallness" addressed by Hau'ofa have also translated into perceptions of island populations and their human value. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's 1969 comment in regard to the future of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands perhaps best exemplifies this sentiment: "There are only 90,000 of them out there. Who gives a damn?" (Teaiwa, "Bikinis," 101). Likewise, French general and president Charles de Gaulle dismisses the Caribbean islands in a similar sweeping statement (which serves as Glissant's frontispiece to *Caribbean Discourse*): "Between Europe and America I see only specks of dust." Geographic and population size contributed to the selection of Bikini Atoll as a nuclear test site and to Vieques as a military training ground, and in this perception of islands, smallness also connotes "boundedness."

My second lens deals with "air-age globalism," the rise of aerial technologies during the World Wars and subsequent re-mappings of the globe viewed from above (Taketani, *Archipelagic American Studies* 113). Taketani argues that the 1940s saw a spatial paradigm shift in which the Mercator projection lost its utility. The Eurocentric maritime map depicts the Japan and Hawai‘i at opposite ends of the Earth; however, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, post-Mercator aerial maps closed up the distance between the two archipelagoes and also "closed up the strategic value of Pacific islands and thus shaped the conduct of the war" (114). The United States used these maps "for the military tactics of island hopping or leapfrogging, building airstrips and integrating the network of military operations with aircraft" (114). While the spatial reordering created through aerial perspectives blurs hemispheric boundaries—calling

into question illusory divisions between East and West—Elizabeth DeLoughrey also observes that the aerial view creates a panoptical perspective. In "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific," DeLoughrey refers to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) films used to "introduce US viewers to the newly acquired island territories in the Pacific Islands" (168). The views of the islands from military planes re-inscribed ideas of islands as remote and bounded, closed systems isolated from the rest of the world. This myth of "biological and geographical" self-containment helped the AEC to justify "human radiation experiments on Marshall Islanders for 40 [years]" and also mystified the tests' contamination of the globe (168). DeLoughrey concludes that, because the irradiation of the Pacific Islands was circulated through ocean currents, "we all carry a small piece of that island world in our bones" (179).[68] In my discussion of *Iep Jāltok,* I consider how Jetñil-Kijiner counters these aerial, God-like views of removal and detachment by presenting the view from the ground or sometimes the water line, exposing the bodily impacts of radiation poisoning and climate change in the Marshall Islands. Similarly, Senior contrasts aerial perspectives with the messy, entangled view of corruption and environmental destruction from the ground (89). At the same time, I also consider how some of these atrocities are common knowledge and yet fail to arouse outrage or action.

My third lens, the dichotomy of "spectacle" and "secrecy," is a concept adapted from Schleitwiler to consider how spectacle allows us to both see and not see human rights violations in the US-controlled Pacific. In *Strange Fruit of the Black Pacific: Imperialism's Racial Justice*

[68] DeLoughrey explains: "Due to these thermonuclear weapons, the entire planet is permeated with militarized radiation [. . .] Radioactive elements produced by these weapons were spread through the atmosphere, deposited into water supplies and soils, absorbed by plants and thus into the bone tissue of humans all over the globe [. . .] At very conservative estimates, these nuclear weapons tests have produced 400,000 cancer deaths worldwide" (179).

and Its Fugitives (2017), Schleitwiler examines interrelated migrations of African Americans, Japanese, and Filipinos across the US empire. He opens by considering the filmic/pop-culture figure of King Kong as "perhaps [the] most famous black figure from [the] Asia/Pacific region" (22). He writes that "to state that *King Kong* is a celebratory reenactment of lynching is merely to express an open secret, one consistent with lynching's own logic . . . the simultaneity of spectacle and secrecy is crucial to understanding this violence" (22). Like the film and its multiple remakes, lynching asks its audience to "see and not see," "the same training of perception that made the perpetrators of spectacle lynching disappear before the sight of the law" (22). I transport this notion to Micronesia, where the spectacle of the atom bomb's mushroom cloud, well-documented by the AEC, both depicts extreme violence and deflects public attention away from its human impact. Though the figure of the blooming mushroom cloud is no secret, the myriad public health and environmental impacts remain relatively unseen. The "simultaneity of spectacle and secrecy" is an important descriptor for US military activity in the Pacific in that it is not outright invisible to international publics but instead operates through a kind of slippage: an American viewer might even be overexposed to images of hyper-violence and fail to witness them.

Teresia Teaiwa articulates a similar concept through her term "militourism," which I discuss in more depth in my analysis of the poetry volumes below. The neologism, which combines militarism with tourism, describes how "military or paramilitary force ensures the smooth running of a tourist industry, and that same tourist industry masks the military force behind it" ("Reading Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa*," 251). Hawai'i, for example, is known for its beauty and is perceived primarily as a tourist destination, which belies the fact the archipelago houses one of the largest military arsenals in the world (Ireland). Through these three optics of

diminishment, detachment, and deflection, I examine how the US rationalized its nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands and continues to downplay the impacts of its military presence in the wider Pacific and the Caribbean.

Desert Islands and Blue Frontiers

Maps of global nuclear testing over the course of the Cold War tell a story. Between 1945 and 1980, more than five hundred bombs were detonated by the US, the UK, France, the USSR, and China (Simon et. al. 49). Data drawn from a National Cancer Institute map of atmospheric nuclear test sites show a pattern: the UK and France exported their testing to their respective colonial (and former colonial) territories, with the UK's tests concentrated in Australia and Christmas Island, and France focused in Algeria and the Pacific Mururoa Atoll. China conducted just over twenty tests in its Lop Nor desert. Meanwhile, the US and USSR, the two world leaders in nuclear testing, had sites in both island and continental spaces: the US's nearly two hundred tests were divided between the Nevada desert and various sites in the Pacific Islands, and the USSR bombed Kazakhstan and Novaya Zemlya, an island to the north of Europe (Simon et. al., from figure). Collectively, the Pacific Island region was marked by more sites and total detonations than any other part of the world. Nuclear powers chose what they deemed as barren terrains and "desert" islands, showing a continuity in perception between desert spaces on continental land masses and the islands of the Pacific.

In *Savage Dreams: A Journey in the Landscape Wars of the American West,* Rebecca Solnit bridges two populations devastated by nuclear testing across continents. She connects the Western Shoshone and downwinders (people living downwind from the test site) in Nevada with the nomads of the Kazakhstan Desert/Semi-Palatinsk (Nixon 153). Both desert populations

occupy a present absence in national memory; in order for nuclear powers to rationalize bombing, they had to imagine these spaces as empty, unpopulated, and ahistorical. This national amnesia and "imaginative evacuation" is intrinsic to frontier mythology, where the disappearance of native peoples (whether actual or discursive) is necessary for the nation to claim rightful ownership of "unoccupied" territory (Nixon 153).

For Connery, this consumption of frontier spaces is marked by a territorial ideology of abstraction, an ideology that is particularly pronounced in US contexts: "The United States, conceiving itself more than most nation-states in terms of lack, of externality (manifest destiny, the frontier, the new frontier, etc.) has been prone to the worst excesses of the violence of abstraction [. . .] The Cold War carried geopolitical abstraction to new limits, accompanied always by those weapons that could render the planet truly abstract" (36, 37). Visually, the deserts of Australia, Nevada, and Kazakhstan might share geographic similarities that fit in well with narratives of colonial settlement. As Williams observes, "barren and featureless" desert landscapes dominate colonial frontier narratives, pioneer tales of the American West, as well as "speculated post-apocalyptic futures" in the aftermath of nuclear war (17). Yet, the abstraction and evacuation of space takes on new dimensions and implications when considering the US's westward movement across the desert to the ocean.

In the Cold War era, the shift to the ocean, specifically the Pacific, fulfilled the ideal spatial metaphor of international capital, and the US's economic investment in the Pacific Rim allowed for a decentered vision of capitalist accumulation that would hide hegemonic power relations. Connery clarifies the connection between America's land and sea frontiers:

> Water is capital's myth element. The idea of an ocean-centered westward movement of history, beginning with the Mediterranean, passing on to the Atlantic, and culminating in the Pacific, was commonplace in the late nineteenth-

> century United States. And as an extension of *America,* the Pacific would be at its essence a *non*colonial space where a pure capital would be free to operate . . . As I have mentioned before, the Pacific Rim is a teleology, and its teleological character has been shaped in part by residual American frontiers. The original frontier—the rush to the coast—is a dimension of the fear of land. (40, 42)

Connery's observations about the liquid operations of capital and US nationalism are particularly alarming for their resonances with postmodern anti-hegemonic discourses. The shift to the ocean, evidenced by recent scholarship in the "Blue Humanities," allows for an escape from rigid, land-based national boundaries and invites more fluid, dynamic, and anti-essentialist identity formations.[69] The danger, however, in claiming the ocean as a liberatory or utopic space is that capital is also operates through diffusion and has the potential to wash over differences.

Referring to St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott's oft-quoted poem, "The Sea Is History," Caribbeanist Vanessa Agard-Jones questions whether water, "the romantic metaphor that has irredeemably made its place in Caribbean and African diasporic studies," can adequately describe the complicated structures that attend African diaspora in the Americas ("What the Sands Remember" 326). Because water washes clean and cannot be fixed, she wonders whether water-based critical frames can properly reckon with "the body's messy realities" (327). Instead, she proposes sand as an alternative metaphor in that each grain preserves its local imprint even as it is transported and altered. Against water's power to subsume and level difference, Agard-Jones sees sand as a more "materially informed" archive that is both "diffuse yet somehow omnipresent" in the islands (341).

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[69] See Gilroy (1992) as well as several more recent works, previously mentioned in a footnote in my introduction: Steve Mentz's *Shipwreck Modernities* (2015), Teresa Shewry's *Hope at Sea* (2015), and Natasha Tinsley's *Thiefing Sugar* (2010) and work on the "queer" black Atlantic (2008), among many others who turn from terrestrial to aqueous frameworks.

Though Agard-Jones seeks to decenter diaspora in Caribbean studies to allow for greater consideration of situated subjects, specifically queer peoples in Martinique, the ubiquity of sand extends into wider island geographies and even into the land-locked deserts that were turned into nuclear testing sites. While I do not pick up sand itself as an animating metaphor in this chapter, Agard-Jones's attention to granular, particular, and diffuse matter fosters a more observable connection between diverse island geographies than sea currents alone. Extending Agard-Jones's focus on messy materialities, I consider the sand-like omnipresence of the chemical dispersion that leaches into bodies and environments in both the Caribbean and Pacific islands. Vieques, a small island off the coast of Puerto Rico, for example, does not appear in the maps of Cold War nuclear testing mentioned above. Yet, it has been subjected to a similar "imaginative evacuation" as the islands and deserts that blossomed with mushroom clouds across Cold War history. Occupied by the US Navy from 1941 to 2003, Vieques was used for bombing, weapons testing, and training exercises, and the remaining heavy metals and toxic chemicals, such as Agent Orange, are thought to contribute to unusually high rates of cancer and other diseases on the island (Pelet).[70] In this sense, Vieques shares similarities with the Marshall Islands in terms of fallout from the US's military industrial complex. Despite the spectacular ultraviolence of the nuclear bomb, the residual aftereffects and increased cancer rates in the Marshall Islands are largely denied and obscured by the US government. Examining the forms of "chemical

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[70] Recent studies show that cancer rates in Vieques are 27 percent higher than in the rest of Puerto Rico. The small population of 9,000 has one of the highest rates of illness in the entire Caribbean: "People who live in Vieques are eight times more likely to die of cardiovascular disease and seven times more likely to die of diabetes than others in Puerto Rico, where the prevalence of those diseases rivals U.S. rate" (Pelet).

embodiment"—the trans-generational slow violence wrought by the chemical weaponization of water, land, and bodies—reveals continuities in American spatial mythologies impacting islands in both the Caribbean and the Pacific (Agard-Jones, "Spray"). In other words, the kinds of violence that do not appear on any map are what link these geographies even after military presence has been withdrawn.

In a separate essay titled "Spray," Agard-Jones connects agricultural practices in the Caribbean to the US military industrial complex. She refers to the history of crop dusting as emerging from war technology, as WWI fighter planes were converted to become the first "agricultural 'bombers'" for applying pesticides. She writes: "Not only were the tools of war critical elements in the expansion of pesticide application, but the war machine itself became one of the most important, and the most pernicious, users of crop dusters in the twentieth century." Aerial spraying allowed a much greater scale of dispersal of insecticides on banana plantations in Martinique from the 1970s to the '90s and later fungicides, but the military technology also led to the widespread diffusion of chemicals into the environment with lasting health consequences for locals. Whether caused by direct military operations or extending from weapons technology, the dispersion of chemicals in Martinique, Puerto Rico, and the wider region coincides with aerial views of island spaces as remote and bounded.

Considering the watery properties of late capitalism and US expansionism, neocolonialism in the Caribbean and the Pacific resists easy definition and quantification.[71] Like

[71]Also significant to understanding the fluid operations of post–Cold War colonialism is its ability to co-opt diversity and multicultural discourses. As Shigematsu and Camacho observe, not only capitalism but twenty-first-century militarism is defined by shape-shifting, fluid qualities: "Whereas the modern military was characteristically comprised of both conscripted and professional ranks directed toward winning wars, the postmodern military is said to be less tied to the nation-state, increasingly 'androgynous,' and more fluid and permeable with civilian

the micro particles that pervade the air, the physical evidence becomes difficult to gather together and yet remains ubiquitous in the island spaces that share these histories of environmental violence. The poets discussed in the following sections expose the environmental, cultural, and physical consequences of these more covert colonial operations. By depicting the long-term effects of "small" and "slow" military intrusions, they critique the optics and logics that both enable and mask various forms of environmental destruction and their lasting impacts on human bodies.

Militourism in the Caribbean Basin

In Senior's "rain," which first appeared in *Talking of Trees* (1985), the phrase "children play" repeats, conveying a sense of innocence interrupted before the final mantra, a triple repetition of "bullets hail down" (64). The reverberation of bullets down the page visually "rhymes" with the rain in the previous stanza, conflating the natural occurrence of cascading water with the onslaught of violence from above. The poem links the Vietnam War and the bombing of Hiroshima through aerial assaults by an unseen perpetrator. In her later collection *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), aerial perspectives recur across a number of poems, but in contrast to "rain," the trope continuously suggests subtlety and routine rather than outright horror. While "rain" commemorates the event of Hiroshima, *Gardening in the Tropics* examines residual and structural effects of colonialism in the Caribbean across generations.

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society" (xxvii–xxviii). In this way, neoliberal forms of racial and gender diversity create an image of an inclusive military, while the military's interpenetration into civilian life normalizes or obscures the reality of US occupation in the Pacific Islands and the fact of perpetual warfare.

Following the opening poem, "Gourd," the book is divided into four sections. The first section, "Travellers' Studies," features immigrant stories and a series of poems that moves chronologically through hurricanes in Jamaica from 1903 to 1988. The following sections, "Nature Studies" and "Gardening in the Tropics," employ botanical metaphors to consider a variety of colonial and neocolonial operations in the Caribbean, and the final section "Mystery (African Gods in the Caribbean)," navigates Yoruba mythologies in island landscapes. One of the best-known poems from the collection, "Plants," opens "Nature Studies" through the metaphor of plant reproduction. "Plants are deceptive," the speaker confides in her address to a listener referred to affectionately as "Innocent" (63). The speaker seems to pull the listener aside to gossip. The occasional use of end-rhyme and sing-song cadence give the quatrains a contained and almost stilted feel, which matches the poem's (supposedly preposterous) conceit about the dark inner life of plants. The humorous tone, however, works in tension with the inherent critique of the covert operations of colonial expansion. With ironic parenthetical asides, the speaker explains that though plants appear rooted and more innocent than roaming animals, you can observe their diabolical nature through their dissemination:

> Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!)
> and twine, from their exhibitionist
> and rather prolific nature, we must infer
> a sinister not to say imperialistic
>
> grand design [. . .] (63)

The speaker sexualizes plant propagation through her mock sense of propriety, expressing shame at the very mention of breeding. This theme continues in references to flowers as "made-up for romancing" and fruit as "nothing / more than ovary, the instrument to seduce" (63). Though their

methods are easily taken for granted or go unnoticed, these coquettish plants realize their "colonizing ambitions" through "parachuting seeds and other / airborne traffic dropping in." Through "airborne" diffusion, plants are able to spread their system without raising any alarms. Animals and insects are unknowingly complicit in the "vast cosmic program that once set / in motion cannot be undone" (64). Ultimately, all other life is turned to plant food, as plants overtake and outlast us.

Senior's plant-as-imperialist metaphor inverts the larger volume's preoccupation with forms of environmental violence and entanglements between colonized peoples and Caribbean lands and waters. Yet, her positioning of the environment as colonizer rather than colonized, of course, works ironically to comment on the naturalization of colonial expansion. From the colonizer's perspective, expansion is inevitable and necessary to the progress of European "modernity." Through her frequent use of botanical metaphors, Senior's ecopoetics share resonances with Martinican Suzanne Césaire's critique of the exoticization of the Caribbean landscape in her essays published as *Tropiques* (1941–1945), discussed in Chapter One. Césaire rejected the aesthetic of *littérature doudou*, characterized by sentimental depictions of the Antilles as an "Edenic feminized . . . geography" (Curtius 513). With no patience for romantic descriptions of "hibiscus, frangipani, and bougainvillea," Césaire instead comments on the ways in which the beauty of the Caribbean landscape masks the suffering of its people (Césaire 27). In "The Great Camouflage," she imitates touristic discourses of lush jungles and azure waters to illustrate how political unrest and economic inequality are camouflaged within idyllic scenery. She explains, "If my Antilles are so beautiful, it is because the great game of hide-and-seek has succeeded" (46). Similarly, in an interview, Senior explains that *Gardening in the Tropic*'s extended metaphor of gardening emerged as a combination of mythology and practical

knowledge (81). Referring to her childhood in the Jamaican countryside, Senior says that she internalized the "intense beauty of the country" in which she grew up, and the trees and plants were "part of the social fabric" of her community life (79). Like Césaire, however, she clarifies: "Not lost on me as a child was the fact that [the beauty] masked a lot of hardship and pain and so on" (79).

Though it emerges from a Pacific context, Teaiwa's concept of militourism is particularly relevant for reading Senior's investigations of military activity and environmental degradation in the Caribbean. Militourism offers a frame to investigate the gendering of island geographies and environments to justify contemporary forms of colonialism in these regions. As Teaiwa explains, examining how gender dynamics animate militarist and tourist discourses allows us to see how tourism both reinforces and disguises military activity. Using the example of nuclear weapons testing in Bikini Atoll, she considers how the invention of the bikini swimsuit, designed by Louis Reard in 1946 and named after the testing site, both trivialized Pacific Islanders' experiences and created a distraction from colonial violence by "drawing attention to a sexualized and supposedly depoliticized female body ("Bikinis" 87). Teaiwa writes: "The mass-produced-and-marketed bikini simultaneously transcribes and erases the dispossession of the Bikini Islanders onto millions of female bodies [. . .] the emptiness of commodity consumption is only benign if we ignore the malign effects of the bikini's co-commodity, the bomb" (95).The simultaneous emergence of the bomb and the bikini speak to contradictions in western ideologies that conflate women with "nature" and also view "nature" as alienable from human life, placing women in a state both inside and outside of society. In Bikini Atoll, these gender binaries and man/land divides justify the erasure of Indigenous islanders as well as the literal erasure of islands, as discussed in the following section, which were eviscerated during nuclear weapons testing. In the

Caribbean, a parallel can be drawn to Senior's and Césaire's observations about the ways in which beauty eclipses violence. As a result of the touristic gaze that genders and exoticizes tropical spaces, military activity in the islands is downplayed and disappears into the background, as discussed in more detail below in relation to the US's sustained bombing of Vieques. The trivialization of both the Antilles and the Pacific Islands through this gaze simultaneously enables and disguises the impact of foreign military activity on both land and people. Extending Teaiwa's concept to Caribbean contexts draws together various (and far subtler) forms of militourism that specifically impact island worlds.

In "Caribbean Basin Initiative," Senior critiques interrelated dynamics of US economic policy and militarization in the region as well as resulting patterns of migration. According to Senior's glossary, which was not included in the original book or its 2005 reprint but was posted by the author to her website in 2011, the title is a play on US President Ronald Reagan's 1982 "Caribbean Basin Initiative," which was meant to stimulate Caribbean economies through increased trade with the US. According to Senior, the policy "had little success," and in the poem, "this externally imposed 'solution' is contrasted with the initiative of individuals—in this case the Haitian people who from time to time choose the dangerous route of migration in small open boats" ("Annotations" 5). Through the nine sections of the poem, the term "basin" takes on multiple valences: the region as viewed by the US, the migrants' canoes, graves, and finally Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The projected image of the basin creates an uncanny parallel between the Caribbean and Pacific Islands. Considering the US's strategic use of "basin" to support economic and military agendas in the Pacific (namely, the Asia-Pacific Rim discourses dissected by Connery), this similar Cold War mapping of the Caribbean also suggests the promotion of US self-interests at the expense of island populations and environments. However, whereas "Pacific

basin" erases small island nations, in the Caribbean as described in Senior's poem, "basin" works more forcefully to contain the islands and economic refugees.

The poem opens with Haitian migrants clinging "like limpets" (or sea gastropods) to their open boat as they traverse rough waters. Yet, the ocean is not the most dangerous element they face:

> After weeks of
> dead reckoning
> no beckoning
> landfall; I hang
> by a thread
> to my dream.
> We were seeking
> the Gulf Stream:
> it is we who
> are found. (32)

"Dead reckoning," according to Senior's glossary, is a "method of calculating one's position on the ocean" (6). The use of rhyme creates a slippage of meaning (reckoning/beckoning; dead/thread; dream/Stream), where possibility continuously turns to disappointment, and the navigation method connotes a sense that the migrants' mission is already "dead." The seekers try to find their way but are instead found, and rather than sighting land, the speaker reports: "Here there be / Marines," playing off colonial European maritime maps, which marked unknown territories with the warning, "Here there be monsters" (33). The allusion to European cartographies and the revelation that the refugees "are found" connects fifteenth-century colonialism to the contemporary plight of Caribbean migrants.

In the following section, the reader learns that the migrants have been moved to a detention center so near and yet so far from home:

> Nothing's stronger
> than the cage

on Guantanamo,
nothing's bounded
as this rage
as this basin. (33)

The lines refer to the US Coast Guard's practice of capturing Haitian boat people and taking them to Guantanamo before eventually shipping them home (Senior "Annotations" 6). Though the practice ended in 1995, Senior's cage reference seems to foreshadow the US's 2002 establishment of Guantanamo prison for housing suspected terrorists, which in the words of Jodi Byrd, constitutes an "[exportation] of death and grief to other nations" (Byrd 79). The migrants are treated as criminals, and in these lines, "basin" takes on particular resonance when considering US security discourses, where would-be immigrants and suspected terrorists occupy the same position. Senior creates a paradox of "bounded" / "rage," as rage connotes an uncontrolled eruption of emotion. Yet, for the migrants held in the no-man's-land of the Caribbean basin, "nothing's bounded / as this rage" (33). In other words, through the colonial view of the region as a self-contained basin, supposed threats to national security can be indefinitely suppressed in the repository of Guantanamo. Senior's poem then depicts how US views of the Caribbean geography and landscape enable military infiltration but also, paradoxically, create psychic distance between these northern and southern neighbors.

In the twelve interlinked poems that make up the book's third section, Senior connects newer forms of colonialism described in "Caribbean Basin Initiative" to older practices associated with plantation history and the removal of Amerindian peoples. Each poem begins with the titular phrase "Gardening in the Tropics," which also links the twelve into a single, unwinding long poem. The repetition of the first line with variation creates an accumulation and a kind of haunting through its evocation of generational trauma. Across the poems, gardening

sometimes refers to digging, the unearthing of human bones, and at other points to various forms of environmental destruction. In "Seeing the Light," which is told from the perspective of an Indigenous South American Taino, gardening means deforestation:

> Gardening in the Tropics nowadays means
> letting in light: they've brought in machines
> that can lay waste to hundreds of hectares
> in one day [. . .]
> By the time they've cut
> the last tree in the jungle only our bones
> will remain (95)

As in "Plants," Senior turns a presumably benevolent or innocuous notion on its head. Here, "letting in light" or "seeing the light," which connotes a sense of transparency or relief after a period of darkness, refers instead to the mechanized removal of trees. The destruction of the forest is also linked to the end of human life in that once the last tree has been cut, "only our bones / will remain" (95). In an interview, Senior defends the poem against perceptions of being polemical. She explains that she chose to narrate the poem through an Amerindian voice to convey a different philosophy and relationship with the environment. After studying Taino religion and history, Senior says, "I don't feel that they just vanished from the pages of history; we now recognize that some cultural transmission took place that we can see in elements of culture today" (Dawes 78). By depicting Amerindian concepts of the first garden in contrast to a Christian Eden, the poet asserts the relevance and urgency of Indigenous approaches for diverting environmental catastrophe (Senior 96).

In an address to the colonizer, the speaker asserts, "Before you came, it was dark in our garden" (96). The darkness is contrasted to the oblivion of the light wrought through deforestation, which also counters western Enlightenment views that associate light with ascent and intellectual superiority. Yet, the darkness presents other ways of knowing and seeing.

Through the green foliage, "pinpricks of light [filter] / through the leaves to mirror the stars of Heaven / invert the Pleiades" (96). In the darkness, Heaven is visible, and according to Senior's gloss, the Pleiades, or the constellations stars known as the "Seven Sisters," are "very important in ordering the yearly routine of Amerindian life" ("Annotations" 13). In this way, the rapid deforestation poses a threat not only to the forest's survival but also to alter/native senses of time and relationships to place.

Senior's critique of the valorization of light speaks to DeLoughrey's observation of "heliotropes," or worship of sunlight in the current militarization of the environment. DeLoughrey points out that in American Cold War propaganda, nuclear weapons "were naturalized by likening them to harnessing the power of the sun, and their radioactive by-products were depicted as no less dangerous than our daily sunshine" (236). As a result, a number of Pacific writers have regarded the military globalization of the regions as "wars of light" (237). Though DeLoughrey refers to atomic weapons testing, the concept of light as an annihilating force that is nonetheless celebrated as "natural" applies to wider patterns of environmental destruction that impact Pacific and Caribbean worlds alike. In "Seeing the Light," the final section asks:

> To this day—as catastrophe
> holds sway and earth continues to learn. Why did those
> who speak of Light wear black, the colour
> of mourning? (96)

The speaker refers to evangelism as a form of colonialism as the black-clad missionaries preach the love of "Cristo," yet the enlightenment they promise simultaneously brings imminent catastrophe through destruction of the forests. Referring to the crucifixion of Christ, in the final

lines, the speaker wonders how many more trees "must die to illuminate his death," and speculates that it may be "as many leaves" that "must fall to cover up our dying" (96).

The Other "Lord of the Flies" in Vieques

A recent poem by Puerto Rican poet Loretta Collins Klobah, which depicts a different and complex structure of militourism than the forms interrogated by Senior's botantical metaphors. Rather than the natural beauty that eclipses violence in Senior's writing, Collins Klobah considers the touristic gaze that renders an occupied island as deserted and disseminates island stereotypes through the medium of film. Published in the July 2015 edition of the pan-Caribbean online journal *Moko,* "Vieques, 1961, The Filming of *The Lord of the Flies"* describes the production of director Peter Brook's 1963 film, shot almost entirely on the island of Vieques. Adapted from William Golding's 1954 novel, in which a group of boys stranded on a desert island devolve into barbarity, the film presents the island as a space that awakens the English boys' primal hidden natures. At the same time, the framing of *The Lord of the Flies* (1963) occludes the reality of US military testing taking place in the midst of filming.

Collins Klobah's poem opens with the character Piggy staring at a boar's head, intended in the book and film to represent the evil lurking in the human heart. The poem's speaker, however, quickly zooms out to reveal the scene beyond the camera's frame. The setting of the desert island is a fiction produced by both the film and the US military apparatus:

The island
was tropical,
but not deserted—
not then, not yet,
though a covert plan
had been drawn up
to relocate 8,000

fishing villagers,
cane workers,
to dig up
their dead;
yes, to make even
the dead turn refugee

The "covert plan" refers to the US Interior Department's intention to remove the entire population of Vieques to the Virgin Islands in order to grant the navy full control of the territory (Puerto Rico Libre). In 1964, demonstrators were able to stop the forcible relocation. When asked why he chose to adapt Golding's novel, director Peter Brook replied, "It was a good point in the world's madness to show how easily people can slip back . . ." (qtd. in Carrasquillo). Brook's statement expresses fears of the corruption of civilization and slipping back to a "primitive" state; however, the film's setting on a tropical island reinforces Eurocentric views of the tropics as frozen in an uncivilized pre-modern state.

Even more, the notion of "slipping back" into patterns of brute violence ignores the material realities of the military-occupied island where the film was shot. Collins Klobah writes that the thirty-three child actors flown in for the film slept on army cots under the US Navy-owned fly-space, surrounded by:

Jeeps, trucks, tanks,
recoiless rifles, bazookas,
mortars, mines, missles, [sic]
conventional and guided,
that would later leave
surfaces of the island test sites lunar—

In the film, the boys are armed only with knives and what they can fashion in the desert landscape, but "just beyond the camera's pan," their bunkers are stockpiled with industrial weapons. The missiles leave scars on the island's surface the size of moon craters, the speaker suggests. The irony here, of course, is that the film imagines that, outside the bounds of

"civilization," the tropical setting triggers the boys' more primal nature, when in fact, the island is overrun by weapons of mass destruction, the technological productions of western civilization. In fact, the speaker explains, Brook was forced to halt filming during the first week as a result of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba. The "groaning bodies of Cuban exilios" were airlifted to Vieques and placed in the island's naval hospital. All the while, the poem's speaker explains, the child actors are directed to go "tribal [. . .] for Brook." Collins Klobah repurposes the film character Simon's suspicion that "*Maybe there is a beast,"* but this time, rather than a mysterious force of evil, the beast is the military occupation everywhere present yet just outside of the movie's frame.

The form of "Vieques, 1961, The Filming of *The Lord of the Flies"* is center-aligned so that the length of the lines expand and contract as the reader scrolls down the screen. The mutating shape of the long, narrow stanzas sometimes resembles an insect body (perhaps the flies of Golding's title) or an aircraft, as longer lines appear as wings or abdominal curves that jut out from the center. The final stanzas visually resemble Senior's "rain" as words repeat in a vertical cascade down the page (or in this case, the screen). With a heavier cluster of words at the top of the stanza formation, which narrows down in the single word, "us," the text resembles a rain cloud or, if imagined from above, an aircraft discharging bullets or bombs:

La Isla Nena [. . .]
later ousted la Marina
after being the launch pad
for deployments to Guatemala,
Cuba, la República Dominicana,
Grenada, Haiti, the Balkans, Iraq
and Somalia.

The Lord of Flies,
tyrant, divides us,

us

us

us

us

us

us—

Using Vieques's nickname, La Isla Nena, Collins Klobah considers how the small island has become a site for the US to launch foreign wars not only in the Caribbean and the Americas but also in Africa and the Middle East. At first, the references to "us" seem to draw together these geographies in solidarity against a common tyrant, but as the repetition of "us" continues to drill down the screen, the echo suggests a sense of recurring trauma. The "us" might indicate US-occupied nations or it might refer to the US itself, which continues to rain down from above.

Critiques of Nuclear and Military Imperialism in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok*

Marshallese activist and spoken word poet Jetñil-Kijiner's first print collection *Iep Jāltok* (2017), published by the University of Arizona Press, appears as part of the Sun Tracks American Indian Literary Series, implicitly connecting the US colonization of Indigenous Pacific Islanders with Native Americans in the continental US. The book is organized into four sections, each dealing with a different dimension of Marshallese life. The first, "Iep Jāltok," begins with Marshallese navigator history and mythology, and the following three sections deal with different dimensions of colonial history in the Pacific. "History Project" focuses on the legacy of US nuclear testing in the region, followed by "Lessons from Hawai'i," which narrates the

experiences of Micronesian migrants in the United States. The final section, "Tell Them," focuses on the birth of the poet's daughter and features a number of poems dedicated to global climate change and its particular repercussions on the islands of the Pacific. Throughout the collection, the basket to which the title refers serves as a thematic connector. An introductory note explains that "*Iep jāltok (yiyip jalteq)"* refers to *"'A basket whose opening is facing the speaker.' Said of female children. She represents a basket whose contents are made available to her relatives. Also refers to matrilineal society of the Marshallese.*" The feminine coding of the basket takes on multiple meanings as the collection progresses, alternating from a site of contestation to one of hope for Marshallese survival.

The opening poem, "Basket," is shaped in two crescent stanza formations, resembling two baskets facing away from each other. Rather than engaging with motifs of weaving or the communal work of interlacing coconut leaves, as Jetñil-Kijiner describes in other writing, her focus on the basket here interrogates the relationship between inner and outer, or basin and rim. The first stanza, which is an arc of words shaped to resemble a bowl with the opening facing the right side of the page, begins with an invitation:

> woman tip your lid
> across the table
> you swell
> with offering

The poem progresses as it curves inward with, "you / offer / offer / offer," and then reaches its base as it dives back into ancestry: "earth / of your / mother" and "roots / of your / father." The poem describes woman as the conduit connecting past and future, simultaneously acting as the vehicle carrying ancestral history and the producer of the next generation. Through her offering, she generates future history in the form of the next "basket / waiting / to be / woven" (4). The

first stanza reads like a prayer of supplication, the repetition of "you / offer / offer / offer" both beckoning and honoring women's role as cultural producer, conflating the labor of basket weaving with bearing children. The lack of punctuation in the first line, especially the absence of a comma following "woman," affectively collapses the distance between the poetic speaker and the woman addressed. The presumably woman speaker (given the turn at the end of the poem discussed in the next paragraph) addresses a collective "woman"—speaking both to herself and to the larger communal body of "woman."

The next stanza which begins on the following page reverses direction and moves in a convex shape. It begins in the same way, asking the woman to tip her basket to the table, but as her offering descends, it "scrapes / [her] floor" and is interrupted by the question: "bare / vessel?" In the inverse of the previous stanza, the deepest point of the basket is not a reservoir of history but instead a "receptacle / littered / with scraps / tossed by / others" (5). As the bowl curves up to the outer rim, the speaker's address shifts from the collective voice to first-person point of view. The lowercase lyric "i" closes out the poem with:

i fell asleep
dreamt

my smile
was merely
a rim
woven
into my
face

The introduction of "i" here marks two shifts in the poem: the intersubjective voice morphs into an individual speaker, and the basket metaphor turns from its association with women's labor to a false smile. She feels the smile as a rim woven into her face, where outer expression does not

reflect interior feeling. The poem gestures at social pressures on women to appear happy even for strangers. Though she is treated as a receptacle, she masks her unhappiness with a static smile, woven into her face.

Jetñil-Kijiner's examination of the gendered meanings attached to the Marshallese basket uncannily mirrors analyses of Asia-Pacific Rim and Basin discourse. Through the work of Pacific scholar Paul Sharrad, DeLoughrey unpacks the gendered thinking at work in this mapping of the Pacific region:

> Paul Sharrad has usefully demonstrated that the perceived newness of Asia Pacific was a palimpsest over colonial mystifications of an idyllic South Seas that had interpellated the Pacific Basin as a vast, empty (feminized) ocean to be filled with masculine voyagers. In strikingly gendered language, Sharrad argued that the Basin suggests 'something more akin to a sink than a bowl; a container, a vessel that exist to be filled or emptied.' In terms that resonate with the Caribbean, Hau'ofa warned against the scholarly tendency to describe Oceania as 'a Spanish lake, a British lake, an American lake, and even a Japanese lake.' Yet scholars have tended to amplify rather than deconstruct the gendered economic and geopolitical imaginaries of the region. In surveying the Caribbean and the Pacific, continental Rim powers often translate 'vessel' as an empty Basin rather than an alternative navigation of sovereignty. (*Routes and Roots* 103)

The "vessel" to which DeLoughrey refers is the Indigenous Pacific vaka or ocean-going canoe, which, like the ocean itself, is evacuated of history and agency, demoted to a mere container or, in Sharrad's words, "a sink." On the one hand, this feminization or emptying of the Pacific is the language of erasure, collapsing the Pacific into an undifferentiated Asia; on the other, it serves as justification to make use of the space for colonial purposes, be it dumping nuclear waste, testing weapons, or launching foreign wars.

In "Basket," Jetñil-Kijiner plays with these reversals through her performance and re-performance of the basket shape itself. The basket's duality intersects with gendered discourses of the Pacific along multiple axes: Basin and Rim, secrecy and spectacle, interior and exterior,

passive receptacle and sovereign vessel. The rim marks a separation between public and private spheres, and at the conclusion of the poem, the rim, embodied as a woman's pained smile, mystifies and disappears her labor from the public space of cultural production. For Jetñil-Kijiner, the basket's shape becomes the site to explore women's social role: the same basket that bears an ancestral offering can be hollowed to a container, and her act of offering can be reduced to mere servitude.

Extending this basket metaphor, Jetñil-Kijiner explains the rationale for her video poem, "Islands Dropped from a Basket: A Letter from a Micronesian Daughter to Hawai'i." In a March 2017 blog post, the poet describes high cancer rates, diabetes, and other health problems pervasive among Marshallese and Micronesian populations. Facing limited resources at home, the islanders are forced to migrate to the US in search of better health care, where they are often seen as a burden on the system. Jetñil-Kijiner refers specifically to efforts in Hawai'i to take away Micronesians' access to healthcare. The US's hostile reception of Micronesian immigrants strikes the poet as ironic given that the high cancer rates are statistically proven to be the result of the US's nuclear weapons testing program in the region. "What are Micronesians and the US offering one another?" the poet asks. "What is [sic] baskets have we brought to each other?" Jetñil-Kijiner's use of the word "offering" seems ill-fitting for the relationship between the US and Micronesians. Yet, the poet's explanation at the start of *Iep Jāltok* that the basket is open and facing the speaker signals a kind of performance, and the dual nature of the basket suggests that its contents can be offered or concealed. In "Islands Dropped from a Basket," the speaker's bananoor, a traditional Marshallese basket woven from coconut leaves, opens to reveal a legacy of betrayal: "Here is a basket from home. / Bowls of unplugged wires, fatal diagnoses / [. . .] In turn you, Hawai'i, gave me a sterile basket" (Jetñil-Kijiner blog). In the poem, Hawai'i

metonymically stands for the US, unphased by the gruesome content of the Marshallese basket. Though Jetñil-Kijiner is primarily spoken word performer, and her video installations offer a visual component not possible in book format, the print page also allows her to dramatize the basket's relationship to the female body through her play with textual lineation. The print collection, with its words that arc across the page, offers insights into her performance pieces, highlighting the basket's ability to reveal or conceal.

"Most Marshallese / can say they've mastered the language of cancer": Slow Violence in Bikini Atoll[72]

Over the course of the Cold War, the US launched over 65 atomic tests, but as scientific studies show, the 1954 detonation of the *Bravo* hydrogen bomb is responsible for the bulk of enduring radiation in the region and, consequently, lasting public health risks. In fact, the single event marks the highest dose of nuclear fallout in the history of worldwide nuclear testing: over fifty years after *Bravo*'s explosion, scientists project lasting health implications, with "increased cancer risk as the primary late health effect of exposure" (Simon et. al. 48). *Bravo'*s blast, which, unlike previous tests, fused rather than split atoms, "eviscerated three islands in the Bikini Atoll" and is thought to be nearly one thousand times more powerful than the US bombing in Hiroshima (Keown 936). Islanders inhabiting the islands of Rongelap and Rongerik, who were not informed of the detonation, were exposed to the fallout when wind carried the radioactive dust that descended like snow over isles (Niedenthal). Twenty-three Japanese fishermen aboard the *Lucky Dragon* were also exposed to fallout (Simon et. al. 52). The catastrophe created an

[72] The quote in my section title is from Jetñil-Kijiner's poem "Bursts of Bianca" (40.

international media scandal; however, reports focused on the men aboard the *Lucky Dragon,* ignoring the Marshallese exposed in the immediate aftermath of the detonation and then through contaminated soil, water, and vegetation in the years that followed (Keown 936; Simon et. al. 50).

In her analysis of *Iep Jāltok*'s critique of US imperialism, Pacific literary scholar Michelle Keown sees the invisibility of the disastrous trans-generation effects of nuclear testing on the Marshallese people as a key illustration of slow violence. While the *Lucky Dragon* incident created international outrage, the decades of radiation-related epidemics in the Marshall Islands remains "largely ignored and suppressed by the United States" (938). Keown writes, "There was a flurry of international media attention at the time of the BRAVO bomb due to the radiation exposure of the Japanese fishing crew, but the long-term effects of radiation and displacement upon the Marshallese have barely been registered outside the Indigenous community" (938). The disparity in attention, where the Pacific Rim is seen while the "Basin" is forgotten, recalls "black Pacific" narratives in which the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima is inscribed into public memory, and for African Americans during the World Wars, the event symbolized an apocalyptic act of white supremacy. In terms of US narrative, Hiroshima represents a singular event, justified as a once and necessary act, while more chronic and structural nuclear events in the Marshall Islands are conveniently left unremembered.

By considering the spectacle/secrecy dichotomy evoked by Jetñil-Kijiner's basket trope, I extend Keown's analysis by further investigating the dilemma of representation raised by Nixon. Like Sharrad's Basin/Rim binary, Nixon's descriptions of slow violence ring with gendered

language.[73] Nixon observes that global media tend to privilege the visual ("If it bleeds, it leads"), which creates a representational bias against violence that is not bound by an explosive event or action (16). In addition, stories told by "people whose witnessing authority is culturally discounted" remain unheard or, as I argue in regards to Jetñil-Kijiner, constitute an open secret, a form of structural violence that becomes normalized as inevitable. Nixon explains:

> The entangled politics of spectacle and witnessing have implications that stretch well beyond environmental slow violence. In domestic abuse, for instance, violence may be life threatening but slow, bloodless, and brutal in ways that not always immediately fatal [. . .] A locked door can be a weapon. Doors for women are often long-term, nonlethal weapons that leave no telltale bloody trail. (16)

Nixon refers to states of captivity and forced isolation but, in this discussion of domestic violence, the "locked door" also works doubly to demarcate "public" and "private" realms, a binary that enables and naturalizes violence against women.

While slow violence in its various manifestations may be too diffuse or incremental, too "quiet" to raise alarms when viewed in isolation, Jetñil-Kijiner forces her audience to bear witness by connecting structures of slow violence. Events in isolation might not register in the public eye or can be disregarded, but when viewed as a constellation, their impacts become more difficult to ignore. Jetñil-Kijiner connects the bodily horrors of radiation poisoning and cancer experienced by the Marshallese with events of nuclear disaster, global climate change, racism and exile, and the reality of sinking islands in the Pacific.

In the eight-part poem "Fishbone Hair," Jetñil-Kijiner narrates her niece Bianca's chronic illness and eventual death from leukemia. Each of the eight short sections offers a glimpse into

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[73] Beyond gendered language in terms of theorizing "slow violence," Nixon goes into specifics about the uneven impacts of environmental destruction experienced by women. See "Chapter 4: Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor" for an examination of how neocolonial land policies disproportionately impact Kenyan women.

Bianca's life at various stages of illness, and throughout the poem, the grieving speaker is left to consider the physical facts of the child's disembodied hair and bones. These recurring references to "rootless hair" and "bones" creates a resonance of trauma that speaks to multiple senses of loss. The first section begins with the discovery of "two ziplocks / stuffed / with rolls and rolls of hair" inside Bianca's old room (24). The speaker considers the plastic bags with a rush of undifferentiated similes: "dead as a doornail black as a tunnel hair thin / as strands of tumbling seaweed." The lack of punctuation or syntactical separation between the metaphors adds a propulsive quality, as though the speaker is trying to make sense of the contents of the bags before she settles on "strands of tumbling seaweed." She wonders whether her sister stashed the bags in an attempt "to save that / rootless hair / that hair without a home" (24). Keown reads this reference to homelessness as evoking the experience of "exile of the nuclear nomads of the northern atolls" (943). In this way, the rolls of hair represent both the individual experience of child cancer as well as the wider experience of nuclear refugees in the Marshall Islands. As the poem progresses, the connections between Bianca's illness and the legacy of military colonialism in the region become more evident.

In the next section, the speaker explains that a war had been "raging" in her niece's six-year-old bones:

> white cells staked their flag
> they conquered the territory of her tiny body
> they saw it as their destiny
> they said it was manifested
>
> It
>
> all
>
> fell

out (25)

Similar to Senior's racialization of nuclear fallout as "white rain," the "white cells" in Jetñil-Kijiner's poem double for American invaders. Bianca's body is the territory through which the ideology of Manifest Destiny reaches its culmination, and the final phrase drifts down the page like the loose strands of hair it references. In a later section, after shifting in time to moments before and after Bianca's death, the poem alludes to *Bravo'*s detonation as experienced by the *Lucky Dragon* fishermen. After watching the explosion splitting the sky, the speaker explains, the fishermen were quiet, and perhaps most tellingly, "they were neat." After dusting the fallout from their hair, they "turned around their motorboat and speeded home" (29). In contrast to Bianca's rootless hair, the Japanese fishermen are able to return home and leave the incident behind them. In reality, the fishermen of course experienced radiation poisoning, but the description of neatness and "dusting off" suggests that the event was isolated for the fishermen, whereas the Marshallese people have been displaced in their own home.

In the final two sections, the poem turns its grief into potential for solidarity. The coils of hair become the material for nets. The speaker recalls a Chamorro legend in which the women of Guåhan (Guam) weave their long hair into nets to save their island from a monstrous fish. In the closing section, the words are scattered across the page, but this time, they do not evoke falling strands of hair but, instead, a woven net. The arrangement of "fishbone hair" among the nodes of words, "catch," "ash," "catch," "moon," "catch," "star," also resembles an astral constellation, thus calling back to the Indigenous navigator poems at the start of the collection and the ancient sailors who used the stars as guide. The shape also simultaneously suggests a network of islands: the references to Guåhan, another island under US military occupation, creates a trans-oceanic

cultural link, and the net suggests Indigenous collaboration and resistance against a common oppressor. The net of words, the poem concludes, is "for you Bianca / for you" (31).

"For the good of humankind": Universalizing Discourses in the Face of Ecological Catastrophe

In the poem "History Project," Jetñil-Kijiner describes a school project she conducted at the age of fifteen to research the history of nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands. The poem layers discourses of political and military jargon (including Kissinger's dismissal: "*90,000 people out there. Who / gives a damn?"*) with the lived horrors of the nuclear aftermath, including accounts of pervasive miscarriages and infant death as a result of radiation: "jelly babies / tiny beings with no bones / skin—red as tomatoes" (20). Recounting the initial 1946 removal of Bikini Islanders from their atoll, the poem quickly turns from indifferent political rhetoric to theology. The speaker remembers her "islander ancestors, cross-legged / before a general listening / to his fairy tale" (21). The general here refers to Commodore Ben Wyatt, who convinced the Bikinians to temporarily evacuate their home so that the US could begin nuclear testing "for the good of mankind" (Niedenthal). The Bikinians were resettled in the nearby Rongerik Atoll, where they found an insufficient food and water supply and suffered from starvation. They were never able to return home as Bikini remains uninhabitable today, and the displaced Bikinians, who dispersed to Kili and other Marshall Islands, continue to struggle with limited food and resources. Because of irradiation, traditional practices of fishing are no longer viable, which has forced dependency on imported industrialized foods (Niedenthal).

Jetñil-Kijiner examines the residual impact of the general's promise that the Bikinians' sacrifice will contribute to "the good of mankind." The poem flashes forward to the aftermath of

the 1954 *Bravo* detonation, in which islanders on Rongelap "mistook radioactive fallout / for snow" (21). The speaker comments:

> as if God Himself
> ordained
> those powdered
> flakes
> to drift
> onto our skin hair eyes
> to seep into our bones (21)

The seemingly benevolent white flakes again recall Senior's racialized "white rain," especially in the next stanza when the speaker ironizes the religious rhetoric which places the Bikinians in the dual position of savior and human sacrifice:

> like God's just been
> waiting
> for my people
> to vomit
> all of humanity's sins
> onto impeccable white shores
> gleaming
> like the cross burned
> into our open
> scarred palms (21, 22).

Suffering from radiation poisoning, the islanders vomit on "impeccable white shores," which, like the "snow" evokes white supremacy. The cross burned into "our open / scarred palms" also suggests a double meaning, as cross-burning recalls the fear-mongering practices of hate groups in the US. Like the biblical Jesus, often depicted as being crucified through the palms of his hands, the Bikinians are punished for "humanity's sins"; the irony, of course, is that US nuclear testing is not concerned with human survival but instead with national progress, ordained by the "divine" order of American exceptionalism. At the poem's conclusion, the fifteen-year-old

speaker titles her history project, “FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND,” and submits it to a district-wide competition. The three white judges, however, miss the bitter joke (23).

As the collection progresses, Jetñil-Kijiner begins connecting these narratives of radiation-related displacement to those of climate change refugees in the Pacific. In “Tell Them,” the speaker urges her friends in the US to tell others about the Marshall Islands. She describes flooding cemeteries and water crashing over sea walls (66). “Tell them,” she demands, “what it’s like / to see the entire ocean__level___with the land” (66). Those in the US who are not immediately impacted by the reality of rising sea levels have the luxury of complacency, while Marshall Islanders witness the difference that a matter of inches can make. In the poem, “Two Degrees,” in particular, the poet weighs these perceptions of scale as she links two forms of slow violence: radiation poisoning and global warming. She begins by describing her one-year-old daughter sick with fever. She thinks about the difference only a few degrees can make, the difference between life and death, and she extends this thought to scientists’ warning that two degrees’ difference in the Earth’s temperature will mean global catastrophe: “at 2 degrees my islands / will already be under water” (77). She considers minimizing views of the Marshall Islands, which from an outside perspective must look like “just crumbs you / dust off the table” (78), which recalls French president de Gaulle’s description of the Caribbean Islands as crumbs. The poem describes patients in a clinic on Kili island, “with a nuclear history threaded / into their bloodlines,” who awake to a rushing tide flooding the hospital (78). A “sewage of syringes and gauze” floats in the sea water (78). In the midst of the wreckage, the poet explains the aim of her poetic project, that she writes to put faces to the numbers and statistics, to dramatize the human toll of climate change so often obscured by political discourse. “There are faces . . .” she reminds us, “not yet / under water” (79).

Jetñil-Kijiner's depiction of shrinking islands and the unequal experience and witnessing of climate change's impact speaks to recent debates about the future of postcolonial study in a warming world. As scientists take stock of the human impact on the global climate and designate the current era as the Anthropecene, human beings have been refigured as a geological force with the power to control geologic history. In "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change" (2012), Dipesh Chakrabarty argues for a new conception of the human subject in the face of potential apocalypse. He contends, "The fact that the crisis of climate change will be routed through all our 'anthropological differences'"—meaning differences of class, race, sexuality, gender, and so on— "can only mean that, however anthropogenic the current global warming may be in its origins, there is no corresponding 'humanity' that in its oneness can act as a political agent" (14). While Chakrabarty's vision proposes a united human community mobilized to save the species, Benita Parry's withering critique points out that responsibility for massing greenhouse gasses and its effects are not evenly distributed across humanity. Instead, Parry observes, Chakrabarty's transcendent view displaces discussions of the intersecting roles of global capitalism and imperialism in climate change. By ignoring "the logic of capitalist accumulation on a world scale producing environmental crises," she writes, Chakrabarty positions global warming as a "transcendental force outside an actually existing world order" (347). In other words, the climate crisis is staged as separate from rather than imbricated in global socioeconomic disparity.

A reductive take on this debate might frame "anthropological differences," class struggle, and identity politics as irrelevant in the face of impending global threat. Perhaps unexpectedly, and in sharp contrast to Chakrabarty's transcendent vision, Medievalist scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that a deeper engagement with "unequally distributed suffering" is needed to

mobilize against global warming. Cohen connects current fears of a submerged world to another apocalypse story, the biblical myth of Noah's ark. He attributes complacent attitudes about climate change to a western cultural fantasy that allows us to retreat from responsibility—we return, Cohen argues, to the promise of an "ark" that will inevitably save some but not all. Even secular imaginings of end times, as in films such as *2012* (2009*)* and *Interstellar* (2014)*,* mediate anxiety about catastrophe with the relief of escape from a dying planet. Yet, Cohen contends, "if we realized better the complexity of the Noah narrative and its long history of augmentation and reinvention, we might not be so resigned to climate change." Images of a drowned Earth that emerge with the term "Anthropocene" deploy the "god trick," an aerial view that masquerades as objective as it gazes down at the Earth from a distance. Meanwhile, the "arkive" of Medieval illustrations and numerous retellings of Noah's flood across centuries offer a more complicated picture: a view from below that shows the faces of those lost, corpses of human and nonhuman life mingling together in the waters. This change of perspective—from a transcendent, totalizing view to an engagement with the material impacts of climate change—works against fatalism. Instead, the possibility for a human community emerges through a reckoning with uneven suffering rather than an escape from it.

Given Commodore Wyatt's use of Christian theology to persuade Bikini islanders to leave their home, the biblical flood is not out of place in a discussion of sinking islands in the Pacific; in fact, Wyatt's "fairy tale," as Jetñil-Kijiner calls it, is an extension of US national progress narratives of Manifest Destiny. When followed to its limits, the teleology of frontier mythologies, as conceptualized by Connery, risks planetary apocalypse, showing how fatalism and racial chauvinism work together to justify the removal of Indigenous peoples and, ultimately, all of mankind.

In “Dear Matafele Peinam,” Jetñil-Kijiner presents concerns for the good of mankind as inseparable from the life of the planet. The poem, which was originally performed at the 2014 Opening Ceremony of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Climate Summit, is dedicated to the poet’s daughter at the age of seven months and wonders what future world awaits her, one where she “will wander / rootless”? (70) The speaker pledges to her daughter that she will not allow her to become a “climate change refugee” (71). She pledges to fight, even though there are those who like to “pretend / that we don’t exist” (72). As identified by the invocation of “we,” she begins in the Pacific Islands but ripples out to wider geographies:

> that the Marshall Islands
> Tuvalu
> Kiribati
> Maldives
> Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines
> floods of Pakistan, Algeria, Colombia
> and all the hurricanes, earthquakes, and tidalwaves
> didn’t exist (72).

Like the net at the end of “Fishbone Hair,” which suggests Indigenous Pacific solidarity, Jetñil-Kijiner’s geographies here also create a trans-ethnic and trans-cultural collaborative network, but this time, one that encompasses other Global Souths beyond the Pacific region. She issues a call to resist and reassures her daughter that there are already “canoes blocking coal ships,” referring to Indigenous protests against resource exploitation (72). Also significant is the poet’s emphasis on feminine lineage, as she considers her daughter, her granddaughter, and her great granddaughter, reinforcing the book’s epigraph, “Girls continue the lineage,” and culminating in the collection’s final poem (70).

The last poem is a mirror image of the first; also titled “Basket,” it presents two curving stanza formations identical to the opening poem. In the first stanza, however, when the woman tips her basket, her offering finds:

a seabed
to scrape
a receptacle
to dump
with scraps

your
body
is a country
we conquer
and devour (80)

Her body, like Bianca’s, is a country or territory to conquer and an empty vessel in which to dump waste. Yet, though “we / take,” she continues to give. The following stanza of the next page is an inverse of the first, and the two curving baskets face each other to form a circle. This time, when the woman tips her basket, she creates “a lineage / of sand” and “a reef / of memory” (81). The speaker affirms that her “womb” is “the sustainer / of life,” and when the lyric “I” appears, capitalized in contrast to the lowercase “i” of the first poem, the speaker dreams that her words flow out “to greet you” (81).

Conclusion: White Rain and Radioactive Snow: Interrogating Aerial Views

Across Atlantic and Pacific worlds, Jamaican poet Senior and Marshallese poet Jetñil-Kijiner evoke similar images of US aerial power. Each imagine children, trusting and unsuspecting, playing until an attack rains down from above. In Senior’s “rain,” the phrase “children play” repeats, conveying a sense of trauma and innocence interrupted before the final mantra, a triple repetition of “bullets hail down” (64). In Jetñil-Kijiner’s “History Project,” as

well, toxic precipitation interrupts civilian life. The poem alludes to the aftermath of the *Bravo* experiment in which islanders "mistook radioactive fallout / for snow" (21). Local reports of the event describe children running out to play in the falling ash, and in the ensuing hours, the radiation exposure manifested in severe vomiting, diarrhea, and hair loss. The islanders received no warning from the US government, which also failed to provide medical treatment for days (Niedenthal). In both poems, the metaphor of precipitation for white power conveys an element of betrayal: the rain and snow, welcomed as naturally occurring processes, turn out to be man-made poison. In the Marshallese context, the falling snow also appears benevolent at first, not unlike Commodore Wyatt's fairy tale about the testing contributing to "the good of mankind."

The accumulation of snow and its soft descent has a muting and unifying effect, leveling everything it touches beneath a single, white blanket. However, in Jetñil-Kijiner's evocation, the snow's whiteness also conveys white racial power. Snow is an apt metaphor for US colonial discourse which presents American expansion as natural, inevitable, and ultimately "good." The snow's ability to erase differences also describes neoliberal–neocolonial discourses that level differences, evacuating political and social identities, disappearing Indigenous positionalities, and replacing the specificity of women's bodies with generic objectified commodities, as can be seen in the history of the bikini bathing suit. When viewed from above, the snow creates a quiet, undifferentiated landscape. The poets examined here remind us of what is obscured and hidden in this view from above.

Coda: Woven Text-Isles

Throughout this dissertation I have returned to the formal aesthetic of weaving, which emerges in opposition to masculine nationalisms and setter colonial frameworks to assert a more collective subjectivity and ethics of responsibility. My title itself, *Blue Caribbean/Black Pacific,* interweaves two geographies and areas of postcolonial study—interlacing Indigenous Oceanic voyages with Caribbean trajectories and following black diasporic discourses into the Pacific—to interrogate the willed lacuna between black diasporic and Indigenous experiences.[74] In my introduction, I discussed the coinciding structures that conflate women and Indigenous peoples with the landscape, flattening both into the background within national progress narratives. The women poets in this dissertation, however, turn these discourses on their heads: they reconfigure the feminization of the earth by depicting the human body as co-extensive with the environment, presenting nature as living and familial. On the one hand, these poetries correct views that contain Indigenous peoples in a "pre-modern" past and women in the "private" realm by evoking histories of survival and resistance. On the other, they also reverse what Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls the "gendered grammar" of diaspora and globalization, in which the sea is "described as a void, *aqua nullius* to be imprinted with the expectations of the migrant" (*Routes and Roots* 269, 270). Whereas the colonial feminization of land and sea renders both as passive negative space, the women poets here present living geographies in reciprocal relationship with native peoples.

[74] I am indebted to Erin Suzuki for the phrasing "willed lacuna," which distills the ways in which the opposition between African diasporic and Indigenous claims is preconditioned by colonial histories.

Whether in response to masculine forms of literary prestige discussed in Chapter One or the heroic individualism of the epic in Chapter Three, weaving emerges as an alternative that emphasizes communal relation and co-authorship. Through techniques of harvesting and plaiting pandanus passed down across generations, weaving is produced through women's shared labor, which preserves tradition while also allowing for individual adaptation, and the cross-hatched fibers in and of themselves also generate an image of community. As with the Quiché-Mayan creation epic, the title of the *Popol Vuh* refers to the "interlaced fibers of the mat [which] represent the unity of members of the community" (Christenson 56). In addition, the weaving of geographies—between bodies and environments and between land and sea—disrupts what Frantz Fanon calls the colonially mapped "compartmentalized world" (3). In Chapter Two, I described the ways in which the postcolonial nation-state extends the colonial "possessive" logic of land as alienable. As explained by Shona Jackson, Enlightenment conceptions of the human define the modern subject through the teleology of labor; the modern subject "requires Indigenous peoples to remain subaltern" in order to assert his rightful sense of national belonging (*Creole Indigeneity* 213). The alienation of land takes on new dimensions when considering the militarized aerial views of islands, which justify nuclear testing in the Pacific and chemical poisoning in the Caribbean. Against the genocidal impulse that undergirds western "progress," Hawaiian Haunani Kay Trask and Guyanese Mahadai Das turn to Indigenous relations with place to de-naturalize the sovereignty of the nation-state and interweave human and environmental histories. Finally, in Chapter Four, Marshall Islander Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner brings these concepts together in a woven basket that represents feminine embodiment as an empty container and then reverses to reveal the basket as a deep reservoir of history, which connects the past and present by bearing Indigenous traditions into the future (81).

Beyond combatting the gendered logic that evacuates space of history, weaving also presents a metaphor that is materially informed and attentive to individual embodiment through the preservation of distinct strands. While the romantic watery metaphors that dominate diaspora studies risk washing away difference, as Vanessa Agard-Jones points out, the haku lei garland offers a model of hybridity that preserves traditional lineages while also allowing for expansion through the braiding in of new threads (326). In each chapter, I invoked kuʻualoha hoʻomanawanui's braided lei as a metaphor for Hawaiian literature, as oral and written traditions are intertwined and new traditions are engrafted into the existing chain. In this way, weaving is an indigenizing process that resists "fatal impact" theories—rather than being replaced by "modern" structures, Indigenous ways of life adapt and incorporate new influences.

As a final poetic example, which both encapsulates major concepts explored throughout this dissertation and also extends into future research areas, I turn to Nafanua of Samoan mythology, revived by Caroline Sinavaina-Gabbard in *Alchemies of Distance* (2001) (published under Sinavaina's former name) and Dan Taulapapa McMullin, in his explanation of *fa'afafine* gender identity. In discussing McMullin's representation, I point to future research that extends beyond the limited scope of western gender binaries to engage more deeply with queer theory and sexuality. In both McMullin's and Sinavaina-Gabbard's migrant texts, Nafanua embodies paradoxes of Indigeneity in diaspora and allows for further consideration of the ways in which writers indigenize diasporic narratives. Similar to Guyanaese Grace Nichols's Cariwoma, she moves fluidly between migrant and native discourses, and like Teresia Teaiwa's Nei Nim'anoa, she voyages between Atlantic and Pacific worlds.

McMullin explains that the difficulty of his family's move from Eastern Samoa to the US was exacerbated by the requirement that he abandon his fa'afafine identity and "act like a boy"

to conform with western gender norms (82). In the fa'afafine tradition, Samoan families without daughters choose a son to become fa'afafine, a nonbinary identity that cannot be adequately explained in western terminology of gender and sexuality (88). McMullin looks to Nafanua and emphasizes her as a foremother and gender-bending figure:

> Nafanua was the greatest warrior of Samoan history. When she went to war, she disguised her gender by covering her chest. One day in battle her covering was torn off, and her sex was discovered. When she retired from fighting, she became an advocate of peaceful discourse and influenced Samoans to conduct politics in the *fono* communal meeting house for the *fa'amatai* system of decentralized governance and communal land ownership. (93)

While the legend evidences patriarchal stratifications within Samoan society, it presents a woman hero, memorialized as the greatest in history, who also comes to stand for ideals of communal governance and land stewardship.

In *Alchemies of Distance,* Nafanua is not a relic of a past civilization but a living ancestor. Sinavaina-Gabbard also narrativizes her family's migration, from American Samoa to the American South, where she "grew up 'colored'" during the Civil Rights movement (11). Like the title of Nichols's book, Sinavaina-Gabbard calls herself a "Flying-fish daughter," adapting Pacific mythology in her description of her origins: "*Mother was an air current, and Father was an ocean wave. They took turns breathing each other in and out, in and out" (14).* The flying fish, who moves between elements of water and air, also calls to mind Teaiwa's play on the myth of "Mother earth/Father sky" to upset gendered notions of mobility and male-female gender binaries (12).

Against the colonial view which renders land and sea as empty space awaiting possession, Sinavaina-Gabbard introduces the concept of *vā,* which "in Samoan epistemology [represents] the *space between* things [. . .] Relationships are vā, the space between I and thou"

(20). As a space latent with creative potential, vā, like breath and like poetry, "that moving line of breath" (12), can be seen as a "natural extension of the human organism" (18). This notion of space as potential rather than void also resonates with ancient Amerindian epistemologies, especially among the Mayans, in which the number "'zero' was neither void nor emptiness alone. Rather, it gestured to creation, the circular movement between life and death" (Byrd 103). The parallels between these concepts creates a trans-Indigenous link across Atlantic and Pacific spaces that serves as an important counterpoint to western discourses.[75]

As a space of contact and connection rather than absence, vā inscribes a sense of continuity and co-embodiment that "breaks open" and "floods" the public/private binary (Robertson 75). Poet and philosopher Lisa Robertson questions spatial metaphors of the domestic. Because the human body "expresses a complex temporality that includes coded information from the past," the spaces through which it moves cannot be compartmentalized into rigid binaries of public and private (75). She writes, "In a temporal interpretation of the domestic, power innovates itself as an improvised co-embodiment" (76). Reading vā through this lens, divisions between time and space, between public and private realms are rendered illusory through the human body's multi-temporality.

Finally, while colonial narratives gender the ocean and the sailing vessel as feminine and passive in order to enable male travel, Nafanua makes herself a vessel for her ancestors. "By walking the talk for the ancestors Nafanua has become them, and the path, and the song," Sinavaina-Gabbard writes (23). Extending this view of multi-temporality and co-embodiment, Nafanua is "not only the traveler and the vehicle; she becomes the path as well" (25). Similar to

[75] See Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous* (2012).

the poetic works explored throughout my dissertation, the representation of Nafanua works against a hierarchical model of linear history to create a sense of simultaneity, looking not to a separate past but to a continuous present. In this shared sense of space and time, our human destinies are interwoven. The violent histories that mark Atlantic and Pacific worlds are not distant memories but are witnessed and grieved in the present, where we are accountable to the life of the planet and to each other.

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