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One Salt Water:  
Writing the Pacific Ocean in Contemporary Indigenous Protest Literatures

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## Abstract

This dissertation studies a creative archive composed of poems, novels, performances, and visual art produced after 1990 that increasingly represent the ocean as “one salt water”: a space of relations among Indigenous oceanic peoples, animals, plants, and other beings. In doing so, these texts work to forge solidarities and conversations among Indigenous peoples throughout the Pacific that protest against exploitation and mobilize to build sustainable and just oceanic futures. Wansolwara, or “one salt water,” is a Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea Creole) expression popularized in the past two decades through Oceania-wide Indigenous political and environmental activist movements. Also translated as “one ocean, one people,” Wansolwara increasingly appears on social media and other platforms denoting Oceania’s enormous diversity and highlighting critical issues in the Pacific including climate change, militarization, and decolonization. It indicates how Indigenous protest literature and art from Oceania convey a resistance politics built on prioritizing Indigenous systems for being in the world and coalitions across Indigenous peoples. While not all literatures in this archive use the word “Wansolwara,” they all engage the ocean as a literal and metaphorical space for the storied work of local and global Indigenous self-determination. First, they show that the ocean constitutes Indigenous Pacific ecological and genealogical systems, livelihoods, and networks of kinship and exchange. Second, the ocean is a place that generates and disseminates Indigenous intellectual and story practices. Finally, the ocean is enmeshed with Indigenous experiences of colonization but also acts as a means to pursue self-determined futures. By illuminating the oceanic relations established by these texts, I use “one salt water” as a concept that emphasizes the storied activist work of asserting interconnected Indigenous presences and persistence in the Pacific.

*For West Papua*

*Wa, wa, wa, nasini, hinyai, naswei, narupwi, naori wa*



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I am a nonindigenous New Zealander of European descent, or Pākehā, born in Whakatū/Nelson, and who was raised from the age of two in a Nggem community called Kobakma in the lower central highlands of West Papua. That community formed the foundations of my reasons to do this research and it is important to me to acknowledge and be accountable to the people of Kobakma in all my work, especially this dissertation. As a settler in Aotearoa New Zealand, and then a transplant in West Papua and the United States, I consider myself complicit in the colonialism of those lands. I also want to acknowledge that Northwestern, where I wrote this dissertation, benefits from the displacement of Native Nations that have called (and still call) the Chicagoland area home, and specifically sits on the homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations, as well as that of the Menominee, Miami, and Ho-Chunk Nations.

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## Introduction

.... if you

can write the ocean we will never be silenced.

— Craig Santos Perez, “The Pacific Written Tradition”

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, heavy rains swept down slopes destabilized by years of illegal logging in the Jayapura Regency on the northern coast of West Papua. Rivers diverted down streets, whole villages were swept off the side of a mountain. In the end, the official death toll was 113 people, with 94 people still missing, and many hundreds displaced. Groups of women gathered together in one hastily set up refugee camp. They started making *noken*, or *yum*, which are traditional net or string bags made throughout Papua, also known as *bilum* in Niu Gini. Some women did not know how to make the bags and so others, such as community leader Yepina Matuan,<sup>1</sup> taught them. Within these *noken* circles women made plans for recovery after the floods, including initiating housing projects and reestablishing income building. Naomi Sosa, a worker with anti-poverty nonprofit Papua Partners, posted a video to Facebook on 11 April 2019 about the *noken* circles. In the video, a woman called Omince (no last name given) describes how making the net bags in these groups activated hope and encouragement for her and other women. In an earlier Facebook post Sosa wrote that, as people wait for housing solutions, “the bag making and knitting continues while stories are told, lives weave together and hope and confidence grows. There are now 18 women’s groups and today they travelled from their various camps and homes to sit together and create” (6 April 2019).

In the immediate aftermath of a flood, knitting a bag may not seem like the most powerful action one can take. But these acts of bag-making facilitated sharing stories and knowledge. The

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<sup>1</sup> A leader with Yasumat, a community organization founded by the Papuan branch of the Evangelical Church of Indonesia (GIDI).

bags formed an integral part of these women's intellectual production as they planned solutions for their immediate crises. The noken-making circles not only became acts of survival; these gatherings expressed continuing stories that led the women toward concrete actions as they rebuilt their communities.

Later that year, in June 2019, Rosa Moiwend, a West Papuan human rights activist and writer, spoke at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association conference at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. She asked audience members to “create a wave in our ocean” that will carry Papua to freedom from Indonesian occupation. She specifically described what she calls “noken praxis” as a way to create relationships between Indigenous peoples that will lead to this oceanic wave, arguing that acts of “weaving our differences together” through story-making are integral for creating lasting and effective activist efforts across Oceania. In particular, she suggested that these acts of weaving are critical for incorporating Papua into the ocean named as the Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea Creole) term “Wansolwara” or “one salt water.” Oceania-wide Indigenous activist movements, such as the campaign for West Papuan independence, have popularized the expression Wansolwara over the past two decades. Also translated as “one ocean, one people,” the term increasingly appears on social media and other platforms denoting Oceania's enormous diversity and highlighting critical issues in the Pacific including climate change, militarization, and efforts to decolonize. Envisioned as “one salt water” the ocean is a place where Papua is mapped not as the easternmost province of Indonesia, but as land and people in deep kinship with other Indigenous lands and peoples in Oceania. The ocean makes these relations possible. Papua thus becomes imaginable as part of a decolonial future that is at once autonomous from *and* interconnected with other Indigenous peoples and their overlapping and distinct projects of self-determination.



These stories of noken and Wansolwara bring together the concerns that animate this dissertation, which shows that activism in the Pacific constructs and depends on narratives—on stories in their many varied forms. When I use the terms “story,” “storied,” and “story-making” to describe creative work within activist movements I draw from Indigenous theorists such as Jo-ann Archibald Q’um Q’um Xiiem (Stol:lo Nation), Jenny-Lee Morgan (Ngāti Mahuta, Waikao-Tainui), and Jason De Santolo (Garrwa, Barrunggam), who use Archibald Q’um Q’um Xiiem’s (2008) term “Indigenous storywork” to describe research approaches to Indigenous stories that “prioritiz[e] the Indigenous principles on which our stories are shared, respected, and treasured” and which show how such stories lead to “a fiercer reclamation of Indigenous meaning-making and lived experience” (6,13). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou) in the forward to the same collection explicitly uses the term “story making” to describe storywork saying that it “is as much about the principles of *making* stories [as it is about] the art of telling stories and...cultural understandings for *making* sense of stories” (xii, my emphasis). In the context of this dissertation, Indigenous protest literatures demonstrate how story-making involves creative as well as interpretive processes of expressing and understanding Indigenous experiences in the Pacific. Viewed through this lens, Moiwend’s concept of “noken praxis” gestures to the ways that activists take up material and embodied acts of story-making as critical for mapping the Pacific as Indigenous space. These acts highlight the deeply entangled nature of colonialism with issues such as climate change. They honor and make visible specificities, such as Papua’s complex and layered colonization, within wider networks and processes of meaning making, collaboration, and solidarity, within and beyond Oceania.

Inspired by the ways that activists and allies for West Papuan freedom such as Moiwend have taken up the term “Wansolwara” to envision the ocean as defined by Indigenous kinships,

this dissertation shows how the concept of “one salt water” delineates the storied work that visual art and literature does within Indigenous protest movements in the Pacific. Fijian-Tongan writer and activist Tagi Qolouvaki describes the connections between Wansolwara and story in this way:

Our wansolwara is seeded through story...From seed beginnings, great things will come. And so the art, the stories, the movements for a free West Papua, Hawai‘i, Guahan, French Polynesia, Kanaky, Aotearoa, American Samoa—a free Oceania—were seeded by our ancestors; they are bearing fruit. (“The Mana of Wansolwara,” n.p.)

Here, Qolouvaki links diverse Indigenous movements for decolonization across Oceania. She links them by their emphasis on the heritage and work of story at the heart of their movements and she implies that their futures are bound up together. Furthermore, she suggests that “wansolwara” itself—the vision of an ocean connecting various strands of Indigenous futurity, bearing the “fruit” of these movements—is a community created through story. Qolouvaki’s definition of “story” is broad, encompassing multiple art forms including different kinds of literature, as well as “dance, tattooing, quilting, or canoe-building and sailing” (n.p.). Her emphasis on stories as relational practices of creative exchange also calls to mind the term “tok stori,” a phrase specific to and prevalent across Melanesia, which, as Kabini Sanga (Solomon Islands) et. al. describe, refers not to just any kind of storytelling but is an active, explicitly social process of making meaning: “a Melanesian expression of commitment to togetherness manifest through engaging in *stori*, a shared narrative that dialogically constructs reality” (8).

This dissertation situates the storied activism coming out of Papua as just one vital part of networks of Indigenous-centered decolonial activism in the Pacific. My dissertation studies an

archive of novels, poetry, and performances published after 1990 that portray the ocean as a “one salt water” space of relations among Indigenous oceanic peoples, animals, plants, and other beings—and that use that space to forge solidarities and coalitions among Indigenous peoples throughout the Pacific as they face environmental and political crises. These protest literatures voice resistance against exploitation, and they also speak to audiences of Indigenous peoples and allies throughout the Pacific to mobilize for collaborative activism in order to build sustainable and just oceanic futures.

These collaborations include the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement and associated Indigenous demilitarization efforts, climate change awareness campaigns, and activism for West Papuan independence. My dissertation shows that these protest movements are also storied movements that convey a resistance politics built on prioritizing Indigenous systems for being in the world, as well as generating conversations between and among Indigenous peoples.

While not all Indigenous Pacific protest literatures in this archive use the word “Wansolwara,” they all invoke visions of the ocean to imagine decolonization as both local and global. They also all foreground the embodied, material storied *work* involved in forging communities of creative activism in the face of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. Indigenous protest literatures show how colonial nations and colonial stories have mapped the Pacific as a zone where those nations can occupy, extract, and destroy. Indigenous authors intervene in these portrayals by writing the ocean in terms of Indigenous perspectives and frameworks which foreground long continuums of lively resistance and persistent sovereignty in the face of imperialism’s and capitalism’s transoceanic catastrophes.

My dissertation, like the ocean itself, puts disparate locations in conversation with each other. Not all Euro-American maps classify these locations as Oceania or the Pacific Islands, but the histories of these locations are all entangled in the oceanic. Specifically, the primary works of fiction and poetry that I discuss originate from the Pacific Northwest (Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale* (2008)), Te Ao Mā'ohi/ French Polynesia (Chantal Spitz's *Island of Shattered Dreams* (1991, trans. 2007)), the Marshall Islands, Pohnpei, and Samoa (Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok* (2017), Emelihter Kihleng's *My Urohs* (2008), and Penina Ava Taesali's *Sourcing Siapo* (2016), respectively), Guåhan/Guam (Craig Santos Perez's *[From Unincorporated Territory]* series (2008-2017)), and Hawai'i and West Papua (*Wansolwara: Voices for West Papua* (2015)). I focus on literatures published since 1990, while also emphasizing that these literatures emerge from long histories of Indigenous story practices. By putting these texts in conversation with each other, I do not intend to conflate their different approaches, formal attributes, origins, and histories. Rather, I suggest that reading them together allows a specific vision of a heterogeneous Wansolwara to emerge. These Indigenous authors theorize "one salt water" modes of belonging in, mapping, and protecting the ocean, and ask what forms of Indigenous laws operate in it. I argue that writing the ocean as Wansolwara expands notions of what might be considered Indigenous spaces and networks, and, consequently, what creative acts of story are necessary for navigating decolonial possibilities.

My dissertation follows three interdependent threads shared across these literatures. First, in these works the ocean is a dynamic environmental space that metaphorically and literally constitutes both the islands of Oceania and its Indigenous peoples, and is central to their ecological and genealogical systems, livelihoods, and networks of kinship and exchange. Second, these literatures figure the ocean as not only an environmental site, but as an intellectual

and storied space. The ocean generates the islands, peoples, and networks of Oceania, and their histories and intellectual traditions including written, material, and embodied forms that express stories. The literary works this project gathers together consider both the ocean and the diverse stories it generates as necessary partners in theorizing Indigenous decolonization. Third, Indigenous protest literatures show that the ocean constitutes the islands and their peoples, requiring us to foreground the ocean in issues of territorialization and Indigenous belonging. That is, protest literatures represent the ocean as a space that has been exploited and traumatized by settler colonialism and other forms of imperialism and capitalism, while also framing the ocean as a site for and a means toward decolonization. By illuminating the oceanic relations established by these texts, I use “one salt water” as a concept that emphasizes the storied activist work of asserting interconnected Indigenous presences and persistence in the Pacific.

### *Oceanic Contexts*

The oceanic relations established by Indigenous protest literatures contrast against those of colonizing global hegemonic discourses. In 1994, after a series of conferences and treaties beginning in 1956, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) came into full effect. UNCLOS essentially became the dominant international legal framework for governing the seas, superseding the preexisting principle of freedom of the seas.<sup>2</sup> UNCLOS redrew the borders of nations and empires, regulating rights of movement, business and economy, and resource management within territorial waters, contiguous zones, exclusive

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<sup>2</sup> “Freedom of the seas” was a doctrine that ostensibly meant that the seas were a place open to navigation, and free from trade regulations and other limitations on commerce. But, as those such as Carl Schmitt acknowledge, this concept was inconsistently applied, begging questions of for whom the ocean is actually free for or free from.

economic zones, and archipelagic waters (*United Nations*).<sup>3</sup> Most significantly, UNCLOS established that nations have sovereignty over waters within 12 nautical miles of their coastline. Additionally, areas extending 200 nautical miles from those nations' coastlines fall within their exclusive economic zone, where each country maintains its own trade, research, and resource extraction regulations. UNCLOS also established international bodies for regulating laws of the sea. Even more recently, the push for and subsequent collapse of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which was set to be the largest free trade deal ever signed, exemplifies contested economic and geopolitical concerns about mobility, free trade, and regulation that characterize discussions about the Pacific.<sup>4</sup> Both UNCLOS and TPP demonstrate how the ocean is a space of environmental, political, economic, and historical interactions, and that those interactions are used by nations to extend their powers. They demonstrate the fluid, mobile nature of oceanic spaces, but also how those spaces are, as scholars such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Harris Feinsod show, shaped by regulation and controls such as military bases, ports, canals, trade and fishery agreements, and resource extraction laws ("Toward a Critical Ocean Studies" 26; 117). By expanding the transoceanic reach of colonial nations, the TPP and UNCLOS, as Chamorro writer Craig Santos Perez points out, are part of "territorializing and militarizing the Pacific," and, subsequently, territorializing and militarizing its Indigenous peoples ("Transterritorial" 621). They territorialize by laying militaristic and economic claim to the region, and through the narratives they circulate about the Pacific.

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<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea provides the full texts of the Convention articles online.

<sup>4</sup> The USA never ratified the TPP deal and thus other nations with Pacific investments later came together and signed their own deal in 2018, known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (James McBride and Andrew Chatzky).

Whether for colonial, economic, scientific, military, missionary, or tourism purposes, US and Eurocentric discourses of islands in the Pacific have long classed the islands as sites for Western knowledge and commodity production while also marking them as isolated and insular. The Pacific encompasses a vast stretch of different islands and archipelagoes, which the United Nations usually map as “the Pacific Islands,” or, more recently, “Oceania,” before further subdividing the region into the categories “Melanesia,” “Polynesia,” “Micronesia,” and “Australia and New Zealand.” Some island nations such as Tonga, Fiji, and Western Samoa are recognized by the United Nations as independent nation-states—considered “decolonized” when they achieved autonomy from colonial powers through official UN processes. Others, such as West Papua and Hawai‘i, are not afforded such recognition, and are generally considered parts of larger nation-states. Still others, such as Aotearoa New Zealand, are now independent nations, but settler colonialism perpetuates imperial legacies. Then there are those, such as Guåhan/Guam, that fall within a more ambiguous definition as territories of empires. A range of colonial histories and shifting layers of different empires affect these islands. They include countless Indigenous peoples, who are part of different communities, all with their own particular heritages and traditions.

The ways that colonial powers map these locations have enormous environmental, social, and political effects on Oceania’s populations and communities, including non-human ones.<sup>5</sup> Representations of islands as small, empty, and isolated and as places to be explored or used as research sites are directly linked to the ways they have been exploited by colonialism, exacerbating the destruction of their lands and contamination of their waters, and contributing to how world governments ignore Indigenous peoples and their calls for political recognition,

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<sup>5</sup> As Noelani Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (Kanaka Maoli) states, “Oceania is not just a geographic region but a political project” (90).

demilitarization, and urgent climate action. For example, narratives of islands as isolated, laboratory-like spaces directly enabled the US, France, and Britain to conduct nuclear experiments in the Pacific from 1946-1996—leading to ongoing displacement and devastating health effects for Indigenous peoples in places such as the Marshall Islands and Moruroa, and causing contamination which continues to spread through the ocean.<sup>6</sup> As I write this introduction, another immediate example of US occupation of island space for military use is unfolding. The USS Theodore Roosevelt, an aircraft carrier carrying 2700 sailors—114 who tested positive for the coronavirus Covid-19—has docked in Guåhan (Kate Lyons, 1 Apr. 2020). The Navy requested that the majority of those onboard be allowed to disembark in Guåhan to “reduce the spread of the outbreak onboard” (Lyons n.p.). Although the US military occupies a third of Guåhan’s land, those sailors will be housed in hotels within the civilian community, not on the military base. The Navy did not consider the virus containable onboard the ship so they chose the island as a space to quarantine the sailors. This action suggests that Guåhan is empty and available space, and ignores how the virus will spread from the sailors through Guåhan’s population and how it will affect their limited health infrastructure.

The colonial narratives of the ocean and its islands that make them available for nuclear testing and military bases also make them available for tourism and other forms of resource extraction. As Vernadette Gonzalez explains, tourism and militarism are “partner[s] in island exploitation as they both “naturalize and even obscure systematized acts of violence” in “a

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Grove’s *Green Imperialism* (1995) first delineated how perspectives of island spaces as isolated laboratory-like spaces lie at the origins of colonial concepts of research, including nuclear research, and environmentalism. Masahide Kato points out how Euro-American powers do not include nuclear tests and the harm they cause to Pacific populations in definitions of nuclear war, and therefore these powers participate in “an ongoing extermination process of the periphery [which] is blocked from constituting itself as a historical fact” (339). See also Paul Lyons’s *American Pacificism: Oceania in the US Imagination* (2005).



strategic and symbiotic convergence” (3,4).<sup>7</sup> Two recent examples of how this convergence plays out in narrative and material terms include the online vitriol directed at scholar Holly M. Barker when she published an article about US nuclear testing in Bikini Atoll as the real ocean context for TV show *SpongeBob SquarePants*’s “Bikini Bottom,” and the outright refusal of the US-based Manhattan Project Beer Company to change the name of their “Bikini Atoll” beer after the Marshall Islands government officially requested that they do so. Both of these examples show that many Americans remain completely unaware of the US’s devastating legacy in the Marshall Islands’ Bikini Atoll, where numerous nuclear weapons tests took place, and most associate the word “bikini” with the swimsuit. Once made aware of this history many Americans say they do not care, as they do not feel that their lives are connected to such violence (Barker; Jon Letman).<sup>8</sup>

I-Kiribati scholar Teresia Teaiwa writes that the erasure of Bikini history through tropical paradise narratives conveyed via images like the swimsuit is a deliberate, strategic form of national “forgetting” (“S/Pacific” 87). While the people of Bikini still cannot return home to their devastated land and waters, US companies profit off the image of island paradise. As scholars of militarism and tourism in the Pacific such as Teaiwa and Gonzalez have shown, “paradise” itself is “not a generic or static term” but rather “is conjured up through imaginative labor, sustained by such economic apparatuses as plantation and tourism industries and the hierarchical societies they engender, secured through the threat and reality of violence or the promise of rescue, and continually contested by the people who live there” (Gonzalez 8).

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<sup>7</sup> See also Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Chamorro)’s edited volume *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (2010), which uses the metaphor of currents to document the interdependent partnership of militarism and colonialism.

<sup>8</sup> Such indifference also belies the fact that the US mined uranium for the Manhattan Project tests from Laguna Pueblo lands in New Mexico, coopting and contaminating their lands. My own research on the Manhattan Project Beer Company’s website shows that not only did they refuse to change the name of their “Bikini Atoll” beer, but they are now selling it in two flavors: Raspberry and Coconut Key Lime.

Gonzalez's breakdown of "paradise" effectively demarcates how its construction lies at the intersections of narrative, material, and embodied processes. She shows how imperial and capitalist representations of oceans and their islands encode particular perspectives of and attitudes about them, enabling actions with very real repercussions. Once such hegemonic narratives deem the islands contaminated or exhausted, though, they depict them as longer useful, ignore the islands, and dispense of them.<sup>9</sup>

Transpacific and global oceanic studies, which study cultural and political flows and networks throughout the Pacific, have disrupted some colonial narratives of insularity, emptiness, and disposability. Such studies delineate the transoceanic influence of imperial and capitalist systems and show how different forms of power drive the regionalization of the ocean under terms including the "Asia-Pacific" and the "Pacific Rim."<sup>10</sup> In particular, oceanic emphases in Asian American Studies and Asian Studies usefully demonstrate that the Pacific is a dynamic, networked space, and a space of intense "cultural production," as scholars Arif Dirlik and Rob Wilson put it, highlighting the fact that "the invention and mapping of the Asia/ Pacific as a geographic, economic, political, and military entity" is critical in order for imperial powers to control that entity (7). At the same time, the networked aspects of the transpacific make it a

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Katerina Martina Teaiwa's *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (2014), as one case study of a colonial power (Australia) dispensing of the island of Banaba once exhausting its phosphate resources.

<sup>10</sup> Arif Dirlik's *What is In a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (1993) interrogates and troubles the notion of the Pacific Rim, in particular, as a term driven by hidden power structures, particularly those that obscure how such a term implicitly erases islands. Likewise, Rob Wilson's *Reimagining the American Pacific* (2000) examines processes of regionalization in the Pacific within the American imagination, showing how Pacific Rim discourse contributes to articulations of US transoceanic power formations. Also focusing on the US, David Palumbo-Liu reads the Pacific "as a particular locus of American development as a global power," foregrounding the way the US "manag[es] the modern" in Asia and the Pacific as a critical strategy of maintaining that power (by excluding Pacific and Asian peoples from the "modern") (17).

contested space, “in which the destiny of the Pacific is subject to competing interpretations made from different shores” (Yunte Huang 6).<sup>11</sup>

However, transpacific studies tend to foreground major economic and military powers and the relationships between them, such as China, Japan, and the United States. Transpacific and global oceanic studies do not usually consider Indigenous peoples, spaces, and intellectual practices as active and major players on the transpacific stage, even while the capitalist and imperial systems highlighted by transpacific studies exploit Indigenous bodies, labor, and resources. In addition, transpacific conversations tend to exclude Indigenous peoples and literatures when thinking about and privileging cosmopolitanism and global mobility. When such studies *do* consider the archipelagic regions and Indigenous peoples of Oceania, they usually center on their colonizers and/or focus on Sino-US relations within these systems, seeing the transpacific, as Yuan Shu and Donald E. Pease put it, as a “zone of economic cooperation” (6).<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, my project focuses on the perspectives of Indigenous peoples, spaces, and intellectual practices. These perspectives, I argue, seek to push past national, economic and colonial determinism to create a “one salt water” of relations among different Oceanic Indigenous peoples and texts that do not require colonial powers to make them visible. Indigenous peoples have always articulated their own heterogeneous perspectives of and

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<sup>11</sup> See also, for example, Richard Jean So’s *Transpacific Community* (2016) and Camilla Fojas and Rudy P. Gueverra Jr.’s *Transnational Crossroads: Remapping the Americas and the Pacific* (2012).

<sup>12</sup> A notable exception is the collection *Archipelagic American Studies* (2017), edited by Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, which centers the US but in a way that is useful for “decontinentalizing” American Studies, and which emphasizes how archipelagic formations can reveal dynamic forms of resistance in the Pacific to the US’s own archipelagic articulations. Lisa Yoneyama’s “Towards a Decolonial Genealogy of the Transpacific” (2017) also intervenes in transpacific studies’ tendency to overlook settler colonial dynamics, writing that “a transpacific designation must remain haunted by the often-disavowed predicaments of the settler empire” (479). Most recently, Aimee Bahng and Erin Suzuki, as well as Tina Chen, reevaluate the field of Asian American, American, and Asian studies through the lenses of Indigenous, Oceanic, and Pacific studies to analyze how such studies might intervene in settler colonial definitions of Asian American and Pacific Islander relations, and, as Chen puts it “map the uneven terrain of the transpacific” (1).

engagements with the ocean and their places in it, as scholars such as Alice Te Punga Somerville (Te Ātiawa) assert. “*We have already been here*, thinking about oceans and how to think with them” she writes, rejecting the idea that oceanic studies began with scholarship on the Atlantic (“Where Oceans” 28, original emphasis). A key text in Indigenous scholarship on the ocean is Samoan writer and critic Albert Wendt’s 1976 article “Towards a New Oceania.” This article became an ur-text for Oceania studies, creating a vision of Oceania that rejected the colonial nomenclature of “Pacific Islands” in order to privilege Indigenous histories and creative expressions. Taking up the term “Oceania” and Wendt’s call to center Indigenous perspectives of the ocean, Tongan-Fijian scholar Epeli Hau’ofa describes his vision of the New Oceania as “a sea of islands” in order to refuse colonially-centric maps of the Pacific (31). “There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands’,” Hau’ofa argues (31). Pacific islands portrayed as “islands in a far sea” “denotes small areas of land sitting atop submerged reefs or seamounts” (32). By contrast, the “sea of islands” that is Oceania “denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants” (32). The former implies that the islands are far away and that what happens to them does not affect the rest of the world while the latter prioritizes the islands and a sense that the ocean is full of them, rather than primarily a vast empty space.

Hau’ofa remaps the Pacific and rejects colonial representations of isolation and smallness by suggesting that the ocean connects Indigenous peoples and their ecologies. Indigenous people participate in acts of “world enlargement” that went on well before the European “discovery” of the islands, and these acts enabled relationships between oceanic communities beyond economic interpretations of network and exchange (30). Hau’ofa’s concept of Oceania as a place of social networks and entanglements that lead to such “enlargement” includes land and sea areas, but also

the heavens and underworld that draw on the “myths, legends, and oral traditions, indeed the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania” (31).

Building from Hau‘ofa, I argue that Indigenous protest literatures from the Pacific ask questions about what belonging in the “New Oceania” looks like as militarism, capitalism, and tourism increasingly map and occupy the ocean in different ways, but also as human and nonhuman relationships with the ocean shift with climate change. In a time when scientists see island nations like Kiribati, for example, as bellwethers for climate change’s impacts, and news outlets like the *Washington Post* proclaim it will soon be “wiped from the map” by rising sea levels, if the ocean is a space of such connections then what happens in Kiribati—positive as well as negative—will affect other places, including colonial nations (Anoté Tong and Matthieu Rytz). By remapping colonial understandings of the ocean Hau‘ofa shows that, for the people of the “sea of islands,” issues of environmental and social justice are bound up together, and he suggests that changing our perspectives of the ocean and its islands by changing our representations of them can also lead to solutions to face the ocean’s specific environmental challenges that address their root causes in exploitation.

I follow Indigenous Pacific activist movements in focusing on how the ocean is a site of both environmental destruction *and* decolonial potential. As Indigenous activist movements in the Pacific grapple with the ocean as a place of exploitation and uneven power relations on one hand, and a place of belonging and heritage on the other, they have foregrounded the ocean as Indigenous space on the international stage since at least the 1970s, when the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement (NFIP) began in Fiji. Visions of Indigenous Oceanic interconnection emerged from decolonization movements, especially the NFIP, as Fijian scholar Tracey Banivanua Mar delineates. Teresia Teawia, a pivotal figure for NFIP and West Papuan

independence campaigns continually invoked the ocean as a place of shared heritage as she advocated for activist solidarities predicated on Indigenous oceanic relationships, saying that “we sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood” (qtd. in Hau‘ofa, 41). “We” in this phrase refers to Indigenous peoples of Oceania.

Literary scholar Chadwick Allen (Chickasaw) extends terms used to describe such interconnections by calling them “trans-Indigenous,” as a way to emphasize relationships among Indigenous peoples and the role of literature in fostering those relationships.<sup>13</sup> Allen reads Indigenous literatures through this “trans” lens to honor “the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global.” He thus illuminates methods of reading Indigenous literatures in ways that are “together (yet) *distinct*” (*Trans-Indigenous* xix, xiii, original emphasis). His approach reads Indigenous literatures and art in terms of their kinships with each other, and also applies to methods of talking about potential solidarities, coalitions, and kinships between worldwide Indigenous peoples that do not erase local particularities. Notions of global Indigeneity are, after all, as Kanaka Maoli scholar David Chang argues, an ancient conversation, even if colonial discourses obscure or ignore these conversations (229). Allen’s notion of the “trans-Indigenous” does not simply offer another term for “multicultural,” but seeks instead to account for uneven power relations and their different forms of intersection within such “trans” networks. He does this by positioning trans-Indigenous conversations and networks as expressions of Indigenous ontologies and laws, working to reestablish connections and obligations between human, animal, and land as a way of restoring Indigenous sovereignties. Viewed through an oceanic lens, the violence of imperialism and its

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<sup>13</sup> Hsinya Huang and Clara Shu-Chun Chang, in their collection *Aspects of Transnational and Indigenous Cultures* (2014), similarly argue that notions of trans-Indigeneity are more appropriate than transnationality in the Pacific (xvi), and an essay by Allen (2012) extends his arguments on trans-Indigeneity to include Native American Studies (“A Transnational Native American Studies?”).

linked traumas of capitalism and environmental damage are transnational and transoceanic phenomena. Subsequently, Indigenous protest movements show that modes of persistence and possibilities of belonging are transoceanic and trans-Indigenous.<sup>14</sup>

A trans-Indigenous vision of the Pacific requires notions of decolonization that are not limited to the boundaries of UN defined nation-states. The first conference of the NFIP (1975), while held in Fiji, was organized to resist French testing in Moruroa. The conference's emphasis on demilitarization was inseparable from its emphasis on decolonization. This conference led to the Pohnpei Charter (1978)—a charter delineating international Indigenous rights (Mar 3). This charter was formative in the development of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), which, as Mar describes “put the Pacific, or Oceania, at the forefront, not lagging in the slipstream, of the process of un-colonizing peoples” (3). At the same time, Mar documents how transnational movements for Indigenous decolonization found the UN's emphasis on a “program of decolonization through nation-making” too limiting and dependent on colonial nation-state frameworks of recognition for many Indigenous peoples in the Pacific (182). Such frameworks too often, as J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) observes in the Hawaiian context, limit “available categories for acknowledging [Indigenous] distinctiveness” and self-determination (3). Indigenous peoples thus forge transpacific, trans-Indigenous collaborations and alliances in order to engage in acts of decolonization as ongoing processes,

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<sup>14</sup> By applying a “trans” lens I also take cues from scholars such as Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall (Kanaka Maoli), and Georganne Nordstrom, who advocate for discussing Indigenous Pacific intellectual works without using terms such as “other,” “alternative,” and “minority,” because those terms “reinforce a hierarchy of rhetorics and correspondingly of cultures” (5). They instead find the Kanaka Maoli term “huihui” to be an effective metaphor for talking about different Indigenous Pacific intellectual and artistic works together in ways that reflect the Pacific as “a community” with “a fabric woven together with stories” (9-10). “Huihui” roughly translates as an act of “pooling” or “gathering,” not in order to homogenize those stories, but in order to view them like the formation of “constellations in the sky” or like the multiplicity and diversity of the ocean (2). In my project I, too, “gather” or “pool” stories in order to illuminate the trans-Indigenous relations forged by literary and artistic protest works of Oceania.

not something that is arrived at fully formed—or, as Mar puts it, they foreground “daily decolonization” that must account for heterogeneous accounts of Indigeneity and colonization, diaspora and globalization (225).

My project takes up the term Wansolwara, or “one salt water,” to articulate how these decolonization movements imagine decolonization as a local but also as a transoceanic, trans-Indigenous project. Decolonization is not an end point, but a process. Indigenous Oceanic activist movements show that local acts of decolonization are ultimately connected to wider “one salt water” acts because modes of dispossession and the environmental ramifications of imperialism and capitalism are not identical across different spaces, but *are* interconnected. These activist movements also show that it is important to look at the ocean specifically when thinking about decolonization in Oceania. It is the ocean, containing and constituting lands, rather than the land or islands on their own that is central to trans-Indigenous traumas as well as trans-Indigenous decolonial possibilities. The ocean is central because everything is entangled with it—including Indigeneity. Decolonization in the Pacific is something that affects oceanic spaces as well as land spaces and is not something that simply occurs when a colonial power relinquishes governance and possession of land. Hau‘ofa describes the ocean as “our most powerful metaphor” (58), but the work of asserting, creating, and maintaining Indigenous relationships that make decolonization possible in “one salt water” are not metaphorical, just as Eve Tuck (Unangax, Aleut) and K. Wayne Yang assert that “decolonization is not a metaphor” and therefore “specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life” (21).

It might be tempting to liken this emphasis on the ocean as a space of Indigenous connection and decolonization to other models of environmental conservationism or expressions of “the ocean as common heritage” such as Elisabeth Mann Borgese’s concept of a “Blue



Revolution” (DeLoughrey *Roots and Routes* 37). However, DeLoughrey points out that Borgese’s Blue Revolution, which envisions ocean governance predicated on how the ocean connects people, is a model that tends to erase violent, nonconsensual, and unequal power relations (41). This erasure often happens in a guise of universality, that, as Perez demarcates, increasingly also appears in environmentalist movements that do not center Indigenous peoples (“Transterritorial”).<sup>15</sup> While climate change accelerates the ecological consequences of layers of colonialism and capitalism in the Pacific, Perez cautions against “rhetoric[s] of ocean conservation” predicated on a Blue Revolution model, which establishes spaces such as marine national monuments while erasing Indigenous claims to oceanic belonging (621).<sup>16</sup> DeLoughrey likewise reminds scholars of oceanic studies to also be critically aware of what she calls a “transoceanic naval literacy” at work in globalization discourses, including that of the US military, which serves to consolidate forms of “hydro-power” (“Toward a Critical Ocean” 24, 26). This kind of literacy, DeLoughrey reveals, makes specific use of the ocean’s “fluidity, mobility, adaptability, and flux—all terms associated with neoliberal globalization regimes as well as the oceanic or blue humanities” (25). In other words, when analyzing and participating in discourses regarding “epistemologies and ontologies of the sea,” it is crucial to also attend to networks of power entangled in and forming their own literacies of the sea in order to account for the ways these discourses work to decenter Indigenous perspectives (25). For DeLoughrey,

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<sup>15</sup> For, “Native peoples,” writes Allen, “know too well that the abstract concept of *together equal* is easily turned against the political interests of specific individuals, communities, and nations and various forms of coalition” (xiii-xiv).

<sup>16</sup> Perez’s point also disavows notions of the ocean as a “commons,” as Rob Wilson puts it, as a “framework for the forging of ecological solidarity,” as these notions disregard particular traumas and fall into fallacies of the ocean as an accessible space for all (“Towards an Ecopoetics of Oceania” 213, 228). Wansolwara is also not a “Pan-Oceania identity,” in terms of how scholars such as Tarcisius Kabutaulaka (Solomon Islands) describe concepts like the “Pacific Way,” which emerged from public policy discourse in Fiji in the 1970s (“Re-Presenting Melanesia” 125). Kabutaulaka notes that, while the Pacific Way focused on public policy ideas often described as “anticolonial and representing Oceania as a region with similar cultures that is politically united,” the concept flattens differences, and tends to privilege Polynesian peoples and causes over Melanesian—and, I would add, Micronesian—ones (125).

“decolonizing genre,” or the way scholars themselves tell and analyze stories of the ocean, it is therefore critical for also decolonizing the ocean and oceanic studies. It is not enough to simply imagine Oceania as “a site of transpacific solidarity” without delineating how its violences manifest unevenly (Wilson “Towards an Ecopoetics” 214).

Pohnpeian scholar Vicente Diaz also cautions researchers of Oceania to not let “the Indigenous” be lost in the “trans-Indigenous” ocean (“Trans-Indigeneity” n.p.). In order to avoid such forms of erasure, he posits that scholars learn from Indigenous modes of navigation, governed by understanding one’s positionality in relation to specificities of place, knowledge, and historical and cultural contexts (“Trans-Indigeneity” n.p.). The entities used to articulate one’s position—such as islands and stars—are “on the move,” dynamic rather than static.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the contexts of our positions are not static either. Diaz, along with Kauanui warns against celebrations of the ocean’s mobility and fluidity at the expense of dynamic specificities or in place of critiquing how empire disrupts and erases Indigenous specificities through its own narratives of ocean relation (“Native Pacific Cultural Studies” 317). A trans-Indigenous methodology must account for uneven and hierarchical power relations and their different forms of intersection within “trans” networks, as they focus on particularities at local as well as global scales.

Indigenous protest literatures of Oceania articulate their positionality within specific community contexts, while prioritizing relationships with the ocean. They demonstrate that that the ocean creates particularities of ecology, story, place, and decolonization, and that their islands and their peoples participate in a multiplicity of networks and conversations, that are necessarily multi-vocal, allow room for diverse temporalities, are inflected by uneven power

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<sup>17</sup> See also Diaz, “Voyaging for Anti-Colonial Recovery” (2011), on the concept of *etak*, or moving islands that a Pohnpeian navigator uses to orient himself in the sea.

relations, and contain a variety of sometimes collaborating, sometime competing agents. Thus my approach to these literatures follows Diaz's lead to illuminate their heterogeneity within the trans-Indigenous ocean.

I argue that Oceanic Indigenous protest literatures theorize the "repatriation of Indigenous land and life" by repatriating the ocean and the page as a trans-Indigenous space (Tuck and Yang 21). This does not mean that these protest literatures desire a nostalgic return to a pre-colonial past. Instead, they actively theorize what decolonization as repatriation can look like across the diverse Pacific by unsettling colonial discourses of the ocean and re-inscribing trans-Indigenous experiences and presences back in the ocean and on the page. Indigenous protest literatures must also consider colonialism's legacies and after-effects on Indigenous peoples, such as internal colonization. What does decolonization look like in American Samoa, or Hawai'i, where no treaties have been signed? What about in West Papua or Guåhan, which have been through occupation under several different empires, and are still not offered treaties of any kind? What does decolonization look like when foreign investors buy up island and ocean space for the purposes of tourism and "development"? How do Indigenous peoples maintain access to their ocean resources and livelihoods when capitalism depletes fish stocks and creates garbage patches, and rising sea levels as a result of climate change mean that they can no longer farm or even stay on their traditional homelands? What does decolonization as environmental justice look like when some oceanic conservation efforts further disenfranchise Indigenous peoples? We might also think about decolonization in terms of the right to not submit to genome mapping, or the right to harvest one's traditional foods, or to conduct one's traditional activities such as whale hunting. Indigenous protest literatures do not collapse definitions of decolonization but expand them, tying questions and theories of decolonization through issues of belonging and

territorialization back to the ocean, invested in representations and epistemologies of the ocean that include and go beyond what is regionalized as Oceania today.

I contribute to Oceania Studies, Indigenous Studies, and recent discourses of “hydro-criticism,” by articulating how, read together, Indigenous Pacific protest literatures show that imagining and enacting alternatives to colonial systems depends on stories.<sup>18</sup> As a story-centered term that foregrounds the ocean, Wansolwara does not replace or compete with the term Oceania, but is useful to illuminate the theoretical and political work enacted by protest texts circulating in Oceania as they map the ocean as a space of trans-Indigenous conversations and collaborations. These literatures reveal currents of storied activism and material and embodied intellectual production that defy imperially defined regions, while also not erasing the distinct contexts from which they emerge. In these ways, the protest literatures emphasize “one salt water” as a site of decolonial collaborations and possibilities while also privileging the specificities and differences of particular Indigenous epistemologies, places, intellectual traditions, and histories. Through this reading, my dissertation shows how Indigenous protest literatures remap existing global oceanic, transpacific, and Indigenous studies discourses of the Pacific.

### *The Storied Ocean*

As they confront the ocean’s histories of misrepresentation, occupation, and extraction, Indigenous protest literatures map the Pacific as an ecologically dynamic zone of story and

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<sup>18</sup> I take the term “hydro-criticism” from the *English Language Notes* issue on *Hydro-Criticism* (2019), whose editor Laura Winkiel borrows it from contributor Isabel Hofmeyr’s term “hydrocolonialism.” Hofmeyr describes hydrocolonialism as “(1) colonization by way of water (various forms of maritime imperialism), (2) colonization of water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans), and (3) a colony on (or in) water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island)” (13).

community in order to make visible colonial impacts and bring attention to, advocate for, and theorize solutions for ongoing oceanic challenges—particularly challenges of climate change and militarization. These perspectives, expressed through different forms of story, represent the ocean as ancestor as well as source of sustenance. The ocean can create but can also destroy, can circulate and connect, but can also separate and isolate. It contains life, but also pollutants, it can inscribe and archive but also erase. Most significantly, the ocean in protest literatures of Oceania is intimately entangled with Indigenous people’s different experiences of decolonization, just as it is entangled with the creation of their lands, and is not only crossed and marked by history, cultures, time, but creatively constitutes history, cultures, and time. It is thus a storied space as well. If as Qolouvaki puts it, “one salt water” is “seeded with story,” then my dissertation looks at the composition and growth of those seeds (“The Mana” n.p.). These seeds map “one salt water” not as a regional description but as a storied space of trans-Indigenous, transoceanic protest that imagines local as well as global forms of Indigenous self-determination over their histories, presents, and futures.

My attention to the ocean as a creative space, as opposed to merely a contact zone, builds on the work of foundational scholars of Oceanic studies, including Teaiwa, Hau’ofa, Wendt, and Te Punga Somerville, by foregrounding the storied work of protest at the core of imagining decolonization in the Pacific, and showing that the process of decolonizing the ocean is not limited to what colonial discourses commonly regionalize as Oceania. In “Towards a New Oceania,” Wendt not only expressed a new regional vision of the ocean, but a new literary vision. He argued that literature is integral to the realization of the New Oceania and he gathered together the names of authors across Oceania, uniting them when previously scholars predominantly read them in the context of colonizing literary traditions. Citing Māori poet Hone

Tuwhare, Wendt argues that Indigenous literatures and other forms of art are necessary in order to “dream good dreams again” and that Indigenous literatures are already “creating a new Oceania” by recording the traumas of colonialism and by foregrounding their own histories and contemporary moments (Tuwhare qtd. 51, Wendt 60). Literatures enable hopeful Oceanic futures, for Wendt. Te Punga Somerville affirms this assertion, and emphasizes the multiplicity of stories that “produce” our understandings of the ocean, and, therefore, its futures: “We [all people] produce oceans through names, anthologies, maps, reading lists, bookshop shelves, blog posts, festivals, activist networks, scientific research, creative exchanges, genealogies,” she writes. “We also produce oceans by tracing their effects: weather patterns, coastal erosion, tsunamis, garbage patches, schools of fish, tides” (“Where Oceans” 30). In this passage, Te Punga Somerville suggests that people, including non-Indigenous people, write the ocean, but we also produce it through other forms of documentation and record, and through the ways we gather together and arrange those forms of documentation, categorize them, and make them public (or not). She therefore also shows that non-literary texts, such as government sources and statistics, as well as ones that are considered literary, all tell stories that shape and have consequences for how people engage with the ocean. Therefore, decolonizing the ocean is not just environmental work, but storied work.

Indigenous protest literatures of Oceania reveal that the work of story is an ongoing material and embodied process of active Indigenous presence and persistence. This work is intimately tied to the work of mapping or repatriating “one salt water” as a trans-Indigenous space. These Indigenous authors envision the page as “an excerpt of the ocean”, as Perez puts it, or the site upon which creative work is inscribed or performed (“On Writing” n.p.). That is, the page is part of the ocean and its ecologies—a space where readers can see the tensions and collaborations

within these ecologies play out. Perez's work overtly frames *poetics as theory*—as wansolwara *Oceanic* theory and *decolonial* theory—by re-placing Indigenous peoples in the ocean and in the page, where colonial narratives of the ocean attempt to erase them. In his article “On Writing from the New Oceania,” Perez lays out a kind of Oceanic poetic manifesto. For Perez, to “write Oceanic” is to imagine an oceanic link between environments and texts. Like the ocean, “the blank page, then, is never truly blank.... Each word is an island. The visible part of the word is its textual body; the invisible part of the word is the submerged mountain of meaning” (n.p.). By imagining the ocean as a page upon which creative work is inscribed, Perez's definition of “writing” and the “page” is heterogeneous and expansive, like Qolouvaki's expansive approach to “story.” In Perez's theory of an Oceanic poetics, land is not separable from the ocean, stories are “vessels,” and archipelagoes move and expand. Perez's writing and reading practices are predicated on both the Oceanic and the storied as deeply interconnected, dynamic bodies or systems that are affected by what is below the surface as well as what is above, despite attempts to isolate them through empire (n.p.). For Perez, text and ecologies, and “creative” work and “critical” or theoretical work, are enmeshed.

Indigenous authors of Oceania, like Te Punga Somerville and Perez, offer practices of story-making that demonstrate enmeshment between the page and the ocean, the creative and the theoretical. For example, poet and activist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner constructed her Master's thesis by following the model of a Marshallese stickchart, or navigation tool, using it to navigate the “wave patterns,” materiality, and diversity of Marshallese literatures in oral, written, and visual forms (“A History” 25, 26). Indigenous protest literatures formally emphasize the materiality of story, asking readers, including fellow Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous allies, to engage in reading and writing practices that do not collapse specifics and are necessarily

interdisciplinary. They frame literary labor as theory itself, as Penina Ava Taesali does when she suggests in her collection *Sourcing Siapo* that writing poems extends her family's work of making bark cloth. For her, making bark cloth and making poems are critical methods of theorizing how to maintain family kinships while living in forced diaspora.

If the page and the ocean are both sites of expression and creative connection that foreground Indigenous persistence, then they are both also spaces in which the work of decolonization is enacted. That is, if the ocean is a space central to decolonization efforts, then so is the page or site of story. The ocean is a heterogeneous place of community, circulation, and identity, and Indigenous protest literatures are similarly heterogeneous. These protest literatures do not follow colonial literacy hierarchies but instead illuminate what scholars such as Matt Cohen and Jeffrey Glover define as diverse “mediascapes,” that “are made up of both a set of images and stories about people...and the means by which those images or stories are transmitted,” and which portray “inscription as happening, and as being received, in relation to multiple, sometimes simultaneous modes of communication” (5, 2).<sup>19</sup> That is, Indigenous protest literatures draw on and make visible diverse worlds of creative exchange and meaning making processes that compel modes of analysis that make room for reading objects such as baskets, bark cloth, noken, and other creative forms through frameworks of story.

My project thus builds on scholarship on alphabetic as well as non-alphabetic Indigenous textualities and literacies. This scholarship includes work by Emelihter Kihleng (Pohnpei), Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), and Chris Teuton (Cherokee Nation), who show how colonial powers have frequently used the category of literature to exclude Indigenous peoples and their artistic works from concepts of literacy, and suggest that readers reconsider

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<sup>19</sup> Cohen and Glover borrow the term “mediascape” from Arjun Appadurai.



colonial literary frameworks when approaching Indigenous literatures, in much the same ways that Hau‘ofa and Wendt ask that we reconsider colonial modes of mapping Oceania. In an article highlighting visual aspects of Pacific art in order to emphasize the “visual roots” of literature from Oceania, Teresia Teaiwa argues “for a theory of the polygenesis of Pacific literature” (“Reclaiming the Visual” 731). While colonially centered discussions of Pacific literatures primarily focus on oral traditions vs. post-contact forms of print and alphabetic writing systems, Teaiwa’s “polygenesis” theory rejects this binary, and brings forms she reads as “visual,” such as kapa, tattooing, and carving, into the space of literary analysis. She sees literature in Oceania as part of webs of long-standing intellectual traditions that include the oral alongside diverse forms of inscription such as visual art. In this way, she reads sources of contemporary Pacific literatures stemming from within Oceania itself, not imposed from outside.

At the same time, I heed Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice who encourages scholars to expand their definitions of the literary when engaging with Indigenous literatures, while also being “careful [to] understand that these other sorts of texts aren’t only diverse literary forms, but that they perform other kinds of vital functions in their respective cultures, many of them ceremonial, ritual, and spiritual” (*Why Indigenous Literatures* 23). Attending to these functions in my analysis is part of doing the positionality work that Diaz calls for, and I do this work in creative as well as critical contexts.

By insisting on the relations among writing, material forms like bark cloth, and the ocean, Indigenous protest literatures emphasize the frictional as well as fluid qualities of the transpacific ecologies in which they participate, showing that the destruction and coercive effects of imperialism on the ocean cannot be separated from the history of racialized and gendered capitalism that accompany it. Indigenous protest literatures navigate, make visible, and refuse

environmental narratives that draw on and exploit the ocean's fluidity without addressing its colonial structures and the material realities of its impacts.<sup>20</sup> These impacts include issues of diaspora, anti-blackness, discrimination against women, and racism such as anti-Micronesian prejudice. Indigenous protest literatures position their communities' knowledge as resistance and show how this knowledge is integral to creating the kinds of kinships that lead to decolonial environmental justice that can address such impacts. Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) writes that for Indigenous peoples, "the renewal of their knowledge systems" is critical in this time of climate change for imagining futures that are "guided by our reflection on our ancestors' perspectives and on our desire to be good ancestors ourselves to future generations" ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157, 160). By using literature as a form of "renewal," Indigenous activist authors weave distinct ecological, genealogical, and textual kinships that account for transoceanic violences from ongoing oppressive projects while also looking towards dynamic decolonial community futures.

The kinships these literatures envision might best be understood as multi-being communities or ecologies. I use the term "multi-being," rather than the term "multispecies," as Indigenous scholars such as Smith caution against using "species" when including humans in discussions of ecologies because Indigenous peoples and people of color have so often been excluded from the human in colonial discourses (*Decolonizing Methodologies* 26). While ecocritic Ursula K. Heise does use the term "multispecies" to describe the ecological communities she envisions, she argues that Indigenous literatures are critical for what she calls "more-than-human diplomacy" that can enable just futures (167, 199). For her, literature shows

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<sup>20</sup> Indigenous Studies scholars such as Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) show that environmental movements that do not account for colonial and racist histories, or that fail to acknowledge nuanced Indigenous struggles for environmental justice, are inadequate movements because they do not prioritize decolonization.

that achieving multi-being environmental justice is not just a scientific issue, but one of cultural production. At the same time, scholars such as Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate), remind us that Indigenous peoples “never forgot the interrelatedness of all things,” and that they already foreground multi-being kinships as a given (“Beyond the Life” 180). Emphasizing such kinships “challenge[s] the hierarchies of life” present in much non-Indigenous environmental discourse and intervenes in the ways that colonialism “manages Indigenous lives and nonhuman relations” (181).<sup>21</sup>

These multi-being kinships exist at multiple scales—as small as the size of a family, or as large as oceanic diaspora. The “one salt water” conception at the heart of Indigenous protest literatures of Oceania also facilitates Oceanic versions of Justice’s concept of “nationhood,” which, as he explains, depends on Indigenous peoplehood as kinship. Justice argues that “Indigenous nationhood is more than simple political independence or the exercise of a distinctive cultural identity; it is also an understanding of a common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web of kinship rights *and* responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (*Our Fire* 24). In Justice’s interpretation, kinship is an action. His description effectively demarcates intersections of narrative, and material and embodied conditions of the trans-Indigenous multi-being, and multi-spatial kinship structures that Indigenous protest literatures set up as necessary for decolonial futures. That is, these literatures avow that decolonization requires the repatriation and affirmation of such kinships across Wansolwara,

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<sup>21</sup> See also DeLoughrey who points out that the “multispecies and ontological turn is new to Anthropocene discourse,” but not in Indigenous literatures (*Allegories* 30). Additionally, Theresa Shewry writes about the ways that multi-being communities, including spirit beings, create frameworks for hope in Pacific literatures. For Shewry, the multi-being community does not preclude possibilities of violence, exploitation, or exclusion, but does offer avenues for articulating grief, loss, and trauma in ways that still anticipate future relationships that might be more sustainable.

creating what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) refers to as “networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with other humans and nonhumans radically imagining their ways out of domination” (10).

If colonial and capitalist driven ecological damage, such as plastic pollution and nuclear contamination, create what Allen calls a “crisis of kinship,” disrupting Indigenous cosmologies and storied frameworks, Indigenous protest literatures respond to these crises by invoking and creating multi-being ocean kinships that represent and enact processes of decolonization, including environmental justice efforts, as collaborative processes (*Trans-Indigenous* 193). By forging such kinships, Indigenous protest literatures of Oceania challenge readers to imagine and enact decolonization in diverse ways. They theorize what effective protest and collaboration for decolonial communities looks like, in ways that also attend to nuance and specifics. Qolouvakaki writes, “we grieve, heal, and imagine decolonial possibilities through activist art/story, in community” (n.p.). By showing how Indigenous protest literatures theorize the ocean as a storied space, my dissertation compels questions about the connections between environmental spaces, knowledge, and narrative, and it shows that persisting in and decolonizing Wansolwara space is also connected to the decolonization possibilities of story. Reading Indigenous Oceanic writers together shows that their protest literatures are not only responses to colonialism, but that they create coalitions of ocean-centered activism that privilege Indigenous narratives in transnational networks of the Pacific. This dissertation, therefore, maps out a literary activist history that does not diminish the traumatic legacies of ongoing imperial, settler colonial, and capitalist violences, but offers textually and ecologically anchored storied possibilities for Indigenous futures.

*Chapter Outlines*

Challenging the ways literary studies divide Indigenous literatures along the lines by which imperialism divides up Indigenous places, my first chapter pairs a novel from the Pacific Northwest, Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale* (2008), and Mā'ohi writer Chantal Spitz's *L'Ile des rêves écrasés / Island of Shattered Dreams* (1991, trans. into English 2007), to show that they each reassert Indigenous cartographies of oceanic relation in the face of transoceanic militarism. Spitz protests nuclear testing in French Polynesia by revising imperial maps that depict islands as isolated and available for exploitation. Instead, she represents the ocean as a living and active Indigenous archive, a locus of creation, and a space of ongoing systems of trans-Indigenous relations that vitally engages the islands of French Polynesia. Comparably, Hogan's (Chickasaw) novel portrays the Pacific Northwest and Vietnam as linked through sets of relations generated and facilitated through the ocean. These relations make visible how Indigenous peoples and lands in the Pacific Northwest and those in and near Vietnam all experience American imperialism but forge transoceanic kinships that evade an imperial gaze.

Imperial forces make use of transoceanic networks themselves, so my second chapter takes up Craig Santos Perez's ongoing poetic series, *[From Unincorporated Territory]* (2010-2017) to show how he critiques universalizing celebrations of transpacific relationality while also delineating an Indigenous-centered vision of transpacific community as "an ocean of stories." Focusing primarily on his third and fourth books in the series, *[Guma ']* (2014) and *[Lukao]* (2017), I establish that, first, he represents the commodification of the ocean and its islands by epitomizing globalization through the meat product, SPAM, which in his works becomes a metaphor for the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and places like Guåhan/Guam. Second, he envisions transpacific connections that resituate the ocean as a site of reparative activist poetics,

made possible by the ocean's flows and networks. The four books in Perez's series are, like Oceania itself, intimately interrelated, intra-textual and inter-textual, hyperaware of their connectedness to other writers and of Guåhan's links to Pacific networks. Perez connects Guåhan's colonization to that of other peoples across the Pacific and beyond, suggesting that the island's decolonization must be connected to decolonizing efforts elsewhere, too. Consequently, Perez's poems depict a world of contested, specifically oceanic, sovereignties, activating and invested in intersecting conversations between Indigenous peoples.

My first two chapters foreground concepts of mapping "one salt water" in ways that make visible colonial cartographies as well as trans-Indigenous ones. My first chapter shows how these colonial cartographies, such as those shaped by militarization, force transoceanic connections between diverse Indigenous peoples, and how, at the same time, those communities express their own forms of oceanic kinships not limited by the definitions of colonialism. My second chapter demonstrates the difficulties of navigating between transpacific forces that exploit and those that nourish while living in militarized seas.

My third and fourth chapters specifically foreground the material, embodied, and community work of protest as story-making in the Pacific. My third chapter turns to poetic responses to climate change, racism, and neoliberal efforts to manage or "develop" Oceania. I read the citational, circulatory, and archival inflections of three poetry collections, *My Urohs* (2008) by Emelihter Kihleng (Pohnpei), *Sourcing Siapo* (2016) by Penina Ava Taesali (Samoa), and *Iep Jāltok* (2017) by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (Marshall Islands). These authors invoke the material heritages of their poetics to connect writing to transpacific genealogies of creative textile and fiber practices: embroidered skirts, bark cloth, and baskets. These practices emphasize particularly women-centered forms of creative story-making that persist despite climate change,

ongoing military and neoliberal development, and difficulties of living in diaspora. The poets portray material traditions as flexible, innovative practices that participate in long continuums of Indigenous Pacific women's intellectual and textual production. In these ways, they center Indigenous women's technologies and histories in visions of the transpacific and reveal that challenging climate change, racism, and capitalism in Oceania, like challenging nuclear testing, is not just environmental and political labor, but also textual, citational, and archival labor.

My fourth chapter brings together my dissertation's main threads to examine trans-Indigenous protest for and with West Papua. I begin and end this dissertation with West Papua because the Oceania-wide campaign for Papuan freedom from Indonesian occupation is highly recognizable as a trans-Indigenous movement to Papuans and non-Papuan Indigenous allies, while simultaneously existing as an invisible struggle in the vast majority of non-Indigenous discourses about the Pacific. Its severance from what is generally categorized as Oceania is a direct consequence of colonial forms of mapping and Papuans have repeatedly invoked kinships with other Indigenous peoples from Oceania as justification for their decolonization. I read the poems from a special issue of *Hawai'i Review*, *Wansolwara: Voices for West Papua* (2015), to analyze storied expressions of protest by Indigenous authors for West Papua. The poems in the special issue explicitly take "Wansolwara" as a framework for imagining a resurgent Indigenous-centered model of activism for and with West Papua that narrates Papuan self-determination not limited to nation-state formations. This activism also envisions stories as doing the critical remapping work required to restore Papua's relationships with Oceania. By examining the literary expressions in this journal issue, and the other texts across the Wansolwara creative archive, I demonstrate that writing the ocean creates diverse modes of protest that emphasize and construct relations among Indigenous islands and peoples as key to Indigenous decolonial futures

throughout the Pacific. As they illuminate or weave relationships beyond the forced connections of empire, they theorize what Moiwend calls the “wave” of Indigenous collaboration and persistence can mean across the diverse Wansolwara.



## Chapter 1

Indigenous Oceanic Cartographies in Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale* and Chantal Spitz's  
*Island of Shattered Dreams*

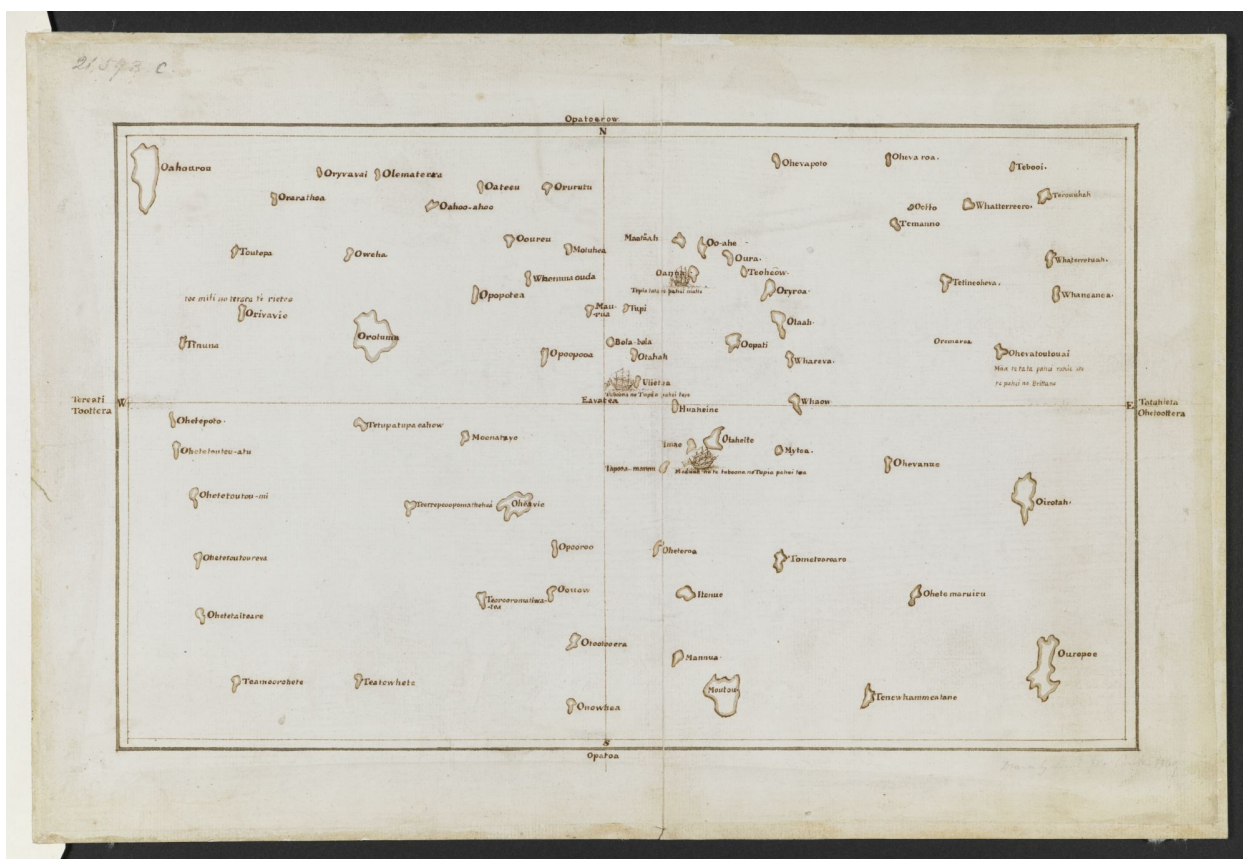


Fig. 1. Copy of Tupaia's "Chart of the Society Islands," 1769, MS 21953 C, British Library.

In 1769, Tupaia, a Mā'ohi leader and navigator from Ra'iātea sailing on board *Endeavour*, drew a chart entitled "Chart of the Society Islands with Otaheite in the center." Since then, historians generally refer to this drawing, which survived through two copies amongst Joseph Banks's personal papers, as "Tupaia's Chart." As its original title suggests, the chart depicts the island of Otaheite (Tahiti) at the center, with other islands, most of which Tupaia provided names for, arranged around it in a rough spiral distribution, spanning thousands of miles of ocean. Tupaia also included some drawings of ships and short historical comments

written in Reo Mā'ohi. Many have pointed out that those who try to interpret the chart like a Mercator projection, or in terms of Cartesian coordinates, fail. Anne di Piazza and Erik Pearthree argue that the chart instead can be read in terms of sailing directions or “bearings” (326). They state that, therefore, we cannot call the chart a map because it does not conform to the same rules of geographic representation most often seen in European forms of maps. However, di Piazza's and Pearthree's argument does reflect that the chart is a geographic tool that represents the world from Tupaia's specific point of view—similarly to how David Chang points out that Kānaka Maoli “placed themselves strategically in the understandings of global geography they created” through their oceanic explorations, essentially reconfiguring European depictions of the Pacific (vii). Whether or not di Piazza and Pearthree or others have accurately “decoded” the chart is not my concern. What I am interested in is that Tupaia, a man of immense oceanic knowledge and connections before boarding Cook's ship, who continued to build connections throughout Oceania after boarding, centers cartographies of Mā'ohi knowledge and history in this chart in a manner reflecting Tupaia's position in place when he created it. By “centers,” I mean that his chart strategically prioritizes a Mā'ohi framework of reference for understanding and interacting with the world.

Tupaia's reference system is particular to his historical and cultural moment, to his own specialized knowledge, and even to the position of his ship at the time he created the chart. Historian Joan Druett suggests that the chart documents what she calls “three dimensional knowledge” that can only be understood from a navigator's relative location with respect to swell, current, and wind movements (121). At the same time, the chart maintains a remarkable focus on surrounding Oceanic histories, realities, and interconnections. In other words, Tupaia's knowledge of the surrounding sea in the chart does not only concern environmental factors.

Druett translates the accompanying comments, showing that they display Tupaia's wide-ranging historical knowledge. On the far right side, one reads, "men eat men, canoes large, small are the ships of Britain" (Druett trans. 123). Druett argues that "canoes large" refers to the enormous ships created and piloted by people from the Marquesas. Another comment reads, "the father of Tupaia's grandfather saw a hostile ship," indicating that Tupaia's historical knowledge extends far back in time, passed down through his family (123). In addition, the ship sketches are not of *Endeavour*, Druett explains, but represent vessels older in style, and thus must refer to an earlier moment when other European ships passed by Tupaia's home islands. All of these comments and drawings indicate that the chart is a spatial representation that centers Mā'ohi geographic knowledge and histories, including Tupaia's own genealogy, within a wider oceanic cartography.

I describe this chart in order to argue that, more than 230 years later, we should read two novels from the Pacific, *Island of Shattered Dreams* (trans. 2007), by Mā'ohi author Chantal Spitz, and *People of the Whale* (2008), by Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan, as spatial projects that are intervening cartographically in ways similar to Tupaia's Chart. These novels also place Indigenous actors and spaces at the center of representations of the Pacific, demoting the representational logics of imperial powers in the process. Spitz's novel, first published in French as *L'Ile des rêves écrasés* (1991), and containing un-translated Reo Mā'ohi sections in both the French and English editions, is set on the island of Motu, part of the 118 islands the French call French Polynesia. I will refer to this group of islands as Te Ao Mā'ohi, or "the Mā'ohi world/universe," as Frank Stewart, Kareva Mateata-Allain (Mā'ohi), and Alexander Dale Mawyer suggest this term as an expansive alternative to "French Polynesia" or the misnomer "Tahiti"

(xii).<sup>22</sup> Spitz's book follows a Mā'ohi family for several decades, from just before World War II to France's construction of a nuclear missile testing center on the island.<sup>23</sup> This family lives through foreign wars, occupation of their lands, and the building of a nuclear test site, foregrounding how these experiences of militarism and colonization impact their rights over and relationships with their lands. They also negotiate what it means to be Mā'ohi of multiple heritages—with both European and Mā'ohi ancestors—and involved in interracial relationships.

Hogan's novel follows an A'atsika family, part of a fictional Indigenous community who traditionally live closely with whales in the Pacific Northwest. Hogan bases this community on the Makah Tribe in the Pacific Northwest, and their complex and extended fight for whaling rights since 1994. Her protagonist, Thomas, is a veteran of the Vietnam War. While in Vietnam, Thomas passes as a member of an unnamed Southeast Asian Indigenous community when he leaves his unit after killing fellow soldiers involved in attacking helpless villagers. He also has a daughter with a woman there before returning to his reservation and his A'atsika wife and child. He finds that his A'atsika family is caught up in an intra-tribal conflict over traditional whaling rights. At the same time Thomas tries to come to terms with the atrocities he saw and committed in Vietnam, the family he created there, and his place within his A'atsika family.

*Island of Shattered Dreams* and *People of the Whale*, both emerging from different experiences of transpacific militarization and distinct Indigenous contexts, and both preoccupied with representing the ocean, show how imperial ways of mapping spaces and defining Indigenous genealogies are closely related. Both processes exploit and erase Indigenous

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<sup>22</sup> "Mā'ohi" itself is a deliberately broad term used by many Polynesians in the region to refer to themselves, as Stewart, Mateata-Allain, and Mawyer also point out (xii). "Te Ao Mā'ohi" also might include Polynesians and Polynesian spaces beyond French Polynesian limits. Likewise, Reo Mā'ohi is an umbrella term that encompasses several Reo variations, and as Spitz uses this broader term I follow her lead.

<sup>23</sup> Historically, France established this center in 1962.

presences, disrupting Indigenous control over their own places, histories, presents, and futures. Spitz's and Hogan's literary cartographies remind us that imperial maps are not absolute. They show that imperial maps do not make visible or legible connections between different communities of Indigenous peoples, or between Indigenous peoples, their environments, and other beings that inhabit those environments. These novels, like Tupaia's Chart, also resist colonial forms of definition and mapping by remapping the Pacific as Indigenous space, unsettling imperial representations of the ocean and of Indigenous peoples with literary cartographies that narrate Indigenous genealogies defined by their characters' specific relationships with place, particularly with the ocean. The books use these place-based forms of relation to foreground their characters' knowledge about the ocean and its other inhabitants. In doing so, they also map relationships with other Indigenous peoples and their different contexts shaped by militarism and war.

Spitz revises imperial maps that depict the individual island of Motu and wider Te Ao Mā'ohi as isolated colonial outposts, ripe with land and Indigenous bodies to be exploited through French imperial projects. Instead, she represents the islands as dynamic participants in the "marae," or sacred meeting grounds, of the ocean (30). This representation allows her to portray the islands as dynamically connected with each other and wider Oceania.

Her novel's worldview centers the ocean and Mā'ohi knowledge about it, thus displacing colonial centers and maps. She also centers Mā'ohi language and textual forms such as poems and songs, often written in Reo Mā'ohi—a language the French suppressed for many years. In these ways, Spitz shows how the French empire incorporated Motu, Mā'ohi peoples, and Mā'ohi language into France's imperial and military cartography. Simultaneously, she suggests that Mā'ohi intellectual traditions and embodied knowledge make it possible to live on Motu and in

kinship and conversation with the ocean in ways that are not tied to or expressed solely in reaction to those imperial cartographies.

Hogan's cartography maps A'atsika lands in the Pacific Northwest and the lands of Indigenous people in and near Vietnam as spaces that are part of the same genealogy of American imperialism, even though they involve distinctly different experiences: settler colonialism violently affects A'atsika lands in North America, and the Vietnam War brings destruction to South East Asia. Hogan envisions parallels as a cartography of land-ocean and human-nonhuman relations, epitomized through A'atsika exchanges with whales. The ocean not only connects and creates different lively ecologies in this novel, but also is entangled in the world's balance. However, the traumas of war and colonialism distort the relationships necessary for this balance, turning families and communities against each other, and warping the practice of whaling from a clearly defined act of relationship based on particular rules of reciprocity and exchange to an act of extraction. Hogan's depictions of the ocean and of A'atsika interactions with the ocean suggest strategies of renewing relationships in ways that centralize the ocean and A'atsika knowledge concerning the ocean—ways that are not necessarily legible through forms of imperial mapping.

This chapter also engages in its own remapping. By placing a novel by a Chickasaw writer about a fictive Pacific Northwest Indigenous nation in conversation with a Francophone novel by an Indigenous Mā'ohi writer, I argue that questions of oceanic identity and activism are not limited to Pacific island spaces, but can also be found in coastal Native American contexts outside of Oceania. My comparative reading challenges the categorization of these novels based on colonial languages and imperial mappings of literary and Oceanic studies. Previous literary scholars have not read Spitz and Hogan's novels together, for they categorize the former as

Francophone or perhaps Oceanic literature, while they read the latter in the context of US Native American literary studies. These categorizations may be accurate and productive, but reading these two texts together pushes at literary maps that divide up how we read Indigenous literatures along the lines by which imperialism divides up Indigenous places. Colonialism divides up Oceania and other oceanic Indigenous spaces such as the Pacific Northwest by arranging them within colonial nation states. Moreover, the languages of those colonial nations still shape the ways that we read the literary histories of Oceanic Indigenous peoples.

For example, in the case of Mā'ohi, colonization fixes wide-reaching Te Ao Mā'ohi into “French Polynesia,” and linguistically regulates its peoples so that they now mainly speak and write in French, dividing them again from their Oceanic relatives who were colonized by Anglophone nations. As Mateata-Allain explains, “colonization in Oceania set up western boundaries that severed ties between Oceanic peoples. This severance consequently shattered interisland solidarity” (“Métissage” 602). For Mateata-Allain, Mā'ohi literature specifically, which is mostly written in French, indexes how colonization has separated Oceanic peoples into separate regions. But Mateata-Allain also argues that reading literatures comparatively and in translation can be practices that reconnect literatures across and among Oceanic peoples. Mateata-Allain sees translation as a tool that can allow reconnection across Oceanic peoples even as she acknowledges how colonial languages, like English and French, dominate Pacific literatures in translation. The English version of Spitz's novel, translated by New Zealander Jean Anderson, is much more widely read and accessed than the French version. The French version earned Spitz death threats and the French government suppressed it. In this chapter, I prioritize Anderson's English translation in part because the novel's moment of translation makes it closely contemporaneous with Hogan's novel, and allows us to challenge the imperial roots of

area studies that keep these works from being read as representing related experiences of transpacific militarization.

This chapter reads the two novels alongside each other to show how they both pose possible responses to devastating legacies of imperialism by reasserting Indigenous mappings of the ocean. Mateata-Allain and other Oceanic scholars' work invite further comparative work across colonially imposed borders. Spitz's novel is rarely mentioned in the same conversations as Māori authors from Aotearoa, let alone Indigenous authors from further afield in the Pacific.<sup>24</sup> This chapter and its comparative method emerge from the assumption that if we are going to earnestly subscribe to Epeli Hau'ofa's "sea of islands" vision, then reading novels like Spitz's and Hogan's together is one aspect of the critical remapping work required to decolonize literary studies along the way to decolonizing geographic spaces. My grouping of these two texts asks us not to ascribe Euro/US-centric notions of linearity and imperially defined regions on to the literary genealogies that produced the novels, but instead suggests that we think about the books circulating through similar currents of Indigenous and trans-Indigenous currents of activism and intellectual production, even as they emerge from distinct contexts.

### *Militarized Contexts*

Both set predominantly in post-war moments, *People of the Whale* and *Island of Shattered Dreams* consistently represent the ramifications of World II and the Vietnam War as not only significant for their characters' own communities, but also as affecting Indigenous peoples globally. These ramifications concern Indigenous environmental sovereignties and are

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<sup>24</sup> An exception is Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall, and Georgeanne Nordstrom's *Huihui* (2015), but even this is limited to collecting her work alongside other writers and scholars, rather than critically examining it *with* the work of others.



entangled with distinct political and cultural forms of sovereignty. Though these wars in the Pacific and their associated events, such as nuclear tests, have officially ended, their effects and accompanying colonial institutional structures remain. Describing the contexts from which the novels emerge reveals the ways in which imperial mapping of Indigenous bodies and places leads to real human and ecological consequences. Specifically, these consequences involve acts of militarizing the ocean that cause Indigenous displacement and bodily harm, disruption of Indigenous knowledge and lifeways, the contamination and extensive regulation of lands and waters, and, ultimately, death for both humans and non-humans. Both novels show that militarization in the Pacific affects not only geographic spaces, but also Indigenous peoples and expressions of Indigenous sovereignty dependent on those geographies.

Militarization in the Pacific relies on mapping. As Mishuana Goeman (Seneca) points out, imperial maps and narratives of space in the Pacific often correspond with military actions:

The case of the Pacific Islands speaks volumes to how our spatial imaginary becomes limited as much through absence as it does through presence. The erasure from a national map of those deemed ‘territorial lands’ and the people who have inhabited them since time immemorial exists simultaneously with intense military occupation and incorporation of Native bodies into the military.

(204)

By delineating these parallels between mapping and militarism, Goeman shows that imperial representations of space, which erase distinct Indigenous histories and obscure connections among Indigenous peoples in the Pacific, coincide with imperial efforts to eliminate, delegitimize, and coopt Indigenous peoples and their lands. Therefore, as, Goeman says, “we must question our mental and material maps” (204). Spitz and Hogan’s novels help us ask these

questions, and assert alternative visions for mapping Indigenous spaces and identities, specifically in relation to the ocean.

Indigenous peoples in North America and the Pacific are connected by shared experiences of militarism and imperialism, including nuclear testing and war casualties. Since the US conducted the first atom bomb test in New Mexico in 1945 with uranium mined primarily on Navajo and Pueblo lands, nuclear weapon development has directly impacted and displaced Indigenous populations and continues to do so.<sup>25</sup> France's nuclear program, concentrated in French Polynesia/Te Ao Mā'ohi, began in 1966 and only ended in 1996, after three decades of secretive testing on the atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa. Spitz published *L'Ile des rêves écrasés* five years before the final test, at the crux of international pressure on France to halt their program. The tests polluted the surrounding sea, causing cancers, birth defects, and other devastating health conditions for people living in Te Ao Mā'ohi.<sup>26</sup> As Dina El Dessouky notes, other acts of French imperialism in the islands often coincided with weapons testing, such as the act that banned Reo Mā'ohi—Mā'ohi language—in 1963 (260).<sup>27</sup> The center for the tests, Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP), closely scrutinized in Spitz's novel, also claimed Mā'ohi land. Today, as Mateata-Allain points out, “although France has recently transferred the majority of economic and financial powers of governance to French Polynesia, it still retains control over the defense and justice systems, law and order, immigration, citizenship, currency, and

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<sup>25</sup> Zuni public health scholar Talia Quandelacy's study of the effects of uranium mining on Laguna Pueblo and Navajo peoples convincingly argues that these effects can be classed as “nuclear racism” (6). Quandelacy takes the term from the Prairie Island Coalition Against Nuclear Storage's 1996 report.

<sup>26</sup> Documented by Tilman A. Ruff, in a 2015 report for the Red Cross.

<sup>27</sup> It is no longer illegal. Reo Ma'ohi was technically prohibited in public places such as schools from 1900, and designated as a foreign language. According to Mā'ohi educator Winston Pukoki, in an interview with France Mugler and John Lynch, some teachers started teaching the language in primary schools as early as the late 60s and 70s, despite this, and then the language was officially taught in schools from 1980 (289, 292). However, France is still the official language, and obstacles for language instruction persist (292).

secondary and higher education” (“Métissage” 602). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Spitz faced opposition from the French government when *L'Ile des rêves écrasés* was published.

Nuclear testing and its impacts on Indigenous land and water spaces exist in tandem with imperial narratives of island ecologies. Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that the “myth of [island] isolation” enabled nuclear testing in the Pacific (“Myth of Isolates” 167). This myth arose along with imperialism and represents islands as scattered, without national and global relationships, and therefore ripe for colonial occupation and research. DeLoughrey sees “the rise of the Age of Ecology and the Atomic Age” as intertwined with each other, because theories of “ecosystem ecologies,” or of enclosed environmental systems, developed from studies on the impacts of nuclear fallout in the Marshall Islands and other testing sites in the Pacific (167). US, French, British militaries used islands and the bodies of their inhabitants as experimental laboratories for these purposes without the inhabitants’ consent, and sometimes without their knowledge. Narratives of islands as enclosed laboratories are inaccurate—radiation spread from them through the atmosphere and through the ocean. DeLoughrey points out that “thanks to their irradiation, we all carry a small piece of that island world in our bones,” while the people experimented upon experienced “the kind of chromosomal damage that knows no temporal or genealogical limit” (179, 171). The environmental maps, narratives, and motivations that enabled nuclear testing built upon erroneous notions of island space and of the humanity of Indigenous peoples and therefore affect places and Indigenous peoples through generations, both within the islands themselves and at a larger, transoceanic scale. As Teresia Teaiwa (I-Kiribati) argued, the same colonial narratives of the islands that make them available for such testing also class the Pacific Islands as tourist and leisure destinations that are “exotic, malleable, and, most of all, dispensable” (“S/Pacific” 93). In other words, imperial cartographies represent the Pacific

Islands spatially as paradises to enjoy and laboratories for research, devoid of Indigenous presence but also dependent on Indigenous presence for knowledge gained through experimentation and extraction. In these cartographies, Indigenous Pacific peoples are simultaneously hyper-visible as exotic objects and invisible and vulnerable to erasure.

Native American literary texts such as Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmom Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) also foreground how maps of Indigenous visibility and invisibility inflect Native experiences of war and have led to the cooption of Native lands as weapons' testing grounds and the recruitment of Native youth into the military. 82,000 Native Americans served in the US military during the Vietnam War, with at least 42,000 deployed to South East Asia.<sup>28</sup> Al Carroll notes that there was an "assimilationist motive" in encouraging Native Americans to enlist in the US military, but narratives of Native experiences of war, such as *Ceremony* and Louis Owens's *The Sharpest Sight* (1992), do not portray assimilation as a successful or positive way to live in the US after returning from the war (9). They instead focus on severance from traditions.<sup>29</sup> Carroll shows that Native narratives of the war consistently focus on "alienation and trauma," and often include themes of mixed-race heritages as threads that trace this alienation—tropes visible in Hogan's novel, and that we might also see in Spitz's novel, though her character who goes to war is Mā'ohi and the war is World War II (32).<sup>30</sup> Tom Holm's (Creek/Cherokee) 1996 survey of Native American veterans affirms Carroll's observations of assimilation narratives, and also shows that, while Native Americans and other "minorities" bore "a

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<sup>28</sup> According to statistics gathered by Robert Sanderson (Mikmaq) in his "Vietnam Powwow" compilation, and Holm.

<sup>29</sup> See also Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), in which the character Abel finds himself unable to assimilate and becomes an alcoholic after returning to the Jemez Pueblo reservation in New Mexico after fighting in World War II, and who instead finds solace in traditions; or see Jim Northrup's *Dirty Copper* (2014), in which an Anishinaabe veteran experiences severe PTSD after Vietnam.

<sup>30</sup> At least 600 Mā'ohi people served in the French armed forces during World War II, according to Jean-Christophe Shigetomi, many of whom deployed to Europe and did not return.

disproportionate share of the war...Indians were not specifically mentioned in a single [press] article” (11). Holm blames this on the trope of the “vanishing Indian,” another form of colonial mapping that defines Native people through absence (Holm 12, Goeman 204). Not only does sending Native Americans to war literally perpetuate their erasure, but if the US can erase the people then it can also erase their sovereignty and instead map US sovereignty on to purportedly empty lands and waters.

At the same time that Native veterans and the impact of the war on Indigenous peoples were invisible in press documentation of the Vietnam War, military names for combat zones in Vietnam explicitly drew on settler-colonial discourses of “Indians” transported from the U.S. to Southeast Asia. The US military called enemy-held territory in Vietnam “Indian Country,” while US firebases were “Fort Apaches” (Carroll 161). In Carroll’s words, “military planners and conservative politicians used Indian war imagery repeatedly to justify the Vietnam War” (161).<sup>31</sup> Another phenomenon bringing “Indian Country” and Vietnam together is the fact that hill people in Vietnam and its surrounding areas often welcomed Native veterans and identified with them. Native accounts of the war report this fact as well. In Mark St. Pierre’s *Of Uncommon Birth: Dakota Sons in Vietnam* (2003), a veteran identifies with the Vietnamese people rather than his fellow soldiers, after seeing how US efforts in Vietnam correspond with US treatment of Native nations back in the US. Written in the wake of the Vietnam War but set right after World War II, Silko’s *Ceremony* narrates experiences of mutual identification between Native soldiers and Filipino and Japanese peoples.<sup>32 33</sup> Thus, when Hogan’s character Thomas also identifies with

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<sup>31</sup> Sanderson, in his “Vietnam Powwow” compilation of Native veteran memories, also notes this kind of language as an ongoing theme.

<sup>32</sup> According to the National Institutes of Health, at least 45,000 Native Americans enlisted in the US armed forces during World War II, and many others moved to cities during this time to serve in indirect capacities.

and creates relationships with members of a Vietnamese hill tribe, Hogan situates her character within a genealogy of Native literary responses to US war experiences. With the Red Power movement growing in influence in the US during the Vietnam War period, and these moments of identification, relationships between different Indigenous communities grew, in the US and internationally.

Set during and right after the Vietnam War, Hogan's *People of the Whale* foregrounds how colonial narratives impact those relationships between Indigenous communities and Indigenous forms of sovereignty. She does this by foregrounding a coastal community's experiences with whales—based on the real efforts of the Makah Nation to maintain their sea and whaling rights in the Pacific Northwest. Joshua Reid (Snohomish), in his study of the relationship between the Makahs, or “People of the Cape,” and the sea, shows how, during treaty settlements with the United States, Makah leaders did not only negotiate land rights but sea rights, demonstrating that the sea was integral to their identities as sovereign peoples. In the words of one leader, `Caqa·wił (“tsuh-kah-wihtl”), at the signing of the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay, “I want the sea. That is my country”” (qtd. 12). This treaty preserved Makah whaling and other resource rights and was designed to allow Makahs to continue participating in their marine-based networks of exchange. In Reid's analysis, “by calling the sea his country during the treaty negotiations, Chief `Caqa·wił articulated a Makah perspective on marine space, namely that local waters were sovereign tribal space...the Makah perspective on marine space challenged the emerging Euro-American view on coastal waters as both a resource commons and an appropriate boundary line dividing colonial spaces” (16, 17). This “Euro-American” way of mapping the

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<sup>33</sup> Historically, Euro-American perspectives divide World War II and the Vietnam War into discrete wars, demarcating history in ways that obscure the imperial links between them, but Asian Studies scholars point out that from a Vietnamese nationalist perspective these wars fell within one continuous period of wars against colonial powers (see, for example, Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh).

ocean corresponds with the ways political maps today divide the ocean into exclusive economic zones and international waters. Reid argues that the ocean, for Makah peoples, is, in contrast, a “space of connections,” homeland, and can be read as “embedded [with Makah] knowledge, history, and values” (127, 153). The kind of connections expressed during the treaty negotiations articulated Makah relationships and responsibilities toward the ocean—while representing the ocean as an environmental, social, cultural, and political space.

The oceanic viewpoint of *ʼCaqa-wiḷ* and the other Makahs whom Reid documents does not fit with a view of whaling as an “extractive economy,” as Nancy Shoemaker describes the colonially driven global whaling industry (6). Makahs officially stopped whaling in 1928, due to declining whale numbers. In 1999, they conducted their first whale hunt since 1928. Reid describes how this hunt involved ceremonial protocols and thus refused a “narrative of decline” for Makahs, instead envisioning “a traditional future” (276). That is, Reid sees the revival of Makah whaling practices as an example of adaptable, long-standing traditions that work to “reclaim their marine space by protecting their sovereignty and charting a course for a particular identity in a modern world,” not a return to a “nostalgic past” (18, 279). Put another way, the fight to maintain these practices represents ways of continuing long-held relationships with the sea.

However, this whale hunt and the ongoing efforts of Makah peoples to resume whaling continue to put Makahs in conflict with many environmental groups. They received permission for an annual whale quota from the International Whale Commission, based on subsistence and ceremonial needs, but the US’s Marine Mammal Protection Act later challenged this decision. This conflict highlights tensions between environmental and conservation groups and Indigenous peoples’ sovereignties. Tensions like these occur at national and international levels, especially

when we remember how environmental scientists used Marshall Islanders for radiation experiments. While the oceanic interests of environmentalists and Indigenous peoples might seem to be compatible in many ways, and, indeed, many groups who identify as environmentalists have formed alliances with Indigenous peoples to resist nuclearization and resource extraction in the Pacific, we must also be aware, as Craig Santos Perez (Chamorro) argues, that settler efforts to “protect” the oceans by preventing whaling, restricting fishing in certain areas, and creating Marine National Monuments, conversely perpetuate the colonization and militarization of the ocean by maintaining the imperial state’s control of it and erasing Indigenous claims to oceanic belonging (“Blue-Washing” n.p.).

Indigenous claims to sovereignty and settler-colonial claims are grounded in contesting narratives of belonging—narratives often represented through maps. Hogan’s views on mapping, in a 2011 interview entitled “Sea Level,” explicitly associate cartography with writing, arguing that both tell stories and that stories can change depending on perspective. Hogan critiques the view of maps as objective depictions of land and water spaces and instead shows how maps are “representative of the worldview” of whoever creates the map (172-3). For Hogan, cartography tells a narrative because it is “that whole notion of categorizing the land, and charting it, and naming it and putting things in their place” (172). Writing is “cartography” because it is a “way of interpreting the world,” or telling a narrative about the world from a particular perspective (173). Goeman makes this point explicit: She writes, “I am concerned with producing decolonized spatial knowledges and attendant geographies that acknowledge colonial spatial process as ongoing but imbued with power struggles...Rather than construct a healthy relationship to land and place, colonial spatial structures inhibit it by constricting Native



mobilities and pathologizing mobile Native bodies” (12).<sup>34</sup> Goeman emphasizes that “these maps are not *absolute* but instead present multiple perspectives—*as do all maps*” (25, original emphasis).

Building on Goeman’s theories of decolonizing space, and Hogan’s understanding of cartography as points of departure, I use the terms “mapping,” or “remapping,” in this chapter to track how Hogan and Spitz represent Indigenous cartographies of oceanic relation—the ocean’s connective and creative qualities—in contexts of militarism that are not limited to linear or topographical representations. These cartographies unsettle imperial representations of lands and the place of those lands in the world.

### *The Ocean as Marae: Mā’ohi Cartographies of Relation*

In Spitz’s *Island of Shattered Dreams*, the French government sends an official to Motu to inform its Indigenous inhabitants about the decision to build a nuclear testing site on the island. The official states: “the Central Government acknowledges the high regard in which it holds its far-flung regions” (73). France is the center of the world in the imperial mapping project implied in this statement. It “acknowledges” its colonies, but only so far as they are read in reference to and are resources for the Central Government—resources for land (for the nuclear site) and bodies (to fight in their wars). In this scene, Spitz shows that the violence French imperialism inflicts on Motu is entangled in how France maps Motu and its other colonies as peripheral to France. Motu and other colonies are “far-flung” to the French, repeating the common imperial narrative that islands in the Pacific are isolated and scattered, or, in Goeman’s words, “absent” from representations of imperial nations (204). This acknowledgment, and the

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<sup>34</sup> Geographer Margaret Pearce (Potawatomi) concurs with Goeman and has used narrative and translation techniques as methods to think about how we can map spaces in more Indigenous-centric ways (107).

actions of the officials who recruit Mā'ohi bodies for their wars, do not map Motu as a distinct entity, but group Motu with all of France's colonies under the vague label of "regions." Reduced to a peripheral part of the French world, Motu, in this imperial cartography, becomes an ideal location for the nuclear missile test site, because if it is "far-flung" or absent then what happens on Motu will not negatively affect France's central national body, even as it uses Motu to expand its territorial reach.

Spitz rejects this cartography. Her novel displays how narratives like that of the French official manifest imperial cartographies and adversely impact her Mā'ohi characters and Motu. At the same time, the novel shows that those imperial narratives inadequately represent the island and the lives of the family at the center of the novel. The family includes Maevaua and Teuira, their son Tematua, and his three children—Terii, Eritepeta, and Tetiare—with his wife Emere, who has a European father. The family's genealogy becomes a lens for understanding how imperialism severs ties between land, kinship, and intellectual relations, but it also provides a vocabulary for locating and guiding Spitz's characters within their specific place in the ocean. Spitz frames the central conflicts in the novel with strategic linguistic and formal choices that build relations not only between characters in her novel, but also between languages and literacies, and across the world. In order to do this, Spitz positions the ocean as the context through which everything in her novel can be read—the island, the family, and the *form* of her story itself. She does this from a point of view that she associates with one Mā'ohi family. Just as Tupaia's chart must be read using particular rules of reference based on his understanding of and position to the ocean, so Spitz's novel creates her own Mā'ohi mapping project in the context of French occupation, working to reestablish oceanic references that imperialism disrupted, erased, and marked as illegible. In this way, Spitz delineates nuclear testing's local and worldwide

legacies of violence while offering up a distinct vision of Te Ao Mā'ohi connection and persistence.

### *The Marae as a Spatial Framework*

Spitz counters imperial maps of Te Ao Mā'ohi with an alternative vision of space that portrays the ocean as a marae. The linguistic and genealogical or relational dimensions of marae are critical in the novel, and very much entangled with each other. Spitz's glossary at the back of Spitz's novel translates "marae" in the Mā'ohi context as a "temple consisting principally of an open space and a platform" (161). Marae can often also include other built structures. We see in the novel small marae, such as ones designated for family use, and very large ones, encompassing multiple structures with different purposes. Marae are found across Oceania, such as in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They are called mala'e in Tonga, me'ae in the Marquesas, and malae in Samoa. Across Polynesia, referring to the ocean itself as marae is also not uncommon.<sup>35</sup> Māori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville connects wharenui<sup>36</sup> and marae to "a range of Māori aesthetic forms," that are "active participants in a complex intergenerational negotiation of homecoming and connection" (71). Anita Smith, describing how Marae Taputapuātea in French Polynesia became a World Heritage site, states that this designation came about partially because "the transnational heritage values of the site for Polynesian communities across the Pacific were well known" (102). While featuring specific locations and cultural differences, marae throughout Oceania fulfill social and spiritual functions for the Indigenous communities to which they are connected. They are meeting places and places that facilitate conversations within the community, with outsiders, and with ancestral and spirit beings.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the Marae Moana marine park project in the Cook Islands.

<sup>36</sup> Maori ancestral meeting house on a marae.

Early in the novel, France recruits and deploys Tematua to fight with their World War II forces in Europe. Maevarua, his father, sings Tematua a song as he is about to embark across the ocean. In it, Maevarua entrusts Tematua to “the limitless ocean/ The sacred marae of our people” (30). This benediction delineates the kind of intimate relationship the ocean has with Maevarua’s family and with Mā’ohi people more broadly. Before this scene occurs, Spitz relays a story about how the ocean, Moanuarifa, is an ancestor of Mā’ohi people and genealogically and interdependently linked to the land (Ruahine), the “Voice of the eternal land” (Tematua), and Ta’aroa, the tree who is “the god of the sea who called the world into being” (13, 162). Together, Ruahine and Ta’aroa are the parents of the people, and Ruahine is also “the great house created by Ta’aroa” (14). That is, Ta’aroa and Ruahine are parental ancestors, Tematua, voice, comes from their union, like the people do, and the sea, Moanuarifa, surrounds all, providing the place in which Ruahine, as a house, is located. In light of Maevarua’s song, we might think of this spatial positioning as similar to the way a marae is a space for gathering together not only people but also sacred buildings or structures, each with different roles. Genealogically, Spitz reads land in reference to the ocean, and Mā’ohi genealogies, including that of the family, are subsequently enmeshed in both land and ocean. They are enmeshed because they are the “children of Ruahine,” who cannot exist without the ocean, their marae, in which they circulate (21). In this context, Spitz foregrounds the ocean as marae, remapping Motu not as a “far-flung” outpost in the Pacific, subsumed under the French government, but as a being that derives its existence and place in the world from the ocean.

By describing the ocean as a marae—literally acknowledging the ocean’s role as environmental and ancestral agent—Maevarua establishes it as explicitly Mā’ohi space. It is part of the island’s genealogy, as well as the family’s genealogy. Genealogies concern familial

kinship relationships for Spitz but also mean more than shared bloodlines and genetics, as they include nonhuman beings such as different spirit forms, plants, and animals—and, crucially, geographies as relatives and ancestors. Spitz offers an ocean-centric ways of thinking about genealogy that goes beyond DNA or what Kim Tallbear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) calls “gene talk” or genome thinking (*Native American DNA* 178).<sup>37</sup> *Island of Shattered Dreams* associates genealogy not with blood ties but with place and placental ties to land, and to the ocean through the land. Spitz reinforces these associations between marae, the ocean, and genealogy through the way she treats several land-based marae in her novel. These marae fall into disrepair after colonization, but Spitz shows that they are still vitally important for the family on Motu because they are the places where or near where Maevaua and Tematua bury the placentas of their children. The fathers bury the placentas along with Ta’aroa, or a tree, in order to facilitate belonging to Ruahine, and to Moananurifa through Ruahine (24, 57-61).<sup>38</sup> In the book, marae are also places where human ancestors first came ashore. So, Spitz shows that marae are ancestrally and genealogically significant as well as spaces where the family members literally root themselves and position their relationships with the world. Naming the ocean as marae refers us to its position as a relative, connecting it to the family’s genealogy. Spitz thus maps a

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<sup>37</sup> Tallbear’s analysis of “DNA politics” usefully opens up ways of thinking about genealogy beyond “gene talk” while also highlighting the Indigenous sovereignty issues at stake when we talk about genealogy (1, 178). She de-romanticizes DNA as a substance that contains all answers, and outlines how the fraught history of genetic science and the categorizing of Native DNA is linked to “long-standing race definitions and practices of racialization” (178). In other words, DNA, as one way to map a body and its heritage is not apolitical, just like other maps are not apolitical. Tallbear’s work also falls into the same theoretical conversation as Michel Foucault’s thoughts on genealogy, building from Nietzsche’s. Foucault uses Nietzsche to destabilize the idea of pure origins and knowledge used to classify, and, instead contemplates the body itself as embodying history while also pushing against the notion of history (and genealogy) as linear (83).

<sup>38</sup> For more on the significance of placenta burial in the Pacific see Christine Taitano DeLisle (Chamorro), who delineates what she calls “placental politics” in Guam’s context, arguing that, due to the ways that colonial powers have historically overtly banned or discouraged Indigenous placental practices throughout the Pacific, “the political, social and cultural act of burying the placenta can be regarded as a specific form of indigenous and gendered resistance against...colonialism, and that furthermore, such corporeal politics of foregrounding communal relations and stewardship of lands and people can be seen as...assertions of cultural self-determination” (para. 2).

multigenerational story in more than one way, showing that marae are places for multiple generations to meet, converse, celebrate and mourn, as well as places in which ancestors are present and acknowledged.

This is not the first time a Mā'ohi writer has referred to the ocean as a marae, so Spitz not only locates her novel within a specific socio-cultural context with this reference but also connects her narrative to a Mā'ohi literary context. In 1928, Teuira Henry, of Mā'ohi heritage and the granddaughter of a European missionary, describes the ocean as a marae in her ethnology, *Ancient Tahiti*. She writes, “the sea was the ‘supreme’ marae, into which princes, priests, and the people plunged to wash off crime and pollution of all kinds, spiritual and temporal” (143). Henry identifies several different forms of marae in her book, and all are linked to ancestral and spiritual functions. But the ocean is the “supreme” marae, surrounding all others. Likewise, for Maevarua, the ocean is “the sacred marae of our people.” This phrasing elevates the ocean over the other, land-based marae in the novel. Both “supreme” and “sacred” suggest that the ocean is a place of significant authority, specifically spiritual authority. It is also the marae that is present for all the family members as they change over the generations. Maevarua trusts, then, that the ocean will connect his son to Te Ao Mā'ohi, even once he has left the island. As Maevarua puts it, land-based marae are visible physical markers that show that “[Mā'ohi] civilization existed before the white people's” (28). If land-based marae signify stories of Mā'ohi persistence, calling the ocean a marae also implies that it is a visible, authoritative marker of Mā'ohi persistence.

Furthermore, Maevarua's reference to the ocean as marae signals that it is a place that facilitates gathering, discourse, and the transmission of knowledge based on particular protocols of interaction and relation—just as a land-based marae facilitates such interactions and is

governed by particular protocols. I use the term “protocols” here, even though it is a term often associated with the military industrial complex, because it conveys the novel’s emphasis on rules or guidelines of relation required in order to live with the marae as a governing spatial and spiritual framework. I also use it instead of “rituals” because colonial discourses have too long associated “rituals” with static practices reserved for the past, whereas marae protocols, such as those exhibited in *Island of Shattered Dreams*, are dynamic contemporary practices as well as practices with long histories. In *Island of Shattered Dreams*, we can observe some of these protocols in action when Maevarua and Tematua bury their children’s placentas. For these fathers, the act of burying a placenta requires prayer to the “benevolent spirits of the marae” where, or near where, it is buried, the planting of a tree along with the placenta, and the acknowledgment that marae of all forms are also places of sustenance (23). Spitz emphasizes sustenance through the tree that will “nourish” the child as he or she grows (24). Nourishment leads to ongoing life so the book suggests that following these protocols will sustain the family.

The family’s knowledge of the protocols governing oceanic and land-based marae also guides the family’s relations to their past and the ways they confront their colonial present. Tematua’s knowledge of different trees allows him to choose ones with appropriate meanings for his children when he plants their placentas, expressing a kind of horticultural literacy tied to their local heritage and to the environment of Motu that will affect his children in the future. This literacy or knowledge becomes particularly significant because of the family’s experiences of living as an interracial Mā’ohi family. Tematua and Emere’s three children—Terii, Eritapeta, and Tetiare—have three different ways of coming to terms with their heritages and facing the colonized world. But Spitz does not suggest that any of these ways—whether it is embracing European schooling like Eritapeta, struggling with it like Terii, or protesting the missile site like

Tetiare—erases their Indigeneity. For example, when Tematua buries Terii's placenta, he sings, "son of the two worlds you carry within you/... You are strong with two worlds/ Fragile with two heritages" (57). While acknowledging the fact that being of both European and Mā'ohi descent will make life difficult for Terii, he does not describe Terii's heritages as one trying to erase the other. Rather he describes them as place-based in the form of "worlds" and, again, in nourishing terms because they give his children strength even as they also make them "fragile" (57). Mindful of these tensions, he chooses for each child a different tree in order to impart the sustenance that will help them on their way—for Terii he chooses one that provides, for Eritapeta one that heals, and for Tetiara one with many meanings so as not to limit her (59, 61). Thus, Spitz links nourishment and sustenance closely with knowledge, which, in the book, often transmits in embodied forms.

### *Colonialism in the Marae*

However, Spitz also vividly shows how the violences of colonialism, particularly the building of the missile test site, abuse Mā'ohi protocols of interaction and intimacy with the marae of the ocean, interfering with the nourishment both it and the island provides. By interfering with this nourishment, this knowledge, colonialism also disrupts the ways Spitz's characters orient themselves in the world. The Prologue describes Ta'aroa (the tree) and Tematua (Voice) dying because the arrival of colonial forces caused "our order" to break (19). "Our order" here refers to the interdependent way of living set up by the ancestors—Ruahine and Ta'aroa giving life to the people, and Moanurifa surrounding and sustaining all. By breaking "our order," colonialism also interrupts Mā'ohi genealogy, making the Mā'ohi "orphaned people" (153). The fact that the Ma'ohi are "orphaned" implies that colonialism severs the close



familial relationships established between Mā'ohi people and the ancestors in the Prologue.

These are not just environmental relationships, but genealogical and intimate relationships. Spitz figures both ocean and land as feminine, and she represents colonialism as an abuse of intimacy, as it is “the rape of the belly of the land” and the ocean is “violated” as a result (94, 132).

The missile site not only disrupts relationships between land and sea, or land and people, but also the intimate possibilities among beings on the island. While engaged in protesting the test site, Terii falls in love with a woman, Laura, who works as a scientist to run the tests for the French government. Before the test site is completed, the two have sex between the roots of a banyan tree growing through the ruins of an old marae on the mountain (108). While the marae Laura and Terii meet in is crumbling, there are trees growing through it, and it gives Laura and Terii the privacy to come together. At the same time, Laura's presence in the marae reminds readers of the role of Europeans in causing the marae of the “old order” to disintegrate, making these intimate acts—between the Indigenous man trying to protect his homelands and the woman working in the service of the colonial power destroying the island—seem particularly fraught. This tension is not acknowledged by Terii or Laura in the moment, though their relationship ends soon after when the missile test center is completed.

While ruins for European Romantic writers may symbolize cycles of life, death, and decay, this scene speaks more to protocols than cycles. It does indicate the marae's capacity for facilitating connection, life, and, momentarily, hope for the future, but because this moment of intimacy is over so quickly and is so fraught, it also suggests that the marae of the old order can no longer offer this hope in a sustained way, because its protocols have been broken. Here, I use Theresa Shewry's definition of hope as “a relationship with the future that involves attunement to environmental change and more specifically to the ocean, nonhuman beings such as sharks,

people, and deep, irreversible loss” (2). For Shewry, the intimate connections fostered within the multi-being oceanic community, including its islands as beings, do not erase past violence or exploitation or eliminate the potential for future violence, but they do leave room for empathy and solidarity cultivated through shared investments in ocean space. Her framework is more useful for thinking about how Terii will face the future, rather than thinking about the future of Laura and Terii together, because the missile site’s completion subsequently destroys any further intimacy between them, echoing the severed intimacies felt all over the island (134). Their failed relationship suggests that Spitz’s prescription for achieving the kind of hope at which this scene hints depends on building a future not tied to those ruins but connected to the protocols of relation demanded, structured, and strengthened by the concept of the marae, which exceeds the physical remains of the old marae.

That is, in the above scene and in the ones that describe placenta burials, Spitz portrays the remnants of the old marae not simply as nostalgic markers of the past, but as possessing ongoing significance and power for the family in terms of the protocols of relation that define their structures, rather than the materials of their remains themselves. The old marae on Motu might not physically survive, but references to a “marae of the old order” suggest that there can be marae of the “new order” that similarly make space for, give life to, transmit, and sustain knowledge. Even though the marae where Maevarua buries Tematua’s placenta is of the “old order,” Spitz writes that “with this [planting of the placenta] Maevarua carries the ancient soul of his people into the future” (24). Here a marae is explicitly a place of “union,” as Maevarua expresses it, and this union is future-oriented as well as rooted to ancestral connections associated with Motu’s place.

None of the characters, however, mention the ocean, as “supreme marae,” in past terms. It has a presence in the book as part of the “old” and the “new” orders, encircling all the other marae on the island. By calling an ocean a marae and therefore associating it with all the ancestral and genealogical weight that marae connote in this book, Spitz also ascribes ancestral, familial connections to the ocean and suggests that, as a marae, it has a role in the future nurturing of Mā’ohi people as well. It is and it is not its own space—it supersedes other marae, but, structurally, it is also enmeshed in the genealogy of the landed island space and its people, and therefore also enmeshed in their futures.

Mā’ohi future persistence in this novel depends on the characters reestablishing or renewing protocols of relation that being on a marae site dictates. When Tematua returns from war, traumatized and isolated, he “reacquaints himself with his land” (35). Specifically, he does this by swimming in the sea. In order to renew his intimacy with the island of Motu, Tematua must engage with the marae of the ocean, reestablishing the connections between all three beings involved. We see this need to reestablish intimacy again when Tematua brings his son, Terii, back to Motu after high school on another island: “Terii lets his soul and his body be reborn on this island that nourishes him, reconnecting every time with the magic of this world where he belongs” (66). In this scene, as Terii looks forward to becoming reacquainted with his home island and the waters that surround it, Tematua sings to him and his sisters, conveying knowledge about the ocean and the island to them and suggesting that this knowledge is integral to Terii’s renewed intimacy with them both. Here, again, the island is a source of nourishment and renewal, but, more specifically in this scene, that nourishment comes through Tematua singing. Then, when the test site is established, Terii and Tetiāre, discouraged, spend a night at the beach, exchanging stories, before they “immerse their naked bodies in the bountiful

sea...unaware that their father, long ago, had returned to his origins in the same way” (80-81).

This experience allows them access to “ancestral memories” or knowledge (80). Directly after this night in the sea Spitz writes that their energy is restored and they tell their father “we must fight [the site]” (81). By connecting this scene in the sea so closely to the decision to resist the nuclear site, and by connecting Tematua’s earlier songs with oceanic and island knowledge, Spitz implies that acts of reaffirming and renewing storied forms of knowledge and physical intimacies with the ocean depend on those protocols of relation that nourish, and those protocols in turn ultimately give them the strength to fight the missile site.

It is also through protocols of the marae of the ocean that Tematua tries to teach his children how to negotiate the challenges of living with their heritages. That is, he tries to teach them how to be literate in particular protocols of relation. These literacies are tied to how Spitz portrays Reo Mā’ohi in the novel and how the family uses it in the face of colonialism. Tematua, “in a long oral tradition handed down with love...passes on to his son the words of their world, words of yesterday and words of tomorrow, so the dream will live on in him, the lost dream of happiness, the forgotten dream of eternity, a different dream from his own, the dream of new children and yet somehow similar” (66). This passage indicates that, though Tematua’s knowledge is rooted in the past, it is also future-oriented, much like burying placentas. He expresses Mā’ohi persistence as achievable through acquiring particular literacies—linguistic, intellectual, and environmental—gained through present and future intimacy with their place on the island of Motu in the ocean. Tematua, “born of the sun and sea,” also teaches his wife, who was not taught by her own father, “the language of the land, the sea, the moon, and the stars” (53, 51). Spitz shows that literacy involves language as well as knowledge of genealogy and place—he was born of the sun and sea, and those places have “language.” Likewise, placentas are buried

in the “belly” of the land, and Reo Mā’ohi is “the language of the belly [land] of their people” (86). In other words, if the burial of the placentas is an intimate act based on very distinct protocols that allows the landed marae to nourish its Mā’ohi relatives, then Reo Mā’ohi is one of the kinds of nourishment provided.

*Ocean as Marae, Language as Marae*

In Spitz’s novel, the ocean, containing its islands, is a space of knowledge that nourishes, especially linguistic knowledge. By connecting this knowledge to genealogy through the framework of the marae, Spitz also engages in a kind of linguistic and literary remapping. The novel’s use of Reo Mā’ohi formally indicates the links among ocean, (is)land, and voice and helps delineate protocols of oceanic relations. Spitz’s novel itself acts as an island within an ocean-like cartography of relation, a marae of language. The novel’s form portrays language as a relational space like a marae where Oceanic Indigenous peoples can come together and interact, with all the connotations, but also protocols, of meeting, greeting, intimacy, connection, and respect for the sacred site of the marae as well as the beings which move amongst it.

Spitz strategically places Reo Mā’ohi in the book in ways that define language as a relational, marae-like space. While the book was first predominantly written in French, and then translated into English, it opens in Reo Mā’ohi and frequently includes words and phrases in Reo throughout. Some phrases are translated in a glossary at the back of the book, but many, especially the opening creation story, are not. The opening Reo Mā’ohi creation story is followed by a Biblical creation story in French, later translated into English. This is not a translation of the Mā’ohi story, however: they are two different stories. Thus we have two creation stories or, to put it another way, two ways of mapping the genealogy of creation, showing how the French

version is at odds with the Mā'ohi version. But the Mā'ohi story comes first. Spitz reaffirms the primacy of Reo Mā'ohi throughout the book, including in ways that might at first seem small, such as replacing English names like Elizabeth and Emily with their Mā'ohi equivalents: Eritapeta and Emere. By placing a glossary at the end of her book for some Mā'ohi words, Spitz does offer some points of access to their meaning for her readers, but she refuses to give non-Mā'ohi speakers full access—or even the illusion of full access. As a marae generally has particular rules about speech and interaction—who speaks when, in what part of the marae, and in what register—so Spitz's novel does the same, while not letting us forget whose voice is leading.

Spitz also embeds her book within Mā'ohi literary traditions of speaking, prayer, and song. While the book takes shape as a novel, it includes Mā'ohi songs, chants, and stories that have usually been told in their oral forms. In this sense, Spitz's book is self-conscious about its connections to Mā'ohi place *and* Mā'ohi literary predecessors. Maevarua says that “the Word”—specifically Mā'ohi traditions of creative expression—make “the world live in him,” implying that, like the ocean, language acts as creative, animating force (29). The way that the book moves between forms of “the Word”—such as telling a narrative of the test site one moment, then shifting to a song, and so on—corresponds to the ways that Spitz also represents the heritages (Mā'ohi and European) of her characters: as multiple and cumulative. By moving between literary forms, and prioritizing traditionally Mā'ohi ones, Spitz locates not only the marae of the ocean, containing and creating Te Ao Mā'ohi, at the center of the map, displacing colonial centers, but also locates Mā'ohi linguistic and textual forms centrally as well.

The novel's linguistic forms reinforce Mā'ohi continuity. Maevarua's wife Teuira shares the same first name as Teuira Henry, the aforementioned first Mā'ohi author to refer the ocean as

a marae in writing, and a woman who produced copious amounts of Mā'ohi scholarship, making her well known across Te Ao Mā'ohi. By echoing Teuira's name in her book, Spitz signals that she sees her novel as part of a continuation of Mā'ohi literary production. While her publishers marketed her book as the first “novel” by a Mā'ohi writer, Spitz herself consistently links her writing heritage to Mā'ohi literary predecessors. Teuira, in the novel, is a grandmother figure. She is not, in the end, the character who continues to tell the stories. However, she is the one who encourages Tetiara, her granddaughter, to record and tell stories. As fathers often name sons for male ancestors in this novel, so ancestral literary mothers emerge through this naming reference, too. Spitz strategically connects her narrative to wider Mā'ohi references like Teuira's name to continually privilege a Mā'ohi context over a colonial one, giving us a vision of the literary world in which she sees her book circulating.

The multiple threads of this book come together most clearly when Tetiara decides to write about Mā'ohi stories and Mā'ohi experiences. Her relationship with writing suggests that the marae of the ocean, and by association, the “word” or Mā'ohi rhetorical traditions, are equipped to persist through and beyond the violences of colonialism. Tetiara is encouraged to write by her grandmother, Teuira, who says, “Write... You can do it. You must do it. For us. For our children” (125). Directly before this imperative, Teuira discusses the impact of Tematua's deployment and the missile site, how it results in “violence deep inside you” (125). At first she just wants Tetiara to enjoy her life, but she realizes that writing seems to be a way for her granddaughter to cope with that violence. Her directive to Tetiara expresses writing as an act of future-oriented genealogical maintenance: “for our children.” But Tetiara also thinks of writing in terms of heritage as well: “the old woman has given her children everything she knows, knowledge passed on through the words she has spoken. Now it is time to pass this knowledge on to others

through the written word, the ones that endure” (125). In other words, Tetiāre envisions writing as the continuation of the lines of knowledge maintained throughout her family’s Mā’ohi genealogy, even though others on the island call her and her siblings “half blood” (150).

Writing provides the marae that Tetiāre seeks to reconnect herself to Motu. The end of the novel emphasizes environmental destruction, descriptions of lost traditions, and demographic shifts as more foreigners move to the island. At this point in the novel, it is twenty years since Teuira told Tetiāre to write, though she abandoned the project for years. Now, she feels like she cannot “spen[d] her life digging up forgotten marae with her brother” (150). The “forgotten” marae’s ruins are not sufficient for Tetiāre, so she seeks another kind of marae framework to reestablish the relationships between herself and Motu, and she finds it storytelling and writing. Terii encourages her, saying “the dream passed on by oral tradition is dying because we can’t remember, and we must bring it back to life through writing” (156). He does not suggest that oral tradition is irrelevant—rather he suggests, like Teuira did, that writing is a tool like oral traditions that can maintain particular relations between knowledge and between Mā’ohi people and their place on Motu and with the ocean.

Teuira Henry, the first person from Te Ao Mā’ohi to write a description of the ocean as marae, represented it as a place in which people immersed themselves to cleanse themselves of trauma and violence (143). Spitz also represents the ocean this way and encourages us to think of language as another kind of marae, in which her novel operates as a kind of island space, connected to and in the process of connecting many other Oceanic Indigenous peoples and lands, and leading towards decolonial possibilities through these cartographies of relation. “Come home my son,” writes Tetiāre in a poem to people from Motu, “pass on your dreams to your brothers” (157). Her poem suggests that connections between place (“home”) and knowledge (“dreams”)



are crucial to her vision of persistence. She hopes that the continuation of these connections to place and knowledge will allow people to be “beautiful and proud, forever Mā’ohi” (154). This future that Tetiāre envisions as she realizes the adaptive possibilities of the Word, already embedded in Reo Mā’ohi and Mā’ohi stories, and equipped to persist because they are expressible through multiple mediums, is an explicitly Indigenous future. Tetiāre extends this future, “the world of tomorrow,” to other Indigenous peoples throughout Oceania, because of the relationships, place-based and knowledge-based, the ocean-and-language-as-marae make possible (140).

In this way, the literary world in which the book circulates does not limit itself to “French Polynesia,” but is expansive like the ocean, creating a relational space much like a marae that is attendant to Oceanic genealogies that also go beyond Motu. Mateata-Allain writes that Spitz suggests in her book and in articles elsewhere that she “is calling for a conversation between Pacific peoples” (*Bridging* 49). Backing this up, in an unpublished paper, “To Write Colonized,” Spitz argues that the kind of multilingualism she exhibits in her works is a necessary strategy to renew conversations across Oceanic peoples. She says that Indigenous writers from Oceania need to “escape the monolingual in order to blaze our collective power...so that we can dance our initial connections with Pacific peoples and unite our solidarity” (qtd. in Mateata-Allain 49). For Spitz, embracing multilingualism unites multiple languages and literary forms in one text, but it also validates translation as a connective force. The multilingual construction of Spitz’s book and its subsequent translation into English work toward the restoration of ties between Oceanic Indigenous peoples which have been broken by colonial language formations.

Together, the figure of the marae and these linguistic and formal strategies center Mā’ohi concerns and worldviews, while also gesturing toward the concerns of Indigenous peoples

beyond Motu, given the persistence of marae across Oceania. Albert Wendt connects the multiplicity of and mobility between genres and languages in Pacific Island literatures to a notion of heterogeneous but interlinked intellectual traditions across Oceania (*Nuanua* 4).<sup>39</sup> Concurring with Wendt, I suggest that calling the ocean a marae links Spitz's novel to the intellectual and social traditions of Indigenous peoples across Oceania, implying that her novel and the island of Motu are not only involved genealogically within the book's pages and the island's landed space, but are also part of more expansive cartographies of oceanic relation. Spitz's novel works to reestablish protocols of relation that enable what Somerville refers to as future "homecoming" associated with the structure of marae, and ongoing connection and persistence not just for Mā'ohi peoples, but also with an eye to decolonization across Indigenous peoples (71).

Spitz's novel is a textual object that, like Tupaia's Chart, circulates through Oceania. It does so, in part, through acts of translation, which give it transoceanic afterlives, and, as it circulates, it not only shows how imperial cartographies are inadequate for representing the experiences of the family on Motu, but also remaps the ocean in a Mā'ohi-centric way. Motu is a name that could refer to several islands in the region and literally means "low lying island" in Reo Mā'ohi. In this sense, it becomes a kind of "every island," not in a way that collapses difference like the French official's "far-flung regions" but in a way that indicates both specificity and range, just like Spitz's cartography in novel form. The ocean-and-language as-marae become the sustaining and connecting forces of the novel's world, the spaces in which the bodies of land, language, and

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, mixing genres is not a strategy limited to Polynesian authors, and has a long history in European literary texts as well, but my point here is that multiple Indigenous Oceanic scholars note that Eurocentric divisions between genres and literary forms are not entirely useful when analyzing Indigenous texts because the forms of those texts do not necessarily map on to or are not legible within definitions of European forms, and nor should they have to be.

beings move, gather, and converse—spaces whose protocols of interaction and relation create and transmit knowledge in ways always gesturing to visions of Te Ao Mā'ohi.

*Documenting Genealogies of Transoceanic Relation in Linda Hogan's People of the Whale*

A comparable vision of questioning our “mental and material maps” emerges in Hogan’s novel, *People of the Whale* (Goeman 204). In this book, the ocean, like in Spitz’s novel, is the source of creation, “the creator of life, the first element,” but Hogan’s remapping depends particularly on relationships between human and non-human beings made possible through the ocean (113). This remapping locates the ocean at the center of the novel’s multi-being cosmology as well as its cartography—the ocean creates whales, and, in turn, the whales are ancestors of humans as well as other sea creatures. Though focused specifically on members of one particular A’atsika, or “people of the whale,” family and their ancestors in the Pacific Northwest, this quote not only names the ocean as part of the family’s genealogy but also names it as the catalyst of wider transoceanic genealogies. The family includes Thomas, who joins the US military and fights in Vietnam before going missing there for several years and then returning; Ruth, his first wife; Marco, their son; and Lin, Thomas’s daughter with his second wife, an Indigenous woman “from the mountains” of South East Asia (167). The Prologue of the novel opens by locating A’atsikas, including the family, in reference to the ocean: “*We live on the ocean. The ocean is a great being. The tribe has songs about the ocean, songs to the ocean...[The tribe’s] eyes follow the width and length of the world*” (9, original emphasis). This opening suggests that the ocean offers the A’atsika people not necessarily or not only physical oceanic mobility, but oceanic vision and knowledge. A collective “we” voices this opening, and that collective lives *on* the ocean, not *by* or *in* it. “On” suggests a dependency that is not carried

in the word “by.” It suggests that the ocean sustains the collective’s existence. The tribe’s songs are “about” and “to” the ocean, indicating that the ocean is not only part of the A’atsika’s creation story but also is involved in a relationship with A’atsika peoples, sustained through ongoing modes of communication like the songs.

From this context, Thomas deploys to South East Asia to fight for the US in the Vietnam War. In what he thinks is Southern Vietnam—though this blurs with Cambodia, Laos, and even Thailand in the novel—Thomas cannot clearly locate the Indigenous peoples he encounters—at least not in ways that his military maps offer. Instead, those peoples, like the A’atsika, describe themselves in relation to specific geographies. One person tells him, “We are not Vietnamese. We are people from the mountains” (167). Here the speaker explicitly rejects being associated with an internationally recognized nation-state moniker and instead foregrounds his preferred terminology. Though the speaker is at that time displaced from the mountains, this is still the term he prefers, basing his identity in a geography that does not conform to the shape of Vietnam on internationally recognized maps. This assertion parallels Thomas’s and Ruth’s own experiences of being A’atsika in the USA. They describe themselves as A’atsika, people of the whale, living *on* the ocean, and do not usually describe themselves as American. By fictionalizing the A’atsika and ambiguously locating “people from the mountains,” Hogan avoids essentializing particular Indigenous peoples and refuses to locate the A’atsika or other Indigenous communities using the terms that are legible to geographies of those nation-state formations. The few times Thomas describes himself as American is when he is talking about the military, showing that, for Thomas, the US nation-state and US citizenship are explicitly linked to militarism. Hogan’s careful foregrounding of preferred Indigenous terms—people of the whale, people from the mountains, people of the earth—suggests that there are ways of knowing

and documenting place that do not require conforming to imperialist cartographies.

Prepositional grammars such as these—“of,” “from”—are explicitly relational. In other words, they mark out lines of descent and document cartographies that, though interfered with through the mappings of empire, still exist. They are also genitive terms, which, while potentially indicating possession, in Hogan’s use more closely suggest notions of origins that push against proprietary associations of possession.

Through these descriptions of two communities’ experiences, distinct yet entangled with one another because of the war, Hogan creates a transoceanic genealogy that resists mapping Indigenous peoples in the same ways that empire does. Though the people Thomas speaks with in Vietnam emphasize mountains and jungle rather than the ocean, Hogan’s genealogy is *transoceanic*, because, while conventional maps of empire highlight land spaces, Hogan foregrounds the ocean and uses it to make visible these parallels between the “people of the whale” and the “people of the mountains.” Hogan says in her “Sea Level” interview that she envisions “place itself” as “a living being” (172). In this novel she maps that liveliness in relation to the Pacific Ocean and the Indigenous peoples at the center of her narrative, unsettling imperial ways of representing spaces as well as genealogies. I call her transoceanic genealogy a cartography of relation because of the mapping work it achieves in the novel.<sup>40</sup> The novel asks us to not view land spaces in isolation but as part of interconnected sets of relations generated and facilitated through the ocean, and, therefore, indicates that attending to these relations is integral to local as well as global Indigenous futures.

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<sup>40</sup> By referring to this genealogy as a cartography of relation I also build on Édouard Glissant’s concept of a “poetics of relation,” that he frames as non-hierarchical, mutually productive network systems. Glissant imagines relation as the process by “which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (11). In Glissant’s Caribbean context, this concept of a poetics of relation provided a way to map what he called Creolized identities, not produced in isolation or static but created through multiple dynamic acts of rhizomatic connection (34).

*A Genealogy of Empire*

The violent contexts that affect the two communities—settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest and the Vietnam War—are not isolated from each other but are part of the same genealogy of US empire. The military maps that Thomas, and later his daughter, first rely on as guides do not make visible the transoceanic genealogies of US empire that bring the A’atsika reservation and Vietnam into contact. But Hogan consistently shows that because the ocean connects spaces and is a space defined by relationships between different beings, events that happen on one side of it can affect events on another side. The violence stemming from wars of empire and the tragedies that affect the family also impact lands connected by the Pacific, and consequently it is “as if the earth has ... been thrown off course,” causing “flooding on small islands” on one side of the ocean, and drought on another (128). By describing destructive events as connected, Hogan shows that her cartography is not dependent on topographical features; instead, she maps the Pacific as a place full of layers, or webs, of relation. Because of these webs of relation, the violences of imperialism and war reverberate across the Pacific, in the same way that a stone thrown into a pond causes ripples. Hogan maps how the transoceanic genealogy of empire can repeat histories of violence as well. Seeing the violence in Vietnam perpetuated by US soldiers, and recognizing the destruction in Indochina that French imperialism left in its wake, Thomas thinks, “It was like us, our history, one more group of murderers” (255). Then, again, in Vietnam, he thinks of “the long line of American tragedies that had shaped him,” describing the cartography created through empire as genealogical in nature—in other words, these violences are iterative and cumulative, even in different times and spaces (257). Thomas represents those tragedies as a “long line” that, like a line of descent, created him, and in this way Hogan suggests that these violences seen in Vietnam and experienced by A’atsika peoples

in the USA are not only historical but also hereditary and ongoing. Thus, Hogan's transoceanic cartography of imperial trauma makes visible that trauma's transmissible qualities, not only spatially—from the Pacific Northwest to Vietnam—but also genealogically.

One of the effects of this transoceanic genealogy of empire is that it renders invisible or conflates Indigenous peoples. We might read conflation as a form of relation, but it is one that homogenizes and erases, and Hogan differentiates it from what she delineates as distinctly Indigenous-centric relations. While designated by the US military as missing in Vietnam, Thomas lives with and is frequently mistaken for a member of the Indigenous community who call themselves "from the mountains," both by members of that community and by non-Indigenous peoples (165). But these moments of misrecognition take different forms. When people "from the mountains" recognize Thomas he is allowed to become part of their community, and although they soon see that he is not a person "from the mountains," he is still familiar to them. Says an old man to Thomas, "You look the same, like us" (168). This man does not say that Thomas *is* the same as them, but that he is *like* them and this similarity is enough to render him unthreatening in their community. In contrast, non-Indigenous members of the US military repeatedly misname Thomas as Vietnamese and therefore interpret him as an enemy. Hogan uses this emphasis on conflation to foreground how empire reads Thomas as legible in only two ways: he is either missing, or he is an enemy. Whereas, the familiarity the people "from the mountains" associate with Thomas culminates in a literal transoceanic convergence of genealogies through the birth of Thomas's daughter Lin, with a woman from the community. The differences between these moments of recognition show that the transoceanic relations of empire conflate violently one Indigenous person with another, or erase the Indigenous body altogether, while the trans-Indigenous moment of recognition results in ongoing life.

*Genealogies of Oceanic Knowledge & Literacy*

Physical spaces are not the only elements at stake in Hogan's cartographical framework. Knowledge, and how that knowledge is recognized or made legible, is also at stake. By emphasizing moments of recognition and kinship, Hogan's cartography makes visible transoceanic genealogies of global connectivity that do not conform to the mappings of imperialism but are dependent on the ocean as a creative, social zone. Hogan characterizes this zone as primarily framed through what she defines as A'atsika knowledge and vocabularies of kinship, not only with other humans but also with other beings that share the ocean. This knowledge is very closely tied to the role of whales in the book. Hogan embeds whales in A'atsika lines of descent. Whales are also transoceanic travellers, facilitating the visions of mobility the Prologue refers to. Chadwick Allen describes whales as "a sign literally *in transit* between northern and southern hemispheres of an Indigenous Pacific" ("*A Transnational*" 11). By making whales central to the novel, Hogan's cartography emphasizes the travelling nature of A'atsika genealogies through the Pacific—not only the physical travelling of a bloodline, as when Thomas travels to Vietnam and conceives a child with his second wife, but also in non-physical ways. Hogan does not equate Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest and Vietnam through the "sign" of the whale but uses whales, and other connections to the ocean to, in Allen's words, represent "a more complex, Indigenous-to-Indigenous idea" (11).

To elaborate: Thomas leaves his daughter, Lin, when he returns to his homeland. Despite this, Lin is connected to him—specifically, connected by the features of both her ancestral homelands: "Jungle was her blood. Ocean was, too, but she didn't yet know it" (197). "Blood" here does not seem to refer to a solely genetic kinship with her parents, but is place-based—rooted in the (mountain) jungle and the ocean. Lin has memories of her father, but in addition to



memories, she is connected to him by their mutual affinity for maps as her job as an adult is to “wor[k] with the papers that help connect people to whoever and whatever they had lost” (215). This affinity allows her to track Thomas to his reservation and travel there herself as a young adult.

But, once at the reservation, Hogan shows how Lin and Thomas must discover different ways of understanding cartography and learn the literacies needed to interpret cartographies of relation. These are literacies that Ruth already seems to know. Once Lin arrives at the reservation, Ruth, Thomas’s first wife recognizes her, saying “we’re related you and I” (221). Like the older South East Asian man’s recognition of Thomas, this recognition is articulated as one of kinship, though Lin is Thomas’s child, not Ruth’s. Crucially, this suggests that a conventional mode of recognizing a “blood” relation—shared DNA, which can be described as a map of one’s biology—does not adequately account for the relations between Ruth and Lin. Lin’s reaction to the ocean underscores this notion. Even as Lin’s ancestral ties have been violated by the traumas of war, she looks at the sea and says, “I have felt all my life the blood I come from. Even this place I have always felt. It is like I know it here” (232). While Lin uses the term “blood,” she links it to knowledge associated with the ocean, rather than to biology. This association, together, with Ruth’s recognition of Lin as kin, shows that relations are not reduced to genetics but are more concerned with embodied knowledges of the ocean.

Genealogy links this family not necessarily through blood but through oceanic knowledge that manifests in bodily ways. I use the term “oceanic literacy” to describe the ways that such knowledge manifests, drawing from Karin Animoto Ingersoll who applies it to Kanaka Maoli forms of seascape knowledge that reveal “hidden linkages between water and land that speak to Indigenous ways of knowing and being” (20). Hogan maps lines of genealogical descent through

these forms of ocean knowledge. In particular, Hogan ties knowledge to the ocean through the A'atsika people's relations with whales. While whales are ancestors for the A'atsika, they are also sustainers—and not just in terms of food. The whales also give people knowledge. For example, a “tiny whale...gave the first hunter instructions on hunting and other details of living a good life” (282). Thomas shares this brief story directly after he has decided to return to living on the ocean and starts swimming in it, seeking the information of its depths. While the whale was “tiny,” and therefore might not seem valuable as a food source, the whale still offers the first hunter knowledge that helps him continue not only surviving, but living a “good life.” The fact that this detail is included precisely when Thomas starts to understand how to read the “breath of the universe” of the ocean, suggests that Hogan's cartography of Indigenous transoceanic genealogy requires a specific oceanic literacy, like Spitz's characters do—but in Hogan's case this literacy stems from knowledge-exchange with whales (281).

Hogan's emphases on whale-specific literacy show that Indigenous cartographies can be represented in ways not reducible to or available through colonial definitions and forms of mapping. Witka, an A'atsika elder and Thomas's grandfather, first embodies what I mean here. Witka “*used to enter the cold sea naked and converse with whales, holding his breath for a long time*” (10, original emphasis). Because of this ability to hold his breath just like the whales and to communicate with whales and other sea creatures, Witka has much knowledge about the ocean, especially related to whale hunts, regarding what particular sea creatures want, and what it takes to live well on the ocean. This knowledge requires being submerged in the same way that whales submerge themselves in the ocean, suspending breath. The novel describes Witka's knowledge as powerful, based on the fact that he “lived between the worlds and between the elements.... [he knew] the language of currents” (19). Witka is literate in currents, suggesting that currents

convey information and have language(s) that is useful to him and how he lives. This description also implies that not everyone is literate in this language. As currents move things in their flow and connect disparate locations, so the language of currents communicates trans-oceanic forms of knowledge and valuable information to Witka.

Witka's oceanic literacy is so valuable that scientists visit him to acquire it, however, again, his knowledge is not legible to everyone. Hogan describes one researcher "thinking if they could learn it what a weapon it would make" (20). This inclusion distinguishes between the militarized oceanic literacy of settler colonialism and that of the A'atsika, based on mutual communication and embodied experiences. The militarized literacy, such as that needed to read the maps that Thomas uses to identify the locations of enemies, weaponizes cartography. Thomas and his fellow soldiers use those maps solely to inflict violence. In contrast, Witka's oceanic literacy concerns ways to maintain long lasting, mutually sustaining layers of communication and life. This does not mean that Witka's literacy is without violence, as he and other A'atsika members use weapons and he is, after all, a whaler. But when Witka kills a whale he only does it after a whale "com[es] gladly," and only after the people have conveyed their hunger and need, and offered the whales something in return—their own bodies in death, and through these exchanges both humans and whales live as part of each other (22-23).

The novel's portrayal of songs as forms of communication that both humans and whales share underscores this point. Witka and his wife Mary sing:

Oh brother, sister whale...Grandmother whale, Grandfather whale. If you come here to land we have beautiful leaves and trees. We have warm places. We have babies to feed and we'll let your eyes gaze upon them. We will let your soul become a child again. We will pray it back into a body. It will enter our bodies.

You will be part human. We'll be part whale. Within our bodies, you will dance  
in warm rooms, create light, make love.... Then one day I will join you. (22-23)

While the killing of a whale may seem like a violent act, the invitation in this song is one of reciprocity and interaction based explicitly on intimacy and kinship relationships, blurring what is whale and what is human. These musical conversations give both whales and humans knowledge and help them make decisions based on the communicated needs of the participants. If the whales are needed because the people are hungry, then they come, and if the whales are low in number then they do not come. The song suggests that the whale receives something out of the arrangement, too—including warmth, love, and pleasure. It also suggests that when humans die, they become part of the whales—life, then, does not end but is mutually sustaining.

The collective “we” of the Prologue states that to “*turn [your] back to the sea*” means to turn your back on “*life*” itself (11, original emphasis). Witka’s oceanic literacy is an example the book gives of continuing to face the sea, and, so, continuing to live. Literacy becomes genealogical here, because continuing these lines of communication is integral to ongoing forms of life. Though Witka may be “the last of a line of traditional men,” elements of his abilities and knowledge surface in his descendants, acting as bodily manifestations of oceanic literacy, and thus continue mapping out the lines of descent from the ocean whether they are “traditional” or not (18). Thomas, his grandson, can hold his breath like Witka, and Ruth, Thomas’s wife, is born with gill slits—literally embodying a fish (23, 27). Even though those slits are sewn up at the hospital, she still has a gift of hearing and implicitly understanding sea creatures. Evidence of multi-being relation and the knowledge required to preserve that relation is still present in her body, even if it is not immediately visible. These details also reinforce the fact that kinship, for Hogan, is not *only* hereditary in terms of blood ties, but is *also* maintained through

communication, embodied experiences, and intimacy through either sexual relations or ingestion. But the book represents evidence of this kinship as a form of literacy—that is, competency in the knowledge of the sea.

Ruth tells us the origins of this competency, reinforcing the fact that it is oceanic in nature:

There was an old story about a girl who came from the sea.... From the sea she brought knowledge. She came in with the sounds of the ocean and she sang them to the people. That's how they learned the whales' songs and also the ticking of coral. She protected the sea and the animals.... When she died...she returned to the sea cut in pieces, and each piece was eaten by the sea animals so the songs and the animals would continue. (56-7)

These songs theorize modes of oceanic literacy that map out ongoing relationships predicated on kinship through exchanges of knowledge and resources. This story underscores the transmissible nature of oceanic literacies for the A'atsika, because it is predicated on intimate relations—here, ingestion. Later, when Lin remembers songs from her father's heritage, which she has never actually heard before, we see again the notion of oceanic literacies transmitted through generations, marking it as genealogical in nature, too (217). Knowledge, here, is housed in and routed through the ocean, learned through communication with sea creatures, and results in a kind of literacy that maintains reciprocal, mutual relationships between humans and nonhuman sea creatures.

### *Refusing Settler State Modes of Mapping and Navigating Trauma*

As Thomas relearns the literacy necessary to read the ocean like Witka, he starts to see possibilities of navigating through the traumas of war in Vietnam and settler colonialism in the

US. He first tries to “heal” and address the traumas of militarism through methods that the settler state makes available to him by travelling to Washington DC and visiting the Vietnam War memorial. At the memorial he finds the engraving of “his name listed as one of the dead,” because the military thought he had been killed (248). But, because he then returned home after going missing for so many years, there is also a circle next to Thomas’s name, “which means he was resurrected” (248). Thomas calls this wall “the map of names,” and he wants to use it to find some way to understand what he went through during the war (248). But this “map” is not adequate for him. It does not offer him the healing or direction forward he is looking for, and even when he tries to return his medals to the military, saying he does not deserve them, he is not successful (266). “At least you survived it,” says one of his fellow veterans (254). “No I didn’t,” says Thomas. “My name is up there. Among the dead and the missing” (255). Thomas is only legible here in two ways—dead or missing, just like in Vietnam when his legibility to the US as an Indigenous person was reduced to enemy or missing.

But his statement also suggests an act of refusal that aligns with Audra Simpson’s (Kahnawake Mohawk) definition of refusal in the context of Indigenous sovereignties. For Simpson, refusal acts as a political alternative to “recognition,” or legibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the settler state (11). A “cartography of refusal,” as Simpson articulates, represents ways of making visible “the fundamentally interrupted *and* interruptive capacity of [Indigenous] life within settler society...[that] upend the perception that colonization, elimination, and settlement are situations of the past” (33). Legibility for the settler state, in Hogan’s book, comes through maps, memorials, and the commodification of particular types of knowledge and resources—that is, it comes through settler structures. However, land-ocean and human-nonhuman relations in Hogan’s novel are the foundation of the production of A’atsika knowledge or legibility and the

foundation of refusal. These relations are not mappable within a settler colonial context: Witka and Ruth do not try to make their knowledge legible in or translate to settler structures of knowledge, and neither, eventually, does Thomas. As Simpson shows, refusing to be made legible does not mean opting out of being present. The Indigenous peoples in Hogan's novel still insist on being acknowledged but on their own terms (11). For example, I return to the names Indigenous peoples in Hogan's book choose for themselves: "people of the whale" and "people from the mountains." These naming choices unsettle the dominant, imperial orders of organizing the world because they do not translate to how the imperial and/or settler state categorizes them.

Thomas tries to account for his time in Vietnam through the methods, or order, of the settler state but is not satisfied. He then refuses the modes of recognition and healing the state offers.<sup>41</sup> He says: "I'm not going to be remembered as an American who killed children and women" (257). Here is another one of the few instances in the book where Thomas refers to himself as "American," and all of these instances are tied to the military. US imperialism tries to erase Indigenous marks of presence from its maps, except in state-sanctioned forms such as the memorial wall. Even so, when Thomas is in Washington DC, Hogan writes: "Looking at the Potomac, he wondered what Indian word the river name came from, where the tribe lived" (266). In this moment in the novel, as in many other moments, Hogan foregrounds an aspect of Indigenous mapping that does not gloss over or obscure colonialism and its violent effects, but grapples with it and then refuses it. Thomas does not just foreground a marker of Indigenous presence—the river's name—but actively thinks about its origins, while refusing to assign those

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<sup>41</sup> Mark Rifkin's theories of recognition in "The Erotics of Sovereignty" (2011) are also relevant here. He argues that US recognition of Indigenous self-determination does not mean a shift toward greater Indigenous autonomy, but rather an increasing insistence on the elimination of Indigenous peoples. In other words, recognition has limitations when it comes to Indigenous sovereignty.

origins only to the past. The name still exists, whether it is legible or not to everyone. Thus, in Washington DC, Thomas does not ignore or forget “the long line of American tragedies that had shaped him,” but he also distances himself from being “an American,” refuses his resurrection on the wall, and returns to the reservation (257).

### *An Oceanic Cartography of Self-Determination*

The final part of the novel requires Thomas to remap his world on his terms—oceanic terms. Back on A’atsika lands, he is shot while on a canoe trip with other A’atsika men. Once shot, Thomas falls into the ocean and dies. However, Thomas then experiences a second resurrection. Before this event he realizes that “he has violated laws beneath the laws of men and countries, something deeper, the earth and the sea...He has to be water again, rock, earth with its new spring wildflowers and its beautiful complex mosses” (268). The laws he “violated” have severed the relations the ocean makes possible—between himself and the water, the land, and their other inhabitants. The second resurrection he experiences functions as a way to reestablish these relations. Falling into the ocean, “he feels, but doesn’t see, all those moments of the past, beautiful and terrible” (287). He is brought to the island where the elders live by a whale or an octopus—and there he comes back to life. Now that he has been resurrected again, through the ocean, he embarks on a mapping project, but one different from the maps he knew during his military days. Now he “maps their land by story and event and the old names” (299). Thomas’s experience in the ocean, how it gave him the ability to see and feel things he had not seen before, makes these acts of mapping, and of knowing what to map, possible.

Thus, the ocean in this novel acts as a deeply relational space of Indigenous self-determination, ways of knowing, and a mode of navigating through trauma, in ways not



accounted for by settler state modes of recognition. The settler state does not recognize his resurrection as a possible event, or understand the oceanic literacies Hogan's characters engage in. The maps Thomas creates are not legible as maps under settler definitions—because they are not based on colonial geographies and methods of routing. Instead, these maps are based on “story and event and the old names” (299). This self-determination through the unsettling of colonial geographies, Hogan suggests, is not merely a reaction or responses to the violences of militarization and the settler state, but is something that preexists settler colonialism and continues to exist because those stories, events, and names are entangled and birthed by the ocean itself, which is “the breath of the universe” (281). In addition, the transoceanic representation we see through this resurrection of Thomas and his re-acquaintance with the life that lives below the surface of the ocean decenters the human while also making possible connections and alliances between Indigenous peoples and among beings who are attached in some way to the ocean. This suggests that there are modes of global connectivity that do not conform to colonial or neoliberal concepts of globalization—that the world can be connected apart from the forced connections of war, capitalism, and ecological disaster—and that means attending to Indigenous-centric stories.

This vision of the ocean is not about *healing*, but is more closely tied to methods of survivance in Chippewa scholars Gerald Vizenor's terms, or “the continuance of stories” (1).<sup>42</sup> It is not about healing because Hogan's characters still live in acute awareness of their trauma. That trauma is not erased. It is also tempting to argue that Hogan's cartography of relation fits neatly within what Rob Wilson calls an Oceanic “commons” that will “open [the region]...up to

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<sup>42</sup> As Dian Million and others argue, concepts such as “healing” and “reconciliation” can further silence and pathologize Indigenous peoples and therefore are not necessarily compatible with working toward self-determination (6).

stranger modes of translocal solidarity, ecological alliance, and world belonging” (“Towards an Ecopoetics” 213). Wilson’s vision of Oceania as a “commons” envisions it as both a physical space, shared by many beings and as a place of social relations. Wilson’s “commons” is therefore useful to an extent for theorizing how the ocean is mapped by Hogan, but Hogan’s novel requires a more complex framework than the “commons” offers. Wilson’s vision is a hopeful one, and I argue that Hogan’s vision is hopeful as well, but her cartography does not require the ocean and everything in it to be accessible to all in order to be hopeful. Wilson wants to “open Oceania up” (229). He does not mean this in an imperial or militaristic way. However, his idea of opening up does not quite fit with Hogan’s emphasis on Indigenous specificities—she certainly emphasizes the ocean as connective, but “opening” is not the most useful term to represent how she maps the ocean because opening, especially when forced by imperialism and the conflation of differences can cause “unlawful boundaries [to be] crossed” (197). “Opening” does not account for the many protocols, responsibilities, and obligations that are attached to Indigenous visions of relation, nor does it account for the fact that a “commons” can overlook asymmetrical power structures, erasures, gaps, and silences. In other words, a “commons” is often only “common” for some, not all. Wilson’s Oceania is populated, but though he holds clear concern for nonhuman beings in Oceania, “populated,” for him, still centers the human, whereas Hogan’s cartographies of relation depend on genealogies that decenter the human (216).

Hogan’s novel shows us that cartographies tell stories, and that stories can be cartographical. While the non-Native characters in the novel tend to describe the A’atsika as caught between a static past and fraught modernity, Hogan advocates for particular transoceanic relations which act as pathways for Indigenous belonging that precede and exceed US/Eurocentric modes of managing and narrating Indigenous lands and the ocean. For Hogan, Indigenous oceanic forms

of knowledge and relational practices equip the A'atsika with the tools necessary for living through and beyond imperialism. This vision presents the world and Indigeneity as heterogeneous, ever moving, and persisting. It is predicated on the ocean being a space that is not merely to be crossed, catalogued, or taken from, but a basis for life itself. These cartographies of relation are not presented as new or as relegated to the past, but as ongoing, present, and future-thinking avenues that reroute US narratives of the Pacific. In so doing, Hogan asserts the ongoing nature of the violences of imperialism but also the persistence of Indigenous epistemologies in the midst of such violences. As Ruth says, “we have continued” (269).

### *Conclusion*

The Indigenous mappings in Spitz and Hogan's novels resonate with Goeman's analysis of how Native women “reorganize[e] spac[e]” through literature to “unsettle” colonial mappings (2). Goeman calls this reorganization “(Re)mapping” and states that it is not about “recovery” but “understanding the processes that have defined our current spatialities in order to sustain vibrant Native futures” (3). “Recovery” implies that the traumas experienced by Indigenous lands and these spaces can be erased, but Goeman refuses this, signaling the importance of memory as well in these remapping processes. These processes are grounded in narratives, and, therefore, literature has a significant role to play in “spatial decolonization” projects (1). Likewise, mapping cannot be thought of separately from genealogy in Spitz and Hogan's novels, because of their emphasis on spatial and place-based modes of belonging, to the land, and to the ocean. The books ask us to read representations of genealogy as maps that embody connections past, present, and future—maps that empire continues to obscure. Spitz's *Island of Shattered Dreams* and Hogan's *People of the Whale* each honor their characters' specific places, forms of

knowledge, relations, histories and cultural contexts without losing sight of the more expansive networks of oceanic connection within which their characters and texts circulate. Therefore they delineate oceanic cartographies that offer possibilities for understanding Indigenous geographies outside of imperial maps, even as imperial maps and their narratives affect Indigenous geographies and the beings who inhabit them.

Therefore, this chapter suggests that, if we are to take seriously Eve Tuck's and K. Wayne Yang's argument that "decolonization is not a metaphor," then remappings of oceanic spaces are just as important as remappings of landed spaces. In an essay entitled "I Write," Spitz asserts that she writes because "it is down to us to spread into all the spaces of thought" (245). In the context of this essay, "us" refers to a trans-Indigenous audience. I contend that *Island of Shattered Dreams* and *People of the Whale* both, in different ways, "spread" not just into "spaces of thought" but geographic spaces, too, showing that these, like Spitz's marae, are also spaces of protocols and relations, making room, like Tupaia did, for their own oceanic visions.

Set largely in postwar moments, *Island of Shattered Dreams* and *People of the Whale* emerged in the years proximate to what might seem like the apex of demilitarization in the Pacific: On 10 September 1996 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and nuclear testing in Pacific waters ceased. Though some nuclear-armed nations (Pakistan, India, North Korea) have not yet signed the treaty and others (the US and China) have not ratified it, the widespread adoption of this treaty in many ways marked a victory for Pacific demilitarization efforts including the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement. However, while the nuclear-free aspects of Indigenous demilitarization efforts gathered under the umbrella of NFIP ultimately sufficiently drew enough international attention to catalyze change, the demilitarization aspirations of the movement,

delineated in The Peoples' Charter for a Free and Independent Pacific (1983) go much further than the cessation of nuclear testing, and assert that its signatories will “work to ensure the withdrawal of colonial powers from the Pacific” (Article 4). As Tracey Banivanua Mar (Fiji) reminds us, self-determination and decolonization as an ongoing process lies at the heart of such movements in the Pacific, with nuclear testing and war as just two very salient examples of ongoing exploitation in the region (225). Likewise, Spitz and Hogan show through their two novels that militarization and other forms of exploiting the ocean do not end with the cessation of a war or nuclear testing. Read together, these novels illuminate their shared histories of exploitation and show how Indigenous peoples might respond to devastating legacies of imperialism by reasserting Indigenous mappings of the ocean.

In my next chapter I continue my focus on cartography by examining Craig Santos Perez's poetics, which take up stories of militarization and demilitarization to show how they affect the current historical moment. While *People of the Whale* and *Island of Shattered Dreams* demonstrate how centering Indigenous literacies and genealogies unsettle and re-place colonial cartographies of the ocean, Perez's poetics take up the food product SPAM to demarcate how US empire in particular exploits oceanic relations for its own ends. He demonstrates the difficulties of navigating what Mar would call “daily decolonization” in the Pacific, as capitalism and climate change intensify and intersect with the ways that militarism territorializes the ocean (225).

## Chapter 2

Mapping Resurgent Archipelagoes in the Militarized Sea: Craig Santos Perez's *Gastropoetics of SPAM*®

Most children who grow up on an island in the Pacific have a SPAM story, or a specific way that their family eats SPAM. In the lower central highlands of West Papua, where peanuts are the main export and one can still find US bullets left over from WW2, my mother cubed SPAM and fried it with soy sauce and those peanuts. We ate it over rice. One Christmas, missing ham from our passport country of New Zealand, Mum served us thickly sliced SPAM (fried, again) alongside mashed potatoes and the dehydrated peas that she had made us squeeze in our suitcases months earlier. A quick web search for SPAM reveals articles about its status as a luxury item in South Korea, essays about “SPAM shame” in the US, horrific factory conditions affecting mainly immigrant workers, travel writers documenting the best places to travel for SPAM across North America, reports of a SPAM black market in Hawai‘i, news of a limited edition pumpkin spice SPAM for Fall, and an obesity crisis blamed (in part) on SPAM in Samoa. Robert Ji-Song Ku writes of SPAM’s “dubious” reputation in US gastropolitics, and points out that, “while it exists mainly as an object of snooty condescension and a symbol of culinary unsophistication in most parts of the United States, the product is held in much higher regard elsewhere in the world” (194). As he documents, American white upper and middle classes often view SPAM’s ingredients with suspicion, racialize it as an Asian American food, and also disdain it as a food for the lower classes. The diverse ways SPAM has been discursively constructed in the US and in the Pacific reveal “layers of overlapping histories, zigzagging and crisscrossing migrations, and elaborate cultural transformations” (223). Because of these histories, SPAM is now perhaps one of the world’s most recognizable trademarks, like

McDonald's, and as such has the power to inspire a vast spectrum of emotions from nostalgia to shame, passion, love, desire, loathing, and disgust.

Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez draws on these emotions and the often polarizing qualities of SPAM in his poems as he documents how the US military circulated SPAM throughout the Pacific. In a 2013 entry for the *Kenyon Review* blog, Perez writes, “technically, SPAM is a species of invasive foods” (“I Eat”). In this entry, parts of which later become a poem in his 2017 book, *From Unincorporated Territory [Lukao]*, Perez traces the history of SPAM in his homeland of Guam (hereafter referred to as its Chamorro name, Guåhan) and across the Pacific. He shows that SPAM's transpacific and invasive valences are a direct consequence of how the pink meat travelled in its distinctive rectangular cans from the Hormel factory in the small town of Austin, Minnesota, to the Pacific via the US military. Where the military went, SPAM followed, as communities adopted it as both a commodity and a product for consumption. Then, true to its invasive nature, it took on lives of its own and became embedded in multiple gastronomies across the Pacific. As Perez documents in his essays and in two of his poetry collections, *[Guma']* (2014) and *[Lukao]*<sup>43</sup>—part of his currently four book *From Unincorporated Territory* series—SPAM is perhaps the most transpacific of foods, and it is also the most military and the most imperial. Paloma Fresno-Calleja, noting the US military's close associations with food products like SPAM, calls the foodways of US imperialism “gastrocolonialism” and argues that “contemporary foodways in the Pacific,” including SPAM, “are not only a side effect of colonization, militarization or neo-imperialism, they also contribute to feed these processes and the discourses that sustain them” (1041, 1044). In other words, foodways facilitated by militarization and their impacts on Indigenous peoples are a feature of

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<sup>43</sup> Hereafter, I will refer to Perez's these titles in parenthetical citations as *H*, *S*, *G*, and *L*. This chapter primarily focuses on *[Guma']* and *[Lukao]*.

colonialism and the way it entrenches its networks in the Pacific. Directly engaging with this concept of gastrocolonialism, Perez writes in *Kenyon Review* that “SPAM is now a part of our cultural diet and inheritance” and “SPAM is a Pacific rite of passage,” because its insidious power is tied to the ways it has inserted and entwined itself into Pacific genealogies, childhoods, and memory (“I Eat”).

By asking us to look at the gastrocolonial discourses underpinning the dissemination and circulation of SPAM as military and capitalist forces, Perez shows that the linked traumas of land dispossession and environmental damage are transnational and transoceanic phenomena. The colonial modes of connection that SPAM creates and participates in are integral to what he describes as the “imperial terripelago” or “global archipelago” of US empire (“Transterritorial” 619). He describes US empire in this way because the terms effectively suggest both the watery pelagic and land components of US’s numerous territories, military bases, and political bases, whose power and influence manifests in forms of regulation, control, and surveillance that go well beyond what is typically represented on a world map or in official government documents.<sup>44</sup> As David Vine has pointed out, many of the US’s military outposts prove difficult to represent at all on a map due to “secrecy” and a “lack of transparency,” though, as of 2015, there were over 800 such bases across the world (*The Nation*).<sup>45</sup> Territoriality, for Perez, “is more than land. Territoriality signifies a behavioral, social, cultural, historical, political, and economic phenomenon. Territoriality demarcates migration and settlement, inclusion and exclusion, power

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<sup>44</sup> His description also reflects how Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens define the term “archipelagic Americas” to include not just those territories officially occupied by the US, but also “islands that have been America-affiliated and America-constituting in ways that precede and exceed traditional narratives of US imperialism and US governmentality” (4). Such a concept acknowledges the US empire’s impacts on somewhere like New Guinea, which, while never officially a territory or in any formal governmental relationship with the US, was a critical site for US bases during WWII and the US’s presence there caused ramifications lasting into today.

<sup>45</sup> See also Daniel Immerwahr’s *How To Hide an Empire* (2019) for more on the ways that the US cartographically misrepresents itself and its empire.



and poverty, access and trespass, incarceration and liberation, memory and forgetting, self and other, mine and yours...Territorialities are shifting currents, not irreducible elements” (620). That is, to truly get a sense of the reach and impact of US empire, one must follow its “currents” and narratives, including investigating what drives them and what they, in turn, shape and facilitate. While the image of the US we are accustomed to seeing on maps projects what Perez calls a “false union of empire,” even as it often excludes territories like Guåhan, his poems reveal the underpinnings of the “terripelago” while “denaturaliz[ing]” the narratives that construct it (“Archipelagic American Studies” 108).

In Perez’s poems SPAM illuminates and “denaturalize[s]” such hidden networks of US power in the Pacific, though SPAM itself is part of the connective tissue that makes the “imperial terripelago” possible (“Archipelagic” 108; “Transterritorial” 619). Perez’s poetics thus engage SPAM’s entanglements in Indigenous lives and the frequently ironic gastropolitics that underpin SPAM’s routes in the Pacific, revealing them to be inseparable from military buildup and its accompanying ecological devastation in Guåhan and throughout Oceania. Ji-Song Ku writes that “SPAM has not lost any of its luster for many of the people of Asia and the Pacific,” citing its ongoing popularity especially in Hawai‘i, Guåhan, and Alaska (213). But he does not dwell on why this may be so, or on SPAM’s particularly imperialist manifestations for Indigenous peoples in the US, in US territories, and in other places where the US military has left its legacies or continues to maintain its presence. In contrast, SPAM, for Perez, makes visible the US’s vast transpacific military reach and its impact for Indigenous peoples from Oceania, especially those from Guåhan. Perez maps out the ecologies and disruptions<sup>46</sup> of SPAM in the Pacific—ecologies

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<sup>46</sup> The foodways of SPAM are ecological in nature, because, as Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) writes, “ecology refers to systems that are organized in ways that reflect perspectives on more or less suitable ranges of adaptations to various metascale forces that have acted over time” (“Food Sovereignty” 359). Food is a necessary part of these

characterized by invasion, erasure, and a monopoly within foodways for Indigenous peoples—showing how SPAM distorts, obliterates, and exploits the norms of consumption, in the same ways that militarization and capitalism exploit environmental norms and also much like the Internet media form of spam exploits and flaunts norms of communication and meaning. Perez’s poetics must then navigate the difficulties of distinguishing between forces that exploit and those that nourish while living in militarized seas.

Perez’s gastropoetics of SPAM foreground Chamorro resistance in the face of militarization and that resistance’s intimate links to the persistence of Indigenous peoples affected by US empire right across the Pacific. Perez’s concept of “archipelagic thinking” is useful for representing Chamorro resistance, for Perez’s emphasis on the relationships between complex nodes of empire also provides a framework for destabilizing colonial narratives of isolated islands (“Archipelagic” 97). He illuminates Guåhan’s relationships with the rest of Oceania beyond the forced connections of empire in what he refers to as an “ocean of stories” or an “archipelago // of prayer” involved in sovereign struggles on multiple planes (*L* 65, 71). This “ocean of stories,” which he positions in contrast to the processed seas of SPAM, represent different metaphors and visions of transpacific networks while also allowing Perez to critique the kind of globalism inherent in, for example, corporate or Disney-fied images of Oceania such as *Moana* (2016) (*L* 65).

Engaging directly with anticolonial discourses and Indigenous movements for environmental justice, his SPAM poetics allow him to illuminate the convergences of Pacific environmental concerns with movements to demilitarize the Pacific. Perez centers his homeland

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adaptations, but imperialism limits the range of adaptations available. “A people’s homeland is a place where they can participate in an ecology that is conducive to a range of options for adaptation,” argues Whyte, including food systems, so if this range is disrupted, their sovereignty over their homeland and its ecologies is also disrupted (359).

of Guåhan, but the gastropoetics of SPAM asks questions of environmental and anticolonial justice that are trans-Indigenous in nature, invoking transpacific connections and activisms that envision an Oceanic world and oceanic relations outside of capitalist and imperial structures. These activisms present transpacific visions that are not peripheral or simply alternate to the militarized ocean but provide frameworks for engaging with and resisting the ways that US empire territorializes the ocean.

I argue that Perez writes the ocean as a site of reparative activist poetics and stories, made possible by the ocean's flows and networks, while also grappling with how the US empire makes use of oceanic networks for its own ends. His poetics are not a universalizing celebration of oceanic unity, mobility, and fluidity, but rather are archipelagoes of language and story, hyperaware of their connectedness to other writers and of Guåhan's links to other Pacific peoples. Perez thus connects Guåhan's colonization to that of other peoples across the Pacific and beyond. Consequently, Perez's poems depict a world of contested, specifically oceanic, sovereignties, activating and invested in overlapping conversations between Indigenous peoples.

*"Uncle SPAM": A Gastropoetics of US Pacific Empire*

If you travel to Austin, Minnesota, where SPAM was invented and first produced at the Hormel factory, the SPAM® Museum proudly shows off its many transpacific variations. A sign proclaims that, "from the beginning, SPAM® products were a part of cultures and cuisines, and are now enjoyed in more than 40 countries." Hormel's legacy began with producing canned meats for Depression-era government programs, before the company moved into creating military rations during World War II. Exhibits at the museum foreground a narrative tied to the US's nationhood and status as a major military power, stating that "since Hormel was founded,

patriotism has always mattered,” and “we’ve supported our troops through every major conflict.” Even the Hormel factory’s mascot during WWII, “Slammin’ Spammy,” took the form of a pig dressed like a US marine.<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 1. Photograph of “Slammin’ Spammy” taken at the SPAM® Museum, Austin, MN. 13 Jul. 2019.

The history of SPAM, as the museum makes evident, has always been allied with the US nation-state project, and, since at least 1944, the US imperial project. Even as it documents this history, Guåhan is barely mentioned in the museum at all except in a brief sentence that states that the citizens of Guam eat the most SPAM per capita in the world. In a map of “the SPAM® brand around the world,” Guåhan is invisible, providing evidence for Perez’s claim in his first book [*Hacha*], that “on some maps, Guam doesn’t exist” (*H* 7). Likewise, Guåhan’s pivotal role for the US’s Pacific military strategy is often literally invisible on maps. Countering such invisibility, Perez remaps the Pacific to show the layers of US militarism in Guåhan and beyond, using his gastropoetics of SPAM to reveal how US territoriality incorporates itself into the daily

<sup>47</sup> This mascot, of course, creates a presumably unintentional irony, suggesting that marines themselves are pigs, and that they are what they eat.

lives of Oceanic Indigenous peoples through the intimacies of consumption and digestion, mirroring the ways that imperial narratives and maps of the Pacific facilitate and normalize exploitation of its lands and waters.

Spanish (1668–1898) Japanese (1941–44), and US (1898–1941; 1944–present) military forces have a long history of exploiting Guåhan as a strategic location for expanding and maintaining their empires in the Pacific. The Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan landed in the Chamorro archipelago in 1521, violently engaging with its inhabitants, and Spain claimed Guåhan in 1565. However, Spanish forces did not occupy land in Guåhan until 1668 at which point they maintained a port before Jesuit missionaries colonized the island in the seventeenth century. The US claimed Guåhan after the Spanish-American war in 1898. Before 1898, Guåhan was part of the Chamorro archipelago along with what is now called the Northern Marianas. But as Perez writes in “A Kite of Words for the Korean People,” after the Spanish-American war “our home islands [the Chamorro archipelago] were partitioned along the 14<sup>th</sup> parallel. Guam, the southernmost Chamorro island, became a US territory, while the northern islands became a territory of Germany. Many Chamorro families were separated by this partition” (n.p.). Perez continues outlining this imperial history by explaining that Japan occupied the Northern Marianas from 1919, and took, or as Perez writes in *[Lukao]*, “kidnapped,” Guåhan from the US in 1941 during World War II (L 11). Since reoccupying Guåhan after World War II, the US continues to use the island for naval and air force bases that are a critical part of its military strategy in the Pacific, extending the US’s transoceanic reach and serving as a first point of defense against threats from countries such as North Korea. Despite this fact, Guåhan’s US citizens still do not have the rights of political representation.

US colonization of Guåhan is environmental as well as territorial. Throughout all four books of his series, Perez highlights the plight of the Micronesian kingfisher as a particular example of the impact of colonialism's environmental and territorial convergences. The kingfisher is a bird that now is only found in zoos outside Micronesia for its own protection. Imperialism forced its diaspora as it can no longer live in Guåhan due to the invasion of brown snakes. The snakes are native to New Guinea and other parts of Melanesia, Indonesia, and Australia. While the brown snake is an invasive species in Guåhan, it is Indigenous elsewhere, and only made its way to Guåhan because of the US military's movements between these locations in the twentieth century. The snake emblemizes how transoceanic currents of war and militarism force harmful relationships between Pacific Indigenous communities, in ways that are similar to how the US empire enables SPAM to proliferate through already existing foodways. Like the young Chamorro soldiers recruited into US wars at higher rates than other American ethnic groups, causing their own deaths as well as the deaths of others, these forced relationships lead only to narratives of endangerment and extinction in Perez's series.<sup>48</sup>

These environmental and territorial convergences occur because imperial narratives explicitly represent Guåhan in relation to the US as a body of land that is available for the US to extract from and use for its own ends. The "unincorporated territory" of Perez's title glosses how Guåhan, American Samoa, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands are categorized in relationship to the US, based on a 1901 *Insular Cases* ruling that established "that the United States can hold a territory as a colonial possession without ever incorporating the

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<sup>48</sup> The US military not only uses Guåhan's land and waters, but also its young people as resources to consolidate its power. Keith Camacho and Laurel Monnig note, "Chamorros, both men and women, enlist in greater numbers than any other American ethnic group.... And Chamorro casualty rates have been considerably higher" (162-3). The US military transports multiple military personnel into Guåhan, while they also remove many young Chamorros from their homeland when they enlist. The military bases also directly and indirectly displaces numerous other Chamorros who now live in diaspora due to poverty, lack of other forms of employment in Guåhan, etc.

territory into the United States or granting sovereignty to the territory” (H 9). The US granted citizenship to the people of Guåhan in 1950, just in time, as Perez points out, for its youth to be drafted into the Korean War (“A Kite”). The US military occupies at least a third of Guåhan’s land for its use, and even more on islands in the Northern Marianas, not to mention the water space it claims, restricts from Chamorro use, and has contaminated with chemicals and radioactive materials. After decades of such occupation, ninety percent of Guåhan’s food is imported, even though, as LisaLinda Natividad and Gywn Kirk argue, the island was self-sufficient before WWII (5).

As an expression of US benevolence, designed to facilitate acceptance of US expansion and occupation, SPAM’s arrival in Guåhan coincided with the arrival of the US military and release of Chamorro people from Japanese internment camps in World War II. Perez writes that, “after America bombed and invaded war-torn Guåhan in 1944, SPAM arrived. My grandmother was a young woman at that time; she describes her first taste of SPAM as ‘manna from heaven.’ Thereafter, Uncle Sam became Uncle SPAM” (“I eat therefore I SPAM”). Perez’s grandmother, after having little to eat during the Japanese occupation, initially associated SPAM with freedom and sustenance. SPAM brought Guåhan some form of food security, but at the expense of food sovereignty. Elizabeth Hoover (Mikmaq/Mohawk) and Devon A. Mihesuah (Choctaw) explain that policies that support food security for communities do “not specify how, where, and by whom the food that all people should have access to should be produced, contributing to a focus on food-related policies that emphasize maximizing food production and give inadequate attention to who exactly will benefit from where and how that food is produced” (8). Food sovereignty, on the other hand “seeks to address intersecting issues of hunger, environmentally unsustainable production, economic inequality, and social justice on a political level” (8). The

former facilitates corporate monopolies, while the latter transfers power to communities.

SPAM's spread in Guam and in the Pacific filled immediate nutrition needs. But, because of its entanglements with the US military, it then monopolized foodways while the military monopolized land spaces.

In the same way that the personification of the US empire as “Uncle Sam” carries with it connotations of kinship and supposed benevolence, Perez’s pun on this personification, “Uncle SPAM,” conveys some of the complex ways that SPAM—as object and reproducer of empire—has entwined its way into Pacific genealogies and histories, including family histories. In a processed meat poem in *[Guma’]*, focused on corned beef hash, Perez includes an epigraph from a poem by Brandy Nālani McDougall (Kanaka Maoli), that states “*from Uncle— / no matter / which Uncle— / you eat whatever / Uncle brings*” (46, original emphasis). Perez refers to two uncles in his work: a biological one, the “reigning Guam SPAM king” (26), and Uncle Sam/SPAM (e.g. 46, 48). Using the term “uncle” frames agents of US empire as kin. The epigraph from McDougall suggests that there is an obligation to accept what an uncle offers to his kin. Like manna, a benevolent gift from God, SPAM acquired miraculous characteristics and fed starving people. But, in doing so, empire, consumed through SPAM, becomes a “digestional genealogy, a delicious cycle” embedded in the lives of Chamorro peoples—it enforced its kinship and coerced consent (*G* 60). Correspondingly, Perez portrays the territoriality of empire as feeding its way into the very cells and relationships of his own family, which makes it, as Perez shows throughout his SPAM poems, a particularly complex monopoly to resist.

Perez thus uses representations of SPAM to show how Chamorro peoples and foodways are coopted into colonization. Because it has fed its way into family histories, SPAM has essentially become the brand of the Pacific, and through this brand the US military also draws



power. “SPAM is a Pacific rite of passage,” Perez writes, not just a Chamorro one (“I EAT”). His speaker portrays even his most intimate relationships, such as with his wife, as mediated through processed meat, asserting “she seduced me with breakfasts of Corned Beef Hash” (G 48). Entangled through the genealogies of Indigenous Pacific families in this way, and represented as a benevolent “Uncle,” US empire epitomized through SPAM (a SPAM-pelago, perhaps) coerces through relational transactions and dependencies. These transactions and dependencies become the connective forces underpinning US empire’s archipelagic power. A brand’s power lies in its memorability and in the ways it compels consumers to strongly associate its name or image with a product. Thus, SPAM as the brand of the Pacific, with an extensive monopoly due to its associations with food security and family, becomes very difficult to simply eliminate from one’s diet or life, just as the US military, with its purported focus on security, also is difficult to dislodge.

SPAM reveals the structural nature of the “imperial terripelago[’s]” transmission and form in the Pacific, which is reliant on how colonialism repeats itself and its interconnected traumas across the ocean (“Transterritorial” 619). Lines from “I eat therefore I SPAM” also appear in a SPAM poem in *[Lukao]*, subtitled “(the birth of SPAM),” mirroring the “digestional genealogy” not only of Guåhan and of Perez himself in relation to SPAM, but also of his poetics that consistently reuse and repurpose lines from his earlier poems (59). This digestive cycle is a vicious, counterintuitive one, even if it is “delicious” (59). Perez writes “Guam is an acronym for ‘Give Us American Meat’,” the irony being that the health effects of the meat may prevent young Chamorros from joining the military, even as the military feeds it to them and as the military treats Chamorros as a cheap, disposable labor force. In his very first SPAM poem in *[Guma’]*, Perez includes an epigraph from Paul Theroux’s *The Happy Isles of Oceania* (1992).

In this quotation Theroux theorizes that Pacific Islanders love SPAM because it “came the nearest to approximating the porky taste of human flesh” (qtd. *G* 26). With the references to human flesh in the earlier poem, and the specter of Slammin’ Spammy the marine pig mascot, the “digestional genealogy” invoked later suggests that both SPAM and the military now cause Chamorro peoples to consume their own selves. Not only that, but the cycle is also bound up in the labor of other marginalized peoples, such as the “undocumented migrants who slice ears, clip snouts, chisel cheeks” (*L* 59). The imagery here shows how Chamorro peoples and undocumented migrants are both exploited by and coopted into the violence of the US empire: Chamorro youth through the military, and the migrants through the SPAM factories and their horrific conditions. Perez does not suggest that these conditions are an anomaly, but are part of a wider pattern of US capitalism, as he points out in “I eat therefore I SPAM”: “SPAM is so cheap because their lives are worth nothing to Hormel, because our lives are nothing to Hormel.” The effects of these patterns may at first seem separate from the speaker’s life (they affect “their lives”), but the rapid shift to how they affect “our lives” emphasizes the cumulative, interconnected nature of this kind of exploitation. Not even the exiled Chamorros who try to make the “perfect vegan” SPAM in Minnesota can redeem it for Perez (*L* 60). “I will never eat it,” he says—the “perfect” SPAM cannot exist, he implies, because the imperial structures of its creation, bearing what he calls earlier the “global burden of disease,” remain (*L* 60; *G* 48). The structures of empire contributed to the vegans’ exile in Minnesota, and followed them there, just like SPAM did.

SPAM’s chains of consumption thus flourish across the Pacific, driven by exploitative practices masquerading as nourishing ones. In [*Guma*] there is another example of SPAM that Perez’s speaker will “never eat”: “a souvenir can...bought after seeing Monty Python’s

SPAM®ALOT on Broadway in New York City” (28). The speaker asserts that it is “the most expensive SPAM® I’ve ever bought”<sup>49</sup> before saying “I will never eat it,” implying that his reason is because of the can’s monetary value and its value as a collectible (28). One of the ironies in this statement is that Guåhan is already oversaturated with SPAM, yet the speaker still finds value in this particular can. It is manufactured specifically to capitalize on SPAM’s ubiquitous status as a consumable item but here its ability to be consumed has new valences: it is an item that should be literally consumed but because it is now consumed (used) as a novelty item, that subsumes the previous mode of consumption. SPAM is not just a food item anymore, and in the Pacific it has never just been about food, no matter the discourses of the distributing military. The discourses of the US military form what Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls a “transoceanic naval literacy” that is deceptive in the ways that it justifies the projects of empire (“Toward a Critical Ocean” 24). The supposed food security SPAM provides and the transpacific networks it depicts are part of this literacy, cloaked in neoliberal rhetoric of the globalized ocean, emphasizing, as DeLoughrey points out, “fluidity, mobility, adaptability, and flux” (25).

It is precisely these associations between fluidity and neoliberal globalization that make the discourses of US empire seductive. In the same poem where Perez’s speaker describes his SPAM®ALOT collectible, he describes a snow globe he owns: “a can of SPAM® sitting on an island. Turn it over and a typhoon swirls madly, unable to unseat SPAM® from its place of honor” (*G* 28). Unlike the people of Guåhan, whom Perez describes as devastated by typhoons in other poems, SPAM is untouched by environmental destruction. Its “convenience, affordability, prestige” make it beloved but also insidiously tenacious, especially when the ways it brands the Pacific become bound up in the identities of the people who call it home (*G* 48). It is in these

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<sup>49</sup> Perez includes SPAM’s ® registered trademark sign in his [*Guma*] SPAM poems but not in [*Lukao*]. I have replicated his choices in the quotations I take from his collections.

moments when the speaker's repeated assertion that he "will never eat it" starts to lose its credibility because the speaker never does stop eating SPAM (*G* 28; *L* 60). Instead, the irony of this hollow denial drives home the real costs of SPAM: the waters, lands, and lives of Pacific peoples coopted into US empire.

*"an archipelago// of prayer": A Reparative, Resurgent Activist Poetics for Oceania*

Perez's small, isolated island in the snow globe is dwarfed by a "typhoon" (28). In contrast, the SPAM in the globe is oversized and dominates its landmass. But Perez's poetics are not content with this representation of islands. Instead he subverts the "transoceanic naval literacy" of the ocean by manipulating it into a form of resistance (DeLoughrey "Toward" 24). When Perez describes visions of diaspora driven by empire and demarcated by the products of colonialism, he writes of "a shirtless Chamorro suffering a severe case of diaspora...kicking back with his Budweiser and can of Vienna Sausages, saying 'Ah, this tastes just like home!'" (*G* 67). Preceding these lines, Perez describes Vienna Sausages as "cheaper than cat food," and being fed to fish by military snorkelers. His diasporic family genealogy told via processed foods includes his Great Grandfather eating Vienna Sausages with rice pudding when he had mouth cancer, and his Grandfather making them "into a sandwich with white bread and mayonnaise" (67). "Yet I am not ashamed," the speaker says, because "somewhere on the Western coast of the United States," there is that "shirtless Chamorro" eating the sausages as a marker of "home" (67). The markers of "home" in this poem are cheap products with global brand recognition, marketed under German and Austrian names, but made in the US. This vision of diaspora is defined by highly questionable forms of nourishment, compared to cat food and fed to fish. This kind of "home" depends on the replication of a specific brand, transmitted through generations

and across the ocean, and Perez represents its transmission in the language of disease. If the Chamorro man in the US is “suffering a severe case of diaspora” then that implies the diaspora that he is experiencing, and the way he is treating it by constructing “home” through colonial consumables, is unhealthy, a kind of illness. Nostalgia for a home which he (mis)places in a vision of processed imports causes the “severe case.” The routes of empire and capitalism define this vision of diaspora and of the speaker’s family history, in the same way as Ji-Song Ku describes SPAM as “a transnational, diasporic product” (221).

In contrast, in other poems Perez constructs very different images of “home” as an “ocean of stories” and “an archipelago // of prayer,” suggesting that it is possible to re-envision what home and its family histories can be for Chamorro peoples and other Indigenous peoples from Oceania, including those who, like Perez himself, live in diaspora (*L* 65, 71). In [*Lukao*], Perez writes about caring for his daughter, wondering about how to “protect” her, before whispering to her that “no matter how from home // storms take you, remember to carry our words/ in your canoe...you will always be sheltered, and you/ will always be sacred in our ocean of stories” (*L* 65). Leaving “home” in this poem does not carry the same connotations of disease that the “severe case of diaspora” does in the earlier poem, and the storms that may “take” Perez’s daughter will not sever her from her home, unlike the typhoon that tries to dislodge SPAM from the island in the snow globe (*G* 67, 28). If his daughter retains her parents’ words, she will be protected and nourished. The poem incorporates the words of a Hawaiian nursery rhyme, spoken by her mother, as both her Chamorro and Kanaka Maoli heritages mingle in the “ocean of stories.” This home is rooted in heritage but envisions mobile futures for the child, grounded by the “words” she will travel with in her canoe (*L* 65). This vision, and the later description of home as “an archipelago // of prayer,” emphasize expression, the creativity that we

associate with stories, and earnestness and hope for the future expressed through prayer, resituating the ocean as a site of meaning making and Indigenous resurgence in the face of disruption brought about by empire (*L* 65, 71).

The Pacific and the islands in it are not just geographic entities in Perez's poetry, but linguistic and literary ones. Part of making the "ocean of stories" possible for his child, for Perez, is creating "home" out of the materials—including the stories—one has on hand. While SPAM recycles meat scraps and byproducts into a profitable item for consumption, Perez rejects its exploitive networks and remaps, reworks, and re-forms representations, images, names, lines, phrases, and stereotypes into a hypertextual mode of literary activism for the resurgent archipelagoes of Oceania. Perez's SPAM and other processed meat poems, which focus on corn beef hash and Vienna Sausage, all fall under the same heading in the tables of contents: "*ginen* the legends of juan malo [*a malologue*]." "*Ginen*" is the Chamorro word for "from."<sup>50</sup> As Perez explains in the notes for his third book, [*Guma*'], where the first of his SPAM poems appear, Juan Malo is a trickster figure in Chamorro stories, a "young, poor, Chamorro man" who makes mischief to frustrate Spanish colonial officials (85). He also points out that "malo" means "bad" in Spanish, a last name given to Juan to suggest the antics he got up to. Following this model, Perez's processed meat poems are witty and linguistically dexterous in their subversion, illuminating as well as manipulating the discourses of colonialism manifested through everyday objects like SPAM. The suffix "logue" added to "malo" signals the type of discourse, or genre of writing, that will follow this heading. We know what kind of discourse to expect when we are reading a travelogue or catalogue, or what form a speech might take if it is a monologue. By

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<sup>50</sup> Perez increasingly uses "ginen" in place of the English "from" as his series progresses.

calling his SPAM and processed food poems “malologues,” then, Perez signals to his readers that the following writing falls into his own mischievous genre.

Perez calls Juan Malo a “resistance” figure, so we can also expect that these poems are resistance poems that push back against empire (*G* 85). In other words, by centering his Juan Malo poems on the food of US militarism Perez transports the resistance genre of Juan Malo stories from the Spanish colonial period into Guåhan’s current period of US military occupation. His SPAM and other processed meat poems not only tie SPAM to discourses and experiences of empire, but also directly engage with a genre of resistance that specifically emerged in Guåhan to counter empire. This genre is typified by humor and playfulness, and the poems Perez includes under the “malologue” heading play with diction, syntax and form, riffing off newspaper headings, common sayings and idioms, creating puns, and innovating on his own earlier poems, as well as making intertextual and intra-textual references to other writers and connections across his collections, creating poems that, like Oceania itself, are hyper-aware of their participation in diverse geographic networks as well as networks of textual production.

In this archipelagic vision, the literary activism Perez’s poems express challenges easy interpretations of global or transoceanic solidarities that over-simplify uneven experiences of violence in the face of issues such as climate change and military occupation. In “any archipelago,” Alice Te Punga Somerville (Te Ātiawa) writes, “there are general currents and tides that affect the whole larger entity as a kind of complex system, but there are also extremely diverse experiences and entities within that system” (“The Great Pacific” 323). The modes of connection epitomized through SPAM and the US military erase these diverse experiences. We can see this, for example, through the Theroux quotation linking SPAM, Pacific Islanders, and cannibalism that Perez includes in [*Guma*] (26). Theroux applies his racist cannibal reference

liberally across all Indigenous peoples of Oceania, and, while the rest of the poem focuses on SPAM in Guåhan in particular, Perez’s inclusion of this quotation highlights forced links between different Oceanic peoples through imperialism, in the context of foodways, in the sense that colonialism has exploited the environments of numerous Pacific islands, and due to the ways colonial powers have stereotyped people from Oceania.

In the context of this poem, with its explicitly irreverent tone, Perez foregrounds the ridiculousness of the racist cannibal stereotype, but he also highlights the devastating effects of it, despite its ridiculousness. Perez’s first line in this poem asserts that, “Guam is considered the SPAM® capital of the world,” due to its per capita rate of consumption—a fact repeated in the SPAM® Museum (26). It is a “culinary legacy” directly linked to US war victories, and also a legacy that is replicated in “all places with a history of US military presence” (26). Not only that, but Perez envisions its role in future wars as well. Furthermore, Perez uses SPAM to emphasize the links between capitalism and militarism in the region, through the image of a car dealer giving away “a 50lb bag of imported rice and a case of SPAM® with every purchase” (26). The food the car dealer offers for free is processed and nutritionally deficient, as is the “40,000 cases of SPAM®” that Hormel donates to Guåhan following a typhoon (26). “The end result of so much SPAM® can be found in [our] newspaper’s obituary pages,” Perez writes to end the poem, tracing a direct line from militarism, capitalism, and misguided “aid” in Oceania to Chamorro deaths. Because the provision of SPAM does not address food sovereignty—it does not transfer power to the community—only (purportedly) food security, the “culinary legacy” of the US military is one that perpetuates death throughout Guåhan, and throughout Oceania. The square brackets around “[our]” in the final line signals that he is talking specifically about Chamorro deaths. Throughout Perez’s series he uses square brackets around collective nouns



such as “we” and “our” in order to prevent readers from interpreting that collective as a universal plural pronoun—the Chamorro language differentiates between exclusive and inclusive “we” pronouns, and this bracketing strategy also allows Perez to make the distinction visible in English (*Chamorro Dictionary*). In this poem’s case, he emphasizes that the fatal military legacy embodied in and accumulating through SPAM specifically impacts Chamorro populations, and, read in combination with the opening quotation, populations of Indigenous people across Oceania. By beginning with the quotation from Theroux, this malologue signals that the kind of overt racism it expresses is not confined to the past, and the final line of the poem confirms that this legacy is replicated through other connected acts of racism and colonialism in the Pacific today, systematized and legitimated through language that enables military actions and misguided aid from international organizations.

Perez thus suggests that sustainable ocean futures for Indigenous peoples must come from resurgence within the “ocean of stories” itself, not from forms of environmentalism that do not account for the structures of capitalism and racism at the center of imperialism. The way SPAM distorts foodways in the Pacific might be thought of in much the same way as we might think about the ecology on a palm oil plantation, or like the decimated ecologies in Guåhan that Perez describes throughout his books, resulting from the invasion of brown tree snakes, transported via military aircraft or ships, and subsequently driving native birdlife to extinction. These ecologies contain life, but at the expense of preexisting biodiversity, and they are dependent on the structures of capitalism and imperialism to sustain their transpacific dominance. Perez reminds us elsewhere that decisions and practices made based on a neoliberal framework of empire ostensibly designed to safeguard ecologies, such as when the Obama administration expanded the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, too frequently

only serve to “further colonize, militarize, and privatize the Pacific” in ways that continue to exclude Indigenous peoples from their lands and waters and consolidate imperial oceanic powers (“Blue-Washing” n.p.). In fact, as journalists Chris Gelardi and Sophia Perez, among others, have documented, the US military has a record of weaponizing Environmental Impact Statements and other environmental protection protocols against Micronesian communities, displaying explicit ties between their practices of what Perez describes as a union of “natural resources management and military readiness” at the heart of US Pacific strategy (“This Isn’t Your Island”; *L* 71). In one intervention in these frameworks, Perez creates a “poemap”<sup>51</sup> or visual poem by layering three different maps on top of one another, revealing the cumulative effects of the US’s military bases in part of the Pacific (*L* 25):

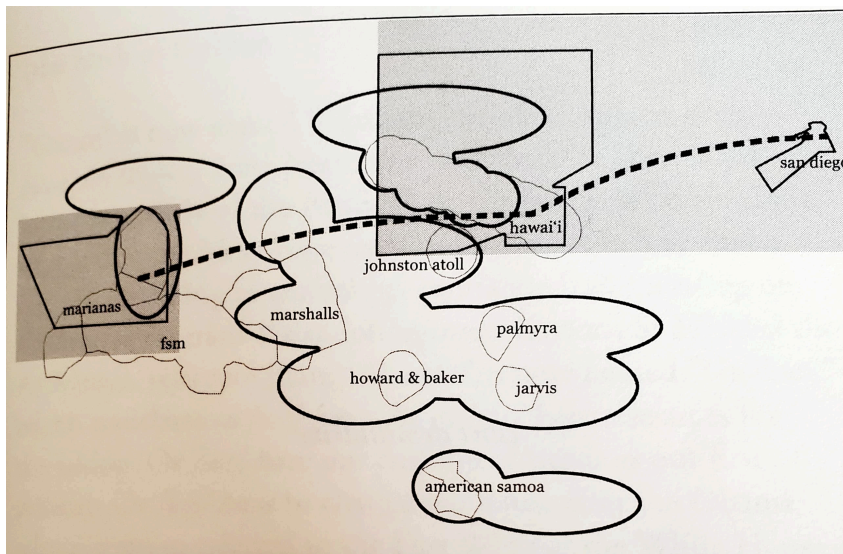


Fig.2. “poemap” by Craig Santos Perez. [*Lukao*] 25.

Firstly, Perez incorporates a map from the Mariana Island Training Area Environmental Impact Statement, authored by the Navy, documenting how a proposed US military base will affect its surrounding environment. Secondly, he layers a map created from some of the realtime data collected and live-mapped by the Pacific Islands Ocean Observing system, which allows

<sup>51</sup> Perez includes multiple kinds of what he calls “poemap[s]” in his books (e.g. *L* 9).

users to view maps based on selected data points such as wildlife sanctuaries, military exercises, forecasted weather hazards, etc. In this poemap, Perez uses the system to visualize Economic Exclusion Zone borders surrounding US military bases. The third map Perez uses to create his poemap was published by the US Undersea Warfare Center Division. It documents how naval training exercises acoustically affect marine mammals and sea turtles. He presents us with these maps together instead of separately to show how one point—a new military base in the Mariana Islands—overlaps with another—a stretch of ocean filled with protected mammals, that by the Navy’s own admission will be affected by military exercises. This convergence of points is significant because it demonstrates how neoliberal representations of the Pacific tend to separate out data points, or what Perez and I might call stories, of militarism and environmentalism. Separating these stories from each other obscures the fact that we cannot address environmental issues in the Pacific without also confronting militarization because the underlying structures of both militarization and environmental exploitation exist in tandem with each other. It casts into doubt the military’s required environmental impact statements that do not include all these layers of impact—that is, they hide the structures that connect them.

If the Pacific is an “ocean of stories,” these poemaps show how Perez consistently attempts to represent its narrative multitude, its many voices, through image as well as text—including using the military’s own representations against them. Poemaps such as this one in Perez’s collections offer multiple ways for mapping the ocean and the connections it facilitates, often modifying or layering existing maps in order to produce new perspectives, effectively

creating archipelagoes of text and image whose interconnections map how colonialism's impacts are planetary in nature, rather than merely affecting small, isolated locations.<sup>52</sup>

Also creating a sense of the “ocean of stories,” Perez literally includes multiple voices in his poems, through interviews or other forms of documentation. In *[Guma’]*, Perez uses excerpts taken from DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) public comments written in response to planned military developments in Guåhan, listing them under the heading “*ginen* fatal impact statements.” The concerns in these comments range from fear of being raped by military men to laments for the lost land of Guåhan (e.g. 64). Tellingly, however, there is no response to these comments—it as if they are spoken into a void. The “fatal impact[s]” may affect each commentator differently, but they all are answered in the same way: with silence. At the end of one of these poems, entirely consisting of public comments, an unknown speaker asks “and if they do take the lands that they want, then what will the meaning of Guam be?” (64). Militarized discourses of oceanic connectivity in this context take the form of Environmental Impact Statements designed to provide the official language and narrative necessary to proceed with more military developments.<sup>53</sup> The public comment aspect of this system ostensibly provides a democratic space for people affected by the developments to contribute their voices. But, without acknowledgement or action taken based on their comments the system is devoid of actual meaning. Furthermore, this last comment points out that the military’s actions not only distort

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<sup>52</sup> These poemaps also echo the work of Nicole Starosielski in *The Undersea Network* (2015), who follows underwater cables networks across the ocean to reveal their hidden hubs and nodes and their impacts on the Pacific Ocean today. Perez actually uses Starosielski’s work as the basis of one of his poemaps, because Starosielski’s work reveals that Guåhan is *the* major internet cable hub in the Pacific (L 9). Perez quotes Starosielski under his poemap, who writes: “Many [undersea communication] cables, which carry almost all transpacific Internet traffic, are routed through the island of Guam. Historically, more cables have landed on Guam than in either Hawai‘i or California, two major hubs for signal exchange” (Starosielski 19, qtd. in Perez L 9).

<sup>53</sup> These Environmental Impact Statements are salient examples of DeLoughrey’s “transoceanic naval literacy” at work (“Toward a Critical Ocean” 24).

relationships between Chamorro people and the land of Guåhan, but also distort the very meaning of Guåhan itself.

The question of what Guåhan is or signifies is an ongoing one across Perez's *From Unincorporated Territory* series, as he uses his poetics to show how language, specifically naming, has the power to map or categorize islands in ways that have direct environmental consequences. In *[Lukao]*, two poems, "(the birth of Guam)" (11-12) and "(the birth of Guåhan)" (27-28), explicitly focus on the impacts of how Guam/ Guåhan is named. In these poems, Perez parses out the differences between "Guam" and "Guåhan." The first begins with Magellan's visit in 1521, suggesting that the name "Guam" is entangled with the island's colonized history. In the later poem, he writes that "Guåhan" "translates as *[we] have*" (27, original italics). This suggestion of possessing or experiencing, for the speaker, corresponds with the diversity of the island, "as in *[we] have* many names for our people," but it also corresponds with what the US uses them for: "As in *[we] have* many resources for the taking" (28, 27). At the end of this poem, the speaker states that, "Guåhan...has been translated as 'lost'" (28). Unpacking complex "identity issues" in this poem, Perez leaves that translation for last, preferring to foreground and reiterate abundance rather than lack (28). However, he also shows how the US exploits this collective Chamorro abundance. The brackets around "*[we]*" continually make visible Guam/ Guåhan's unincorporated status, and in the phrase "*[we] have*" show that the collective Perez refers to here is a specifically Chamorro one: Guåhan and its peoples, their role in US history, and the way their island and resources have been coopted by the US. Perez uses his "islanded" words, to use H.L. Hsu's term,<sup>54</sup> to also intrude in the reading process, foregrounding how US

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<sup>54</sup> By "islanded," Hsu means that Perez uses the brackets to typographically represent island-ness on the page (306).

imperialism sets Guåhan off from its national body, while also asserting a Chamorro collective that will not be totally subsumed into (or, perhaps, consumed by) the US terripelago.

Perez's interrogations of how Guam/ Guåhan is named and categorized are deeply entangled with how Oceania more broadly is mapped and categorized, with direct environmental consequences. In his poem "(first ocean)" Perez asks "is oceania memorial / or target, economic zone or monument, // territory or mākua"? (L 17).<sup>55</sup> The poem is set in Hawai'i, where Perez currently lives, and he addresses it to his wife as they bring their child to the beach for the first time. The poem's subtitle notes that the moment occurs "during the rim of the pacific military exercises, 2014." This military exercises, or RIMPAC, are the largest coordinated international military exercises and occur biennially off the coast of Hawai'i. Before the speaker asks his question about what Oceania "is," we read of "pilot whales, deafened// by sonar...bloated and stranded/ ashore" and "recently spawned fish, lifeless" (17). Perez's poem shows us that interdependent networks shape the sea, where an action that takes place in one part of the ocean (e.g. military exercises) can have consequences in another (animals washing up dead). By drawing these links between how Oceania is named, categorized, or mapped, to the militarization of the sea and its accompanying environmental devastation, Perez illustrates how colonization often starts with mapping, or categorizing a place as a target, or an economic zone, a place to vacation in, or a place to harvest resources from, etc. Colonial narratives tend to suggest that these features of mapping, which lead to manifestations of colonialism such as tourism or militarism, or SPAM, are not connected. But here they, and their impacts on Indigenous populations, are intimately entangled.

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<sup>55</sup> Mākua means elder relatives (sing. makua) in Native Hawaiian (*Ulu kau Hawaiian Electronic Library*).

Naming Oceania as “mākua,” or elder demands a different relationship with the ocean, as if it were a relative, a being, much like the marae in Chantal Spitz’s *Island of Shattered Dreams*, whose wellness is directly connected to our own, and not a place to exploit. It demands forms of kinship that are founded on respect and not forced—not like the kind of kinship SPAM forces throughout Oceania. After asking his question about how to name Oceania, the speaker says “[we] shiver like generations of coral reef // bleaching” (17). The coral bleaching might not be caused directly by the RIMPAC military exercises, but his inclusion of it at the end of the poem suggests that Perez links it its cause, climate change, to the ocean’s exploitation by the ideologies that enable those exercises. In this line Perez links the bracketed collective pronoun “[we],” signifying his family, to beings that have inhabited Oceania since time immemorial—“generations of coral reef.” This collective “[we]” here, then, appears to more broadly signal that Perez’s family’s lives are bound up with other lives in Oceania—nonhuman alongside human.

The pages of his collections become, like the ocean, spaces for this collective, their conversations, and their stories. Perez makes use of forms such as hashtags and literal web links, along with linguistic and formal repetitions and revisions across his *From Unincorporated Territory* series to create what Collier Noguez describes as a “gathering space that is contained by neither the real nor the virtual,” in which Indigenous activists can gather (28). For example, in *[Hacha]* Perez includes web directions for petitions to decolonize and demilitarize Guåhan (83). In *[Guma’]* he curates lists of the names of Chamorro people who died serving the US military, literally creating a memorial space for them, and his poems become archives for the DEIS public comments that otherwise may be lost to the records of the military. In *[Lukao]* he includes interviews that tell birth stories. By placing such material in the realm of his poetics, Perez

creates a space that is overtly engaged with intertextual conversations that extend well beyond the pages of his books and which invites readers to participate in these conversations as well.

In the same way that Perez's poemaps and SPAM gastropoetics demonstrate how not all forms of transoceanic mobility and connection are productive or beneficial, Perez does not uncritically celebrate the relational possibilities of such linguistic strategies. In *[Lukao]* Perez includes some "poems" that simply repeat the hashtag #prayfor\_\_\_\_\_ in one long list, drawing on the kinds of digital links that a hashtag facilitates on the internet in order to connect global responses to a tragedy, most often a mass shooting or a terrorist attack (e.g. 24). But through his repetition of this hashtag and the blank space where a location or community name should be, Perez demonstrates how such forms of linkage risk becoming empty signifiers that do not lead to any real change while the world is faced with repeated and ongoing tragedies. The hashtag becomes redundant in this context, much like the definition of digital spam, which is "irrelevant or inappropriate messages sent on the internet to large number of participants," designed to flood and overwhelm systems—and often with a "deceptive" purpose such as, in the case of the US elections in 2016, when thousands of Russian bots deployed to spread spam and influence the results (*OED*; Simon Hill n.p.). Digital spam, as Hill explains, comes at a very low cost for the perpetrators and is increasingly impossible to escape from in today's digital world. Spam tends to thrive through and epitomize capitalism at its worse, replicating itself rather than creating something new and embedding itself in ways that cycle not just through our emails but also through the ways it exploit the digital world's mobility, connectivity, and fluidity to replicate and spread—in ways that echo how SPAM (the food) has embedded itself throughout the Pacific.



Perez's "ocean of stories" and "archipelago // of prayer," in contrast, map Oceania as characterized by vibrant growth and creative expression, by multiplicity. These are Oceanic visions that epitomize and grow out of the ocean's movements instead of exploiting them or rendering them merely sites of replication rather than fertile creation (*L* 65, 71). The visions ask readers to think through Oceanic reading and meaning-making practices as moves towards repatriating Indigeneity in the ocean as it, and the islands in it, are increasingly commodified and exploited by militaries: not just by the US military, but also by others involved in imperial projects. Perez specifically associates the "archipelago // of prayer" with images of growth. At multiple points in Perez's series he refers to birds that spread seeds that later grow into trees. In [*Guma*'], these seeds grow into the many aerial roots of banyan trees that "fall from branches, intertwine, fuse, and root// as time passes, new trunks form until a single tree becomes an archipelago" (*G* 35). The reproduction of these trees does not replicate the monoculture found in a plantation environment. They are filled with diverse forms of life. From their seeds eventually grows Perez's vision of an interconnected Pacific: his "archipelago // of prayer" envisioned as the entwined roots of trees that provides transoceanic hope for resurgence despite transpacific invasions and forced diasporas (*L* 71).

Throughout Perez's collections, empire corresponds with an absence or erasure of voice. The shared title of Perez's kingfisher poems in [*Lukao*], "*ginen* island of no birdsong," emphasizes an absence of voice, an absence of song, as a marker of extinction. Thus, resurgence in the "ocean of stories" means repopulating it with voice that also enables the growth of the archipelago. In the poem, "Family Trees" (2019), published by *World Literature Today*, Perez highlights how the military controls and limits access to the hayun lågu, a tree that is sacred to his family, excluding them from the tree's space, ostensibly to protect it. "They say this is an act/

of mitigation, but why does it feel like/ the disturbed edge of extinction?” the speaker asks (lines 48-50). In this poem, however, Perez’s father demonstrates a way of interacting with the tree, predicated on using a prayer to ask permission “of the spirits” in the forest and acknowledging the trees as “elders.” Perez draws a direct comparison between the trees and his family:

Like us, they survived the storms  
of conquest. Like us, roots anchor them to this  
island, giving breath, giving strength to reach  
toward the Pacific sky and blossom. (lines 17-20)

The military directly interferes with the growth of these trees shrinking their habitats, restricting access to them, and enforcing their own protocols of protection that decimate the environment that would usually surround the tree. The tree, fenced off on a live firing range, becomes isolated and cut off from its usual ecological relationships, much like narratives of islands as isolated and without relationships with each other make them vulnerable to occupation and extraction.

Perez’s father works to repair this severance with a chant that draws the tree into the collective of his family and of Chamorro peoples as a whole. He sings, “we are the seeds of the last /fire tree! We are the seeds of the last fire tree! /Ahe’! No! We do not give you permission!” (57-60).

Chanting, here, becomes a space for asserting Chamorro presence and resistance—voiced by nonhuman as well as human beings. They, as a collective, claim that they are here and that they refuse the ongoing military development of their shared island space.

In Perez’s poetics, language and the people of Oceania themselves are seeds that will grow to form the interconnected archipelagoes capable of reclaiming that space. He “bur[ies]...seeded words” from his grandmother, “in [his] notebook,” that will later become his

poems (*L* 35). He continually infers that he is not the only person in possession of such seeds, and that the people of Oceania are the seeds themselves. In the last of his “birdsong” poems in [*Lukao*], Perez returns to the image of the fire tree, the hayun lāgu, to create his book’s ending crescendo of the “archipelago // of prayer,” that, belying coming from an “island of no birdsong,” asserts a multi-voiced call for active resistance (71). Perez writes:

i believe in the resurgence  
 of our bodies because  
 [we] are the seeds  
 ginen the last hayun lāgu  
 waiting to be rooted  
 into kanton chamorrita,  
 waiting to be raised  
 once more into lukao (71)

The “bodies” in this context refers to the bodies of people, but read in context with the preceding poems blurs the distinction between their bodies, the bodies of texts, and the bodies of the trees that Perez imagines coming together to form vast connected archipelagoes. Specifically, he envisions these archipelagoes defined by the growth of resurgent poetics and resurgent people, which includes those living in their homelands and those living in diaspora. The “[we]” who are the “seeds...waiting to be rooted” are from “the last hayun lāgu,” a tree whose life is gravely threatened by the ongoing destruction of its surrounding environment (71). Perez does not erase or minimize this threat, but insinuates that its “seeds” (the people, the stories, the trees) will still grow “into kantan chamorrita,” or a kind of “verse-making” and debate traditional to Guåhan delivered in styles similar to slam poetry battles (Judy Flores, “Kantan Chamorita”). He

explicitly grounds his call for resurgence in a very specific Chamorro intellectual form. In the same way that his malogues take up a Chamorro literary genre designed to resist empire, here he takes up another Chamorro form—this time a form designed to provide an opportunity for multiple voices to come together in the same space. A vision of an “ocean of stories” or an “archipelago // of prayer,” then, activates the concept of diaspora and archipelagoes in a way distinct from the transpacific networks and imperial territoriality that SPAM represents. These visions are predicated on aspects of expression and exchange—through stories, prayer, song—that generate spaces for resistance. This “ocean of stories,” composed by his poetics as well as through a banyan tree-like gathering of the voices of so many other Oceanic writers in the pages of his books epitomizes the ever-expanding Oceania in this series.

This gathering does not mean that all these voices will agree, as the *kantan chamorrita* verse-making form invites debates, and, according to Flores, teasing, but Perez’s series gestures towards what such a shared space of creative interchange between Indigenous peoples can look like. Perez takes the epigraph for this poem from “A Postcolonial Tale” by Joy Harjo (Mvskoke Nation): “No story or song will translate the full impact of falling, or the inverse power of rising up. Of rising up” (qtd. 70). While Perez grounds his call to rise in a Chamorro form, by citing other Indigenous authors such as Harjo he implies that it is a trans-Indigenous call as well, expanding the call to multiple communities all impacted by colonialism. The epigraph reiterates Perez’s consistent assertion that the narratives told by empire have real, bodily consequences, and, thus, his call to rise infers that action against these narratives must deliberately extend beyond the page as well. “Lukao” refers to procession, signifying the persistence of Chamorro and other Oceanic peoples, but also implies that resisting empire and forging Oceanic

connections between Indigenous peoples not defined or confined by the patterns of empire must be navigated as an ongoing process.

Perez's Oceanic poetics, with all their emphasis on relational networks of Indigenous peoples and protest, are not a universalizing celebration of oceanic unity, mobility, and fluidity. Instead, they foreground literary, linguistic strategies for navigating militarized seas as part of deliberate processes of decolonization and asserting Indigenous sovereignties. This process is not one that has a final destination. Likewise, Perez's poetics, while attentive and rooted in the past, continually focus on future dreams, efforts, and plans. Writing about the ways the military interfered with traditional birth practices in Oceania, he writes, "~~U.S. Naval orders mandated that the placenta and umbilical cords must be burned because they were considered hazardous waste~~" in both Hawai'i and Guåhan (69, original strikethrough). As the strikethrough suggests, Perez and his wife (McDougall), like many before them, refuse these orders. The page gives them the opportunity to mark this refusal concretely. Perez, addressing his daughter directly, writes "someday we will bury [your placenta] at your grandparents house in Kula, Maui, on the slopes of Haleakalā" (69). In a very literal way, burying the placenta fertilizes the earth and contributes to the ecology of the island, seeding it for the future, in the same way that Spitz's characters, Tematua and Maevarua, plant their hopes for their children by burying their placentas with carefully selected trees.<sup>56</sup> For Perez, food sovereignty, sexual and reproductive sovereignty, and environmental sovereignty are all closely entwined. Thus the act of burying his child's placenta has implications for their sovereignty at all these levels, just as the connections between the different parts of the ocean mean that what affects one part of its waters can affect its waters elsewhere. The last page of *[Lukao]* before the acknowledgements simply contains the words

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<sup>56</sup> See Christine Taitano Delisle (Chamorro) regarding how burying the placenta and other women's health practices "bespea[k] a history of Chamorro women's persistence and resistance" (para. 2).

“are dying”: this is the tail end of a sentence fragmented across sections of the book that when reassembled together reads “because america...can’t demilitarize...people around the world...are dying” (10, 27, 58, 74). The traumas of US imperialism connect the “people around the world” while the fragmentation of this line gestures towards how the territoriality of empire severs other modes of connection and interchange between these peoples. But by asking readers to put in the effort to reassemble these sentence fragments, Perez invites us in to the collective reparative work to re-place such connections while also inferring that the decolonial futures of these peoples are interdependent.

Thus, “dying” is not the final word in this book. Perez’s final pages are devoted to the acknowledgements, which he forms into a gastronomic poem that stands in stark contrast to the gastropoetics of SPAM, emphasizing sustenance, mutual reciprocity, and the vast network of his community surrounding and supporting his poetics. He thanks everyone from “*Kula Country Farms* for the strawberries” to “Janet and Gerry” from *Kūpa’a Farm* “for not spraying pesticides” and “for growing coffee trees under the shade of koa and monkeypod” (76, 75). He thanks the food producers, as well as the food itself, and he thanks readers “for joining [us] at the table of this poem” (78). At the “table of this poem,” its gastropoetics include thanking “creation stories, for surviving” (78, 82). Perez gives those stories credit for sustaining him, his family, and his work, in the same way that he thanks Hawai’i, his home “though I’m not from here” (83). In this poem Perez models the kind of relationships with food, with stories, and with land, that might lead to the reparative Oceanic futures he hopes for. These relationships require acknowledgement of where Perez comes from as well as where he lives now including the specific ways colonialism manifests there. Perez mixes Kanaka Maoli as well as Chamorro words in this poem, making linguistic space for each of the places he calls home. His vision of

Oceanic persistence also requires acknowledging and naming the very bodily violence of imperialism: “Mahalo” [thank you] Perez writes, addressing creation stories, “for hiding in that place in our bodies that no one can convert or steal or behead or ban or bury or shoot or shackle or colonize” (82). The burden of trauma accumulates heavily in this sentence but Perez thanks those stories for bearing that weight and thus “giving us the strength” in order to refuse colonization. Likewise, in the next stanza, Perez thanks “saina and kūpuna”<sup>57</sup> for their tenacity to persist despite such trauma, saying “Mahalo for saving as many seeds as you could while everyone around you was dying// Mahalo for passing down as many stories as you could while everyone around you was dying” (83). He repeats this final phrase again and again as he thanks saina and kūpuna for everything they have given, never letting his readers forget the deaths and underscoring the immense obstacles they had to overcome. At the same time, he foregrounds their acts of sustenance and nourishment despite these obstacles: saving seeds, passing down stories, digging gardens, “planting as many trees as you could” (82).

The Oceanic world of this poem and the gastropoetics it creates is full of expectant growth, grounded in the realities of living in the Pacific under imperialism as its “table” becomes a gathering place for people nourishing diverse resurgent spaces—whether that looks like McDougall breastfeeding her and Perez’s daughter, or a store hosting a poetry reading, or ancestors planting crops (83, 79, 82). Perez brings all these acts into the space of his activist poetics, his expanding and hopeful Oceania. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that he ends by thanking water, using the Chamorro term for it: “*mahalo hānom*” (83). It is the water, ultimately, that feeds, nourishes, and creates these possibilities for resurgent archipelagoes, it is the ocean

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<sup>57</sup> Chamorro and Kanaka Maoli words for elders/ ancestors, respectively, especially those who keep and pass on knowledge.

that Perez maps and remaps throughout his series, and it is the ocean that Perez returns to again and again as he navigates militarized seas.

While this chapter focuses on a single author, Perez's "ocean of stories" foregrounds many other writers, artists, and thinkers throughout his pointedly intertextual poetics that bring together the diverse, networked literary history from which his work arises. The three authors gathered in the following chapter—Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, Emelihter Kihleng, and Penina Ava Taesali—are contemporaries to Perez within these literary networks and explicitly interested in the intellectual, storied conversations from which their work emerges and through which it circulates. Like Perez, they contend with envisioning "home" and maintaining kinships while living in diaspora. Their "ocean of stories" invokes material and embodied forms of story that connect their literary genealogies to constellations of Indigenous intellectual production—specifically forms created and exchanged by women. In doing so, their poetics illuminate transpacific ecologies of fertile creation that prioritize the stories and work of women, resonating with the ways that burying placentas emphasizes persistent genealogies that stand in stark contrast to the destructive monopolies of colonial and capitalist networks.



## Chapter 3

## A “Textual and Textured” Ocean of Women’s Work: Sourcing Materials in Transpacific Ecologies for Persistent Indigenous Futures

On the second floor of ‘Iolani Palace in Honolulu is a room with one large object in its center: Queen Lili‘uokalani’s quilt. Lili‘uokalani, the last globally recognized monarch of Hawai‘i, was well known for her skills in diplomacy, speeches, and writing. In 1893, a group of American sugar businessmen and missionary descendants overthrew her government. The Queen wrote multiple letters and petitions in protest, attempted to rewrite the constitution of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, and even amended earlier letters in order to signal her ongoing resistance to the illegal occupation and assert her own and Hawai‘i’s sovereignty. As part of the coup, the United States imprisoned Queen Lili‘uokalani in her own palace in 1895, and formally annexed Hawai‘i in 1898. Despite her imprisonment and restrictions placed on her writing, the Queen created another piece of “writing”: an elaborately pieced quilt.



Fig. 1. Photograph of Queen Lili‘uokalani’s Quilt taken at ‘Iolani Palace, Honolulu, HI. 18 Mar. 2019.

The quilt archives in material form the Queen's imprisonment as well as other aspects of her life, such her much-loved garden. It is a "crazy quilt" design, with squares assembled from a variety of fabrics and fabric shapes, sewn together in a way that does not conform to one repeated pattern. The fabrics are embroidered with significant names and dates, representations of flora, fauna, and images of daily life, and political symbols such the Hawaiian flag. Chinese and Japanese fabrics, images including European flowers, a Japanese fan, and a man wearing tradition Chinese clothing gesture towards Hawai'i's critical location in transpacific networks of trade and express the Queen's and her companions' knowledge of their surrounding global contexts. Lili'uokalani's friendships and other relationships are stitched across the quilt's surface: literally, through the names of friends including women who worked on the quilt with her, and in the scraps of fabric and ribbon that came into the palace smuggled in the pockets of visitors. The quilt's botanical and animal motifs—including fish, an owl, frog, turtle, various flowers, trees, and butterflies—are common in Hawaiian creative practices, such as kapa (bark cloth) designs and song lyrics, and the political motifs are common in Hawaiian flag quilt traditions.<sup>58</sup> These botanical images and the political symbols affirm the quilt's and Lili'uokalani's connections to Hawaiian history and artistic traditions, situating the quilt's place within long continuums of Indigenous Oceanic women's intellectual and textual production that persist through the effects of US imperialism.

Queen Lili'uokalani's quilt provides an entry point for navigating how three women from Oceania writing today take up material modes of creation to structure literary texts in ways that

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<sup>58</sup> See also Cristy Dwyer and Stacey L. Kamehiro for more on the quilt's connections to kapa, Kanaka Maoli scholar Noenoe K. Silva on Lili'uokalani's other acts of resistance while imprisoned, and Vernadette Gonzalez's analysis of the ways that empire represents Hawaiian quilts through gendered narratives of "domesticated Indigeneity" which are often "pervert[ed]" by Kanaka Maoli women ("Hawaiian Quilts" 90).

assert forms of intellectual as well as collective forms of sovereignty as they face continued challenges stemming from imperial exploitation of the ocean, intimately related to the violence of colonialism that Lili‘uokalani also faced. To create her quilt the Queen drew together elements from rich fibers of Kanaka Maoli heritage and the transpacific systems, or ecologies, which she and the nation of Hawai‘i participated in. The annexation of Hawai‘i had devastating implications for Lili‘uokalani’s sovereignty as well as for Hawai‘i’s role as an independent nation in transpacific economic, environmental, and political systems. Imperial ecological understandings of Hawai‘i as a plantation site and notions of Pacific islands as strategic environments for resource extraction and defense purposes drove the annexation. It was an environmental catastrophe as well as a political one that facilitated US military and capitalist incursions into the Pacific, which continue to shape the region and perpetuate ongoing environmental exploitation. US trade networks enabled and spurred the coup, but its proponents were also galvanized by fears of competing European Pacific networks. The narratives driving these fears form part of what Yunte Huang calls the “transpacific imagination,” or a “host of literary and historical imaginations that have emerged under the tremendous geopolitical pressure of the Pacific encounters,” entangled and frequently in tension and other forms of relationship with each other (2). I refer to these transpacific relations as “ecologies” in order to foreground the interdependent aspects of the transpacific, made up of human as well as non-human actors in circulation and assemblage with each other. Here, I also draw from Michelle N. Huang’s notion of “ecologies of entanglement,” a term she uses to describe a transpacific studies which accounts “the natural and sociocultural interactions entities [such as waste] have with each other and their environment” (99). When engaging with the work of authors from Oceania, the notion of “ecologies of entanglement” usefully suggests the diverse currents and relationships—

that may include violent, frictional relations—between different materials, systems, and beings, when approaching the ocean “itself as a distinct space of cultural production” (M. Huang 97).

Writing over one hundred years after Lili‘uokalani created her quilt, three women poets from across Oceania—Emelihter Kihleng (Pohnpei), Penina Ava Taesali (Samoa) and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (Marshall Islands)—model their poetic collections on material objects that reveal the entanglement of their literary genealogies with transpacific ecologies that involve diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous (including colonial) elements of cultural production. The poets all explicitly name their respective collections, *My Urohs* (Kihleng, 2008), *Sourcing Siapo* (Taesali, 2016), and *Iep Jāltok* (Jetñil-Kijiner, 2017), after material practices and objects often designated as women’s craft. Urohs are traditional Pohnpeian appliqued skirts; siapo, or kapa/tapa, are forms of decorated barkcloth; and “iep jāltok” is a Marshallese proverb that describes a female child as a basket. What emerges from reading these three poets together alongside their varied strategies of sourcing the material genealogies of their poetics is how they, like Lili‘uokalani, connect their writing to transpacific ecologies in ways that assert female-centered forms of intellectual and creative sovereignty that persevere despite transpacific catastrophe.

Lili‘uokalani’s quilt, as an overtly political, intertextual, and rhetorical object, asserted her ongoing sovereignty with the materials available to her and challenged colonial and patriarchal assumptions about what counts as intellectual and political women’s work. By drawing on basketwork, skirts, and bark cloth for their poetics, Jetñil-Kijiner, Kihleng, and Taesali present similar challenges to the reader, accentuated by the activist, institutional, and publication contexts in which they situate their collections. Jetñil-Kijiner and Kihleng both wrote

academic theses alongside their poetic works: Jetñil-Kijiner's master's thesis (2014) shares the same name as her published collection. It begins with a history of Marshallese literature, including interviews with elders, before finishing with Jetñil-Kijiner's own poems that "continu[e] the legacy" of this history (115). Kihleng describes her PhD dissertation (2015) as "a poetic ethnography of urohs" that includes her own poems as a method of doing ethnographic research on urohs (vii). Both Kihleng and Jetñil-Kijiner received their master's degrees in creative writing from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, a Pacific hub within contemporary networks of Indigenous publication. Kihleng's *My Urohs* was also published by UH Mānoa's Kahuaomānoa Press—a student-run press especially dedicated to publishing the work of past and present students connected to the campus. Craig Santos Perez and Brandy Nālani McDougall run Taesali's publisher Ala Press, another Hawai'i-based node of Indigenous-centered textual production. Furthermore, all three writers use their poetry as vehicles for their community advocacy, activist, and leadership work, including Jetñil-Kijiner's widely shared multimedia and spoken word poems that generate awareness about climate change and nuclear testing, Taesali's spoken word community activism with Pacific Island youth living in diaspora, and Kihleng's curatorial and teaching projects that brings attention to Pohnpeian diaspora through the handiwork of Pohnpeian women.<sup>59</sup> The three poets assert that the material genealogies of their literary creations do critical intellectual, theoretical, and political work.

Issues of diaspora, driven by imperialism, lie at the crux of Kihleng, Jetñil-Kijiner, and Taesali's collections, intimately shaping the transpacific ecologies that they take part in. How to establish, let alone maintain, creative and intellectual kinships when one is separated from family and homeland? All three poets have lived in locations that are not their original homelands.

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<sup>59</sup> Incidentally, Jetñil-Kijiner and Taesali also both attended Mills College in Oregon.

Taesali has lived in Oakland and Oregon; Jetñil-Kijiner studied in Oregon and Hawai‘i and now frequently travels from the Marshall Islands for her activism projects. Kihleng was raised in Pohnpei, Guam, and Hawai‘i, and studied in Aotearoa and Hawai‘i. The currents of these movements, and that of their relatives dispersed throughout the Pacific, continuously circulate through their collections, intersecting with currents of militarization, capitalism, and climate change. Diaspora is a form of ecological disruption driven by colonialism in these collections, as it does not just disrupt family relationships, but relationships with place. In order to reestablish these relationships, each poet emphasizes material sources for their poetics, sketching out literary genealogies that insist on Indigenous-centered perspectives for the world’s current environmental and political crises that disproportionately affect Indigenous populations, particularly women.

Jetñil-Kijiner, Kihleng, and Taesali therefore portray an ocean of women’s material work as intellectual theory and as activism, similar to how Alice Te Punga Somerville (Te Ātiawa) describes the ocean as “the realm of tapa,” or, as she defines it, a space that circulates knowledge, texts, and intellectual practices and highlights connections between Pacific peoples and histories even as it makes space for differences (*Once Were Pacific* 81). What Te Punga Somerville evocatively refers to as a “realm” offers a way to map out literary histories in the Pacific by using frameworks and definitions that are not limited by the bounds of colonial archives and do not necessarily conform to colonial concepts of what is literary (ii). For Te Punga Somerville, one of those frameworks is tapa, or kapa, as it is a creative form made in so many locations throughout the Pacific, one that travels with people as they create communities in diaspora, illuminating shared artistic histories but also revealing a diversity of patterns, methods, uses, and meanings. Te Punga Somerville writes that, “tapa is simultaneously regional and specific.... As a metaphor, tapa provides an opportunity to reflect on cultural...and genealogical

continuities across the Pacific and simultaneously to observe local specificities” (4). By drawing on the metaphorical as well as literal valences of tapa, Te Punga Somerville conveys how textual, literary objects are forms and vehicles that construct, facilitate, and embody trans-Indigenous oceanic solidarities and relationships. Likewise, urohs, siapo/tapa, and basketry, for Kihleng, Taesali, and Jetñil-Kijiner, respectively, emphasize the literary work of weaving interconnected Indigenous presences and persistence in the Pacific even as the ocean is enmeshed with their experiences of imperialism and particular challenges of diaspora.

The literary histories that Jetñil-Kijiner, Kihleng, and Taesali’s collections sketch out show that in Oceania we cannot separate textual and archival issues from the environmental, for they use their poems to represent the tensions, relations, and challenges of living with all that the ocean connects but also separates. Colonial archival practices dispossess Indigenous peoples disproportionately, like climate change, neoliberal development, and militarism also do, and constrain narratives of Indigenous futures. Archives are methods of controlling knowledge distribution and tend to privilege preservation as opposed to perseverance or persistence, to put it in Cherokee scholar Ellen Cushman’s terms (117). Likewise, environmental discourses based in imperial understandings of island spaces as untouched paradises also tend to focus on narratives of preserving these land and water ecologies without accounting for their Indigenous peoples and preexisting contexts.

Te Punga Somerville reminds us that colonial concepts of archives as buildings or institutions are inadequate for Oceanic Indigenous texts, which often include women’s material crafts. She instead grounds her work in a more expansive notion of archives, describing Oceania as “our sea of archives,” innovating on Epeli Hau‘ofa’s vision of “our sea of islands” to argue that “an archive in my line of work is just as likely to be in a wardrobe, cupboard or

meetinghouse; Indigenous texts might be carved, oral, written, sung, woven, danced and so on. Archives are places where things, people, and ideas come together” (“Our Sea” 121). Te Punga Somerville portrays archives as sites of knowledge and cultural heritage that can take many different forms, connected and animated by multiple kinds of relationships and contexts, rather than acting as static repositories. Because Somerville reads the ocean as a necessarily connective, creative, and relational space, due to what it touches and the ecologies it makes possible, including texts that circulate through them, she compels us to read it as an archive itself. Some of the connections the ocean makes possible are traumatic, such as when the US coopts Hawai‘i into its military projects. But if the ocean is an archive, containing memory, genealogy, and history, then acts of imperialism such as the occupation of Hawai‘i do not only violate the sovereignty of Lili‘uokalani and Hawai‘i’s place in the Pacific in environmental, legal, and spatial terms, but also in archival terms—by disrupting the transmission of knowledge. In other words, imperialism causes environmental, creative, and archival catastrophe because the environmental, the creative, and the archival are bound up together.

This chapter examines how Kihleng, Jetñil-Kijiner, and Taesali, foreground connections to material objects and practices by women in order to call for environmental and social justice in the Pacific for their homelands and for their communities living in diaspora. In these poems, the ocean is a site of textual circulation, and the poems ask questions about the objects and texts that circulate within the ocean. These questions compel readers to think through notions of archive and citation in ways that honor Indigenous presences, especially feminine presences, and persistence in Oceania. At the same time, they intervene in Euro/US-centric narratives of the Pacific and of Indigenous intellectual expressions, expressing material production as a form of activism with deep roots in the Pacific. As the poems bring the poetic, the scholarly, and the



material together, so too are the environmental, the political, the textual, and the intellectual all closely in dialogue. In this chapter I read the poems from these collections and their entangled ecologies in three ways: as embedded in particular patterns of circulation, as representing and practicing processes of intellectual, material, and place-based citation, and as theorizing Indigenous women-centered Oceanic archives that re-place the archives and transpacific narratives of imperialism. Read in combination with their insistence on rhetorical and intellectual sovereignty, the collections reveal that challenging the linked ecological concerns of climate change, racism, militarization, and capitalism in Oceania is not just environmental and political labor, but textual, citational, and archival women's work.

*Circulation: Oceanic Textual & Ecological Currents*

The ocean is the realm of siapo/tapa, the realm of basketry, and the realm of urohs mapped through the poetry of Taesali, Jetñil-Kijiner, and Kihleng, respectively. Their poems reveal vast networks and patterns of textual circulation that help delineate the Pacific's multiple ecologies. At a very literal and embodied level the poets take part in transpacific conversations that portray the ocean as a space of relations among Indigenous oceanic peoples, animals, plants, and other beings. At a *literary* level, their collections invoke the networked, circulatory aspects of siapo, urohs, and basketry—these aspects include the fact that these are objects which appear in different variations across the Pacific, that they often accompany the transpacific movements of their makers, that they involve objects and practices that are used to forge relationships and are embedded in multifaceted social worlds, and the fact that those objects have been collected by non-Indigenous researchers and explorers and distributed worldwide. By invoking these circulatory aspects, Kihleng, Jetñil-Kijiner, and Taesali foreground transpacific ecologies defined

through Indigenous frameworks. They reveal that, as Christine Mok and Aimee Bahng have shown, environmental exploitation and its displacement of Indigenous peoples cannot be separated from the history of racialized and gendered capitalism that accompany the destruction and cooption of the ocean (5). The three women make visible these violent entanglements in their poetry, illuminating the transoceanic ramifications of US imperialism and militarization for their islands, but at the same time their poetic forms make visible ongoing inter-oceanic, transpacific, and trans-Indigenous currents and conversations that salvage the idea of oceanic connectivity from discourses of globalized capitalism and imperialism.

Kihleng and Jetñil-Kijiner are from Micronesian homelands—homelands that are often excluded from conversations about transpacific connectivity, even Indigenous ones. Pacific currents of navigation and Indigenous mobility are frequently, as Te Punga Somerville points out, associated with Polynesian peoples while Micronesian peoples are just as often erased from such accounts (*Once Were Pacific*). Jetñil-Kijiner and Kihleng, however, foreground their specific island homelands while also highlighting Micronesian transpacific currents throughout their poetry.

For Jetñil-Kijiner, Marshallese concepts of basketry allow her to center Marshallese perspectives even as she invokes the planetary and addresses global audiences to call for immediate action to confront the danger of rising seas. She invokes transpacific audiences as she protests the US's nuclear and other military programs in the Pacific and their particularly devastating health effects for Marshallese peoples, which, along with climate change, reflect deep currents of environmental racism. These forms of imperial exploitation drive anti-Micronesian racism in the Pacific, even as they also drive the displacement of Micronesian peoples throughout the Pacific and North America.

Her collection, *Iep Jāltok*, and academic thesis explicitly invoke basketry to tell, or weave, stories of harmful as well as hopeful transpacific relations. In an epigraph to her collection she quotes from the *Marshallese English Dictionary* to point out that “iep jāltok,” meaning “a basket whose opening is facing the speaker,” is “said of female children. She represents a basket whose contents are made available to her relatives. Also refers to the matrilineal society of the Marshallese” (qtd. 2). She goes into further detail, writing in her thesis that her “basket” of poems includes stories she has inherited from the other women of her family, and that “it is definitely a misshapen basket of stories” with “each poem [as] a narrative” (“A History” 116, 117). Framing her poetry—not just in this collection but as a whole—as a basket compels thinking about the materials the basket is composed of. It also invites thinking about what is in the basket, what exactly it offers and carries for “her relatives.” The proverb that titles her writings suggests rhetorical work, in that the basket receives a speaker’s words and offers them to her family. But the title also foreshadows Jetñil-Kijiner’s ongoing direct address to public audiences in many of her poems, as she calls for people to join her, speaks to those who have been exploited, and demands that her listeners take action.

For her audiences, Jetñil-Kijiner’s basket of poems offers up stories that make visible environmental racism against Micronesians through themes of contamination’s transpacific generational drift. In her video poem, “Anointed” (2018), she speaks directly to the island of Runit, in the atoll of Enewetak, used as a nuclear waste disposal site after the US concluded their 67 tests in the Marshall Islands. Jetñil-Kijiner visits the island to mourn that it is now a crater, a tomb, continually leaking radioactive waste that then travels through the ocean. The video also foregrounds images of residents of Enewetak Atoll who live, as Jetñil-Kijiner says, just 15 miles downwind from the waste site, and who experience numerous effects from radiation carried on

currents of wind and water. Jetñil-Kijiner's video poem is a lament, a memorial for the story of the island that was lost, but she also says that she is "looking for more stories": stories that reflect the ongoing life of Enewetak residents and which connect them to the stories of others outside the Marshall Islands beyond simply the traumatic threads that nuclear contamination creates. The images of every day life—children at school, women singing, people walking down the street—juxtaposed against the silent, barren dome of the waste site emphasize that the inhabitants of this atoll still must find ways to live, to persist, in states of contamination. While Runit, the waste disposal site, became "solidified history," Jetñil-Kijiner contrasts these static images against the video of her sailing to the island on an outrigger canoe, not letting the lives of Marshall Islanders be solidified along with it.

Themes of contamination's transpacific generational drift emerge in Jetñil-Kijiner's other poems too, carried in the bodies of Marshallese peoples themselves. We read of infertility and miscarriages, the deformed and dead babies born to the Marshallese women, the cancer rates, the forced dependence on capitalism, the restriction of Marshallese bodies on their own islands and in their own waters, not to mention the ecological damage. But in poems such as "Tell Them" Jetñil-Kijiner does not let the Marshall Islands be read solely through the US empire and its acts of contamination. That is, she does not let the islands be read solely within US-centered transpacific currents. In the poem she sends earrings to a friend in the US and says that the recipient should use the earrings to tell stories of the Marshall Islands to others. She writes, "Tell them we are descendants/ of the finest navigators/ in the world." "Tell them...we are wood shavings/ and drying pandanus leaves....Tell them....we are little girls with braids/ cartwheeling beneath the rain" (64-66). The repetitive syntactic pattern of the imperative to "tell them...." asserts narratives of ongoing Marshallese presence—narratives that refuse erasure. Descriptions

of lively actions and objects in the present tense effectively foreground Marshallese presences, their continuing lives both within the islands and living in diaspora, despite everything they have endured. Jetñil-Kijiner then asks the recipient to tell how the Islanders will be impacted by climate change, how they still live with nuclear contamination, and how they “are nothing/ without our islands” (67). Here, she expresses how contamination’s transpacific and generational drift ultimately causes ecological obliteration. Nuclear testing and rising seas flatten the multiplicity and liveliness of the islands, collapsing their many entangled ecologies and stories told through those ecologies into one narrative of erasure.

Jetñil-Kijiner’s emphasis on collective Marshallese persistence undercuts an erasure narrative. By framing her poetry collection, *Iep Jāltok*, as well as her thesis, as forms of basketry, Jetñil-Kijiner responds to impacts of transpacific environmental racism and also emphasizes another perspective on Marshallese oceanic connections that is firmly future-focused and materializes from the ecologies of the islands themselves. Her collection of poetry opens and closes with two poems called “Basket”: bookends that resemble a literal basket’s symmetry and echo the curves of a woman’s pregnant body. Notably, for Jetñil-Kijiner who predominantly emphasizes performance and spoken word in her poetry, these two poems are concrete or visual poems and need to be viewed on the page to see how they each represent the shape of a basket:

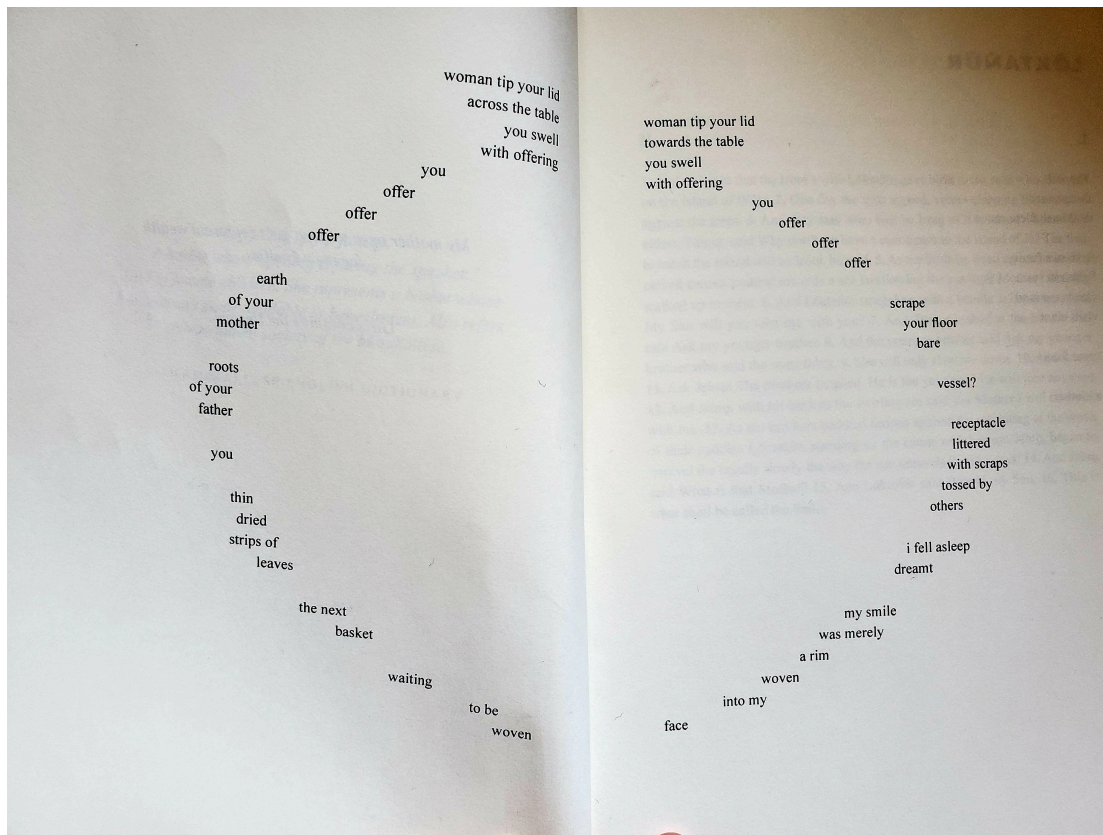


Fig. 2. Jetñil-Kijiner's opening "Basket" poem (4-5).

Both "Basket" poems are also variations on contrapuntal form, or poems of two halves that create a third poem when read as a whole. Like a basket, woven together with gathered materials, the poem becomes more than the sum of its parts. The first poem's first few lines are structured in such a way that they represent a basket opening, while the poem that closes the collection and completes its symmetry restructures the lines in such a way that the opening appears narrower or closed, completing the "weave" of the collection. In her two "Basket" poems, Jetñil-Kijiner describes the Marshall Islands as scraps (5, 80), and as "littered" on the seabed (5). By describing the islands in these ways, she gestures to how imperial narratives have written islands in the Pacific as scattered or small and obscure, and thus how such narratives also enable the violent treatment of the islands and their peoples, such as nuclear testing. However, Jetñil-Kijiner does not represent these scraps as worthless. They may be "tossed/ by others," but she views

them as “the next/ basket // waiting // to be/ woven” (5, 4). She sees them as housing creative potential, which, when woven together, can become something new. By framing her poems and herself as a basket, Jetñil-Kijiner represents her words and stories as “scraps” that become useful and whole when brought together through her creative practice, grounded in Marshallese basketry protocols. Reinforcing the hopefulness contained in her concept of baskets, her “Anointed” video poem includes the image of a basket set upon the dome of the waste site.



Fig. 3. Still from “Anointed” (0:56)

While contamination is violent, and narratives of Marshallese contamination frame the islands and their peoples as wasted resources, as scraps littering the Pacific, Jetñil-Kijiner writes about gathering together and working with objects, practices, and lives that others abused then discarded and using those materials to create something new and restorative, like a basket. In this way she writes her poems as islands, and islands as poems—both critical sources of hope for the future. Jetñil-Kijiner’s narratives of creation on sites of contamination directly challenge imperial narratives of waste and envision practices of basketry renewed as poetry in order to posit Marshallese futures that go beyond survival even as the toxic legacies of nuclear testing continue.

This emphasis on Marshallese futurity encapsulated in the form of a basket also corresponds to the ways Jetñil-Kijiner's poems are deeply invested in the global ramifications of climate change and foreground the ways that islands in the Pacific will be disproportionately affected. She grounds her poems in concepts of oceanic circulation to highlight the overlapping plights of Indigenous peoples in the Pacific while also using her poems to call for global solidarity in the fight for climate change solutions. Her most well known poem, "Dear Matafele Peinam" (*Iep Jāltok* 70-73) is also the most explicit in this advocacy work. Jetñil-Kijiner first presented it at the 2014 Opening Ceremony of the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit. The setting suggests the planetary nature of Jetñil-Kijiner's activism. Yet the kinds of oceanic connections and kinships that Jetñil-Kijiner envisions in the poem center on her immediate family and her Marshallese relatives in order to not let her audience forget that some peoples and places will be more affected by climate change than others. She addresses the poem to her daughter, Matafele Peinam, not to the UN delegates assembled. She speaks from her position as a mother and as a Marshallese woman, anchoring the poem in a specific place: a lagoon where she walks with her daughter. But soon, she says, "your daughter/ and your granddaughter, too/ will wander/ rootless/ with only/ a passport/ to call home" (70). In this poem, climate change driven by environmental exploitation not only erases whole islands, but homes and other forms of rootedness. Forced diaspora correlates with erasure. Invoking a forced Marshallese diaspora, one that directly affects her relatives, Jetñil-Kijiner represents a world in which homelands are not just far away but no longer exist because of climate change.

Jetñil-Kijiner addresses the fact that for people such as "the Carteret Islanders of Papua New Guinea" and "the Taro Islanders of the Solomon Islands" this displaced fate is already a reality (71). The same people who "pretend" that the Marshall Islands "don't exist" also pretend that



those from “Tuvalu/ Kiribati / Maldives” and the victims of “Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines/ floods of Pakistan, Algeria, Colombia” also do not exist (72). In this stanza, Jetñil-Kijiner uses the pronoun “we” to bring the people who “don’t exist” into the intimate circle of address shared with Jetñil-Kijiner’s daughter. She emphasizes these kinships to posit a very different kind of global connectivity than that driven by climate exploitation. From her “lagoon” she shows how climate change’s destructive effects ripple across the world, but so do the voices of people standing together in protest, “petitions blooming from teenage fingertips” (72). “We are spreading the word,” Jetñil-Kijiner asserts, and that word is “for us.” The collective pronouns in these stanzas suggest that the impetus for change comes from the islands and lands most affected, and has global supporters, but always it must center the “we” most affected (72, 73). By the end of the poem, Jetñil-Kijiner returns to speaking more intimately to her daughter, switching from “we” to “you” in her address. This poem, then, is anchored in Matafele Peinam, the literal embodied expression of the speaker’s kinship ties and ongoing connection with the ocean.

Jetñil-Kijiner’s video poem, “Islands Dropped from a Basket: A Letter from a Micronesian Daughter to Hawai‘i” (2017), reinforces these kinship connections between Marshallese peoples and the ocean. This poem portrays the Marshall Islands and their peoples originating from the same place—from a demon’s basket who accidentally dropped them into the ocean. This poem directly addresses anti-Micronesian racism in Hawai‘i, where so many of the people “dropped” from the basket have had to move. As an origin story, the material genealogy of the basket becomes a way to show Kanaka Maoli some of the trauma—specifically, medical trauma caused by radiation—carried with the Micronesian migrants. “Here is a basket from home,” Jetñil-Kijiner says: “Bowls of unplugged wires, fatal diagnoses/ wrapped in aluminum foil, bottled/ fetuses unearthed from the field outside.” However, despite their shared histories of “thieves”

who “sucked the marrow from our reef,” she says that Hawai‘i only offers Micronesians “a sterile basket/ of... peeled and pounded suspicion.” This emphasis on sterility echoes Jetñil-Kijiner’s descriptions elsewhere of radiation’s devastating effects on fertility and suggests that the same harmful narratives that drove the US’s nuclear testing and other military acts in Micronesia are the narratives driving racism against Micronesians living in diaspora. Not all baskets are created equal in this poem. Jetñil-Kijiner does not want a “sterile basket,” something that is empty and dead. She asks for “seedlings/ to take back home.” She suggests that Micronesians will be able to make their own baskets from these seedlings—living, growing beings that can participate in Micronesian ecologies as they have in Hawaiian ones. Jetñil-Kijiner’s vision of Micronesia is a future-focused one, one grounded in the creation of new things that arise from renewing genealogies of knowledge and creative practice.<sup>60</sup> The transpacific movements of Micronesians to Hawai‘i, estimated to number 15,000 people, are ones that spread from the detonation of nuclear bombs in their waters. This poem ties Hawai‘i’s history of militarization to Micronesia’s, and uses baskets to invoke oceanic kinships that might re-place those forced through imperialism.

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In Kihleng’s collection, *My Urohs*, the interconnected but diverse experiences of Micronesian peoples living under extensive militarization form the fabric of her urohs, or traditional Pohnpeian embroidered skirt—part of the makeup of her poetry’s design, making visible aspects of imperialism’s history in the islands, especially how that history has affected women, youth, and kinship relations within Pohnpei, across Micronesia, and across Oceania.

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<sup>60</sup> In the same way, Indigenous scholars such as Kyle Powys Whyte, write that “the renewal of...knowledge systems” is critical for imagining Indigenous futures in a time of climate change (“Indigenous Climate Change Studies” 157, 160).

Urohs are commonly worn by Pohnpeian women, and are part of ongoing women's exchange networks of cloth production and exchange ("Urohs en Pohnpei" *Te Papa*). Kihleng represents her written work, poetic and theoretical, as all part of the same material and intellectual transpacific genealogy of urohs that allow her to confront colonialism while integrating her poetic work into Pohnpeian creative traditions that persist and circulate through the ocean in innovative ways. She states in her dissertation that the, "the central design [of the dissertation] or mwahi are my poems, essential to the making of an urohs kaselel (beautiful urohs), appliqued or embroidered to the scholarly, academic writing or likou, the fabric, that forms the larger skirt, all sewn together with a misihn en deidei (sewing machine), the theory and methodology on which this thesis runs" (vii). In this description, her poems and scholarly writing are technically distinct, but brought together to create the whole of her urohs or body of writing. Her poems and academic writing are entwined through the metaphor of urohs, both necessary for forming her writing (writing).

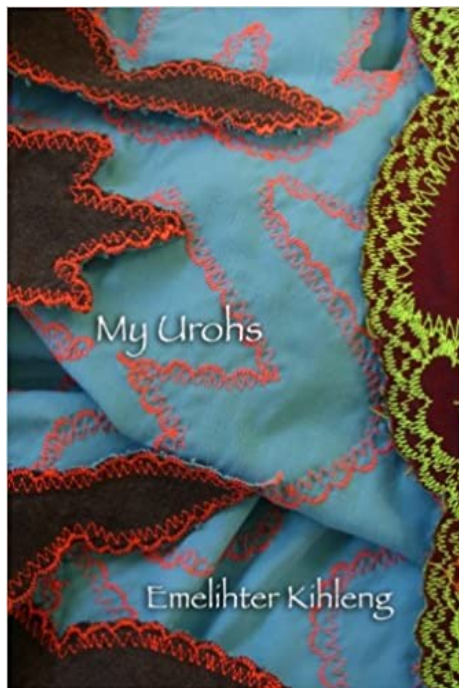


Fig. 4. Cover of Kihleng's book.

Kihleng's urohs-as-poetry records Pohnpei's dynamic oceanic connections, while also showing how currents of colonialism, carrying with them militarization and capitalism, directly affect those connections. Her poem "Destiny Fulfilled" centers on a female childhood friend from Pohnpei, deployed with the US Army to Iraq (6-7). Kihleng writes, "she is a citizen of the Federated States of Micronesia/ 'freely associated' with the United States of America" (lines 25-26). The Compact of Free Association, signed into law in 1986, is an agreement between the USA, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands, allowing the US to use the islands and their waters for military purposes. In turn, the US is responsible for protecting the citizens of these Micronesian states and is also supposed to provide economic and immigration benefits to them, but, as Kihleng's poem suggests, in practice these benefits are not always realized and are vulnerable to legal ambiguities.<sup>61</sup> The Compact is a mode of oceanic connection that creates a particular transpacific ecology linking the US, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands, but in doing so facilitates ongoing trauma through connections that are not based on mutual reciprocity.

For Kihleng, stories of discrimination and currents of Micronesian histories of living under US militarization converge with the Iraq War through the many Micronesian youth recruited to fight for the US in the Iraq War, as part of the " 'Coalition of the Willing' Island Nations" (30). The "Coalition" refers to those nations who backed the US in the Iraq War from 2003. The US's planetary currents of militarization emerge in Kihleng's poem through the lives of Micronesians killed in its wars: "1 Palauan, 1 Pohnpeian, 1 Yapese, 2 Chamorros..." (33). Here Kihleng no longer refers to the people of Micronesia as a "Federation" or a "Coalition," which masks the

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<sup>61</sup> As an ongoing special report by Chad Blair for the *Honolulu Civil Beat* shows, Micronesians experience systemic discrimination in the US, not to mention the fact that so many of them die in US wars.

individual islands and lives impacted by militarization. Instead, she focuses on her friend who is deployed, and then on a Marshallese man called Jimmy Mote, who was “wrongly imprisoned” (39). Kihleng says that she “ponder[s]...statistics” but the statistics are not adequate for revealing, firstly, the oceanic impacts of how US military policies propagate and circulate, and, secondly, how they impact specific individual futures and stories (46). Kihleng instead chooses to end her poem remembering the “kool-aid, ice kehki, and mango days” of her childhood with her friend before the Iraq War (55). In a later three-part poem on “Micronesian Diaspora(s)” (15-21) she takes up the same themes of a militarized diaspora by focusing each part on a different person’s voice. The first takes the form of an interview, conducted in Pohnpeian and then translated. The second and third are first person monologues, speaking of dreams and pain while living in diaspora. Kihleng is invested in the multiplicity of these diasporic stories: that is, her urohs is made up of many designs. But her poems also reveal larger stories and patterns of trauma threading through these narratives.

Those patterns are bound up in connections to Oceanic peoples beyond Micronesia. They included forced colonial connections, such as education in the English language, but they also include decolonial affinities. In the poem “Lokaiahn Wai” (38-39), which Kihleng translates as “the foreign language: English,” her speaker, a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), refers to it as “this colonial global language” (38, line 8). The globalism encapsulated in this language is, for the speaker, inevitably tied to forces that disenfranchise herself and her students. She invokes Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, the anticolonial Kenyan author of *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), who advocates for only writing in one’s native language. But, as the final two stanzas of the poem show, the class also gives students the opportunity to read and watch creative works by authors from across the Pacific. Kihleng writes:

we watch

*The Land Has Eyes* and *Whale Rider*

read poetry by Sia Figiel

and Mahealani Perez-Wendt

try to make a connection

across our ocean to show them

their voices and culture matter (lines 24-30)

In this stanza, Kihleng refers to a Fijian film by Vilsoni Hereniko (2004) and one based on a book by Māori literary heavyweight Witi Ihimaera (1987). Figiel is a writer from Samoa, and Perez-Wendt is Kanaka Maoli. The speaker agonizes over the inadequacies of English to “decolonize [her students’] minds” so instead she cites a literary genealogy for the class that, while focused on works primarily written in English, centers Indigenous Oceanic stories and protagonists (23). “I don’t know if it works,” she says, “but when they see Viki [the main character from *The Land Has Eyes*]...chase the pigs/ they laugh, they identify” (31-38). The speaker in this poem is not interested in showing outsiders that her students’ voices and culture matter. She is invested in showing *them* that they matter and the stories by other Pacific Indigenous authors allow her to do so.

Kihleng’s urohs draws from an Oceanic ecology of textual and literary circulation in order to prioritize Pohnpeian forms of literary sovereignty first, then Micronesian, then Oceanic. Likewise, in her thesis, Kihleng connects her poems and her scholarship to other Pacific poetry and scholarship about women’s creative work, such as Cook Islands’ poetry that attends to tivaivai, or quilting practices (48). Her poems and her research are grounded in a specific, but dynamic Pohnpeian creative and intellectual form, but they also are very much aware of and in

conversation with the ocean-wide textual currents and histories in which they circulate.

Emerging from her poems, then, is a vision of Pohnpeian literary practice and intellectual sovereignty that ultimately defines itself in terms of its relationships with other Indigenous Oceanic practices and interconnected sovereignties, not in terms of its relationships with US and Eurocentric literary and intellectual histories.

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Correspondingly, Taesali centers her collection, *Sourcing Siapo*, on siapo or bark cloth/tapa as a way to map out a world in which she negotiates between her Samoan and American identities, traces processes of being reunited with her estranged father's side of her family, her experiences with domestic violence, difficulties of diaspora caused by imperialism, poverty, and different ways of being a woman. Also known as tapa or kapa across the Pacific, siapo is usually made by women and involves pounding bark until it is soft, then applying designs to it with various dyes. Their designs can vary widely and the cloth has many purposes, such as bed coverings, burial shrouds, and clothing. In the "Notes" Taesali includes at the end of the collection, she writes:

Siapo is the Samoan bark cloth made from the mulberry tree. There are many sources on the internet that discuss the origin and history of siapo also known as tapa. When I was first united with my father and relatives my Aunt Tauvela gave my sister and me large pieces of the Tongan tapa. (96)

In this description, siapo becomes a literal link between Taesali's sides of her family. She and her sister receive siapo at the moment of family reunification, after a long estrangement from

their father's side.<sup>62</sup> Taesali's collection, then, becomes a way to follow the routes of siapo and how they intersect with, overlap, and sometimes fill the gaps of the speaker's and her family's routes of Pacific circulation.

Centering siapo and this moment of exchange with her father's side of the family accounts for the ways that diaspora, militarization, and capitalism have affected her family, or severed connections that siapo works to repair. "Samoa is ruined by the American dollar," she writes, showing how the destructive effects of exploitative tourism travel from America to Samoa, bringing with poverty to their Indigenous populations (58). In an untitled poem that tells the story of how her father left Samoa, Taesali describes how militarism's currents coincided with that of capitalism: "during World War II the American Navy forced our family into the mountains they built the U.S. naval base and then the tuna factories they destroyed the most beautiful part of the island" (58). Taesali's words have a tumbling, cumulative effect in these lines: the military's arrival leads to her family's removal, which leads to exploitation of their waters, which leads to the destruction of their island, and, ultimately, her father's absence. She maintains the correlations between military and economic and environmental exploitation throughout her poems, inevitably linking how the US mined the island of wealth to how it took its youth, too, including her father. "Buying power strips locals out of memory," she writes—the gaps in her lines suggesting the increasing erasure (60). This erasure of land, of memory, and of people includes Samoan youth recruited into the US military and, consequently, the "uncounted dead cousins in Iraq" (61). Their stories, interwoven with the story of her absent father, link the history of capitalism and globalized progress in Samoa to that of the military.

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<sup>62</sup> Taesali slips between the terms siapo and tapa throughout the collection, but prioritizes siapo as she says it is what she is most familiar with.



Likewise, she tethers US wars in the Middle East to exploitation in the Pacific, invoking shared currents of imperialism and, subsequently destruction.

But siapo or tapa supersedes these exploitative transpacific and globalizing currents in Taesali's poems. When Taesali's Aunt Tauvela gifts her and her sister tapa it facilitates reconnection between Taesali and her father's branch of her family after long separation. Siapo also enables her to ask questions about other sources of her heritage, such as a great-great grandfather from South Africa and another relative who was French Canadian. It is as she is asking questions about these relatives, in one of her poems beginning "Dear Father," that her Auntie tells her Tongan tapa is the same as Samoan siapo (57). She then tells the speaker about other Samoan creative practices: "ie" or a "fine-mat" that "takes one year to weave," and "malu," or Samoan female tattooing practices that are about "nobility" and "for protection" (57). In these lines Auntie deftly links different material creative practices together in a way that suggests they are all textual practices with specific purposes, but she also does so in a way that anchors them and the stories of the speaker's diverse transnational family in an oceanic interpretive framework governed by the concept of siapo. A postscript to this "Dear Father" poem reads, in part, "*manoa* song: braid it by way of Samoa" (57). Taesali's ocean song here is one that is vast and touches on many different lands and origin stories. "Manoa" means ocean. But she tells this vast story "by way of Samoa," or with Samoa as her dominant navigation point and source for terminology—hence, perhaps, why her collection is called "sourcing siapo" and not "sourcing tapa." The ocean song is braided, emphasizing it as a place where multiple elements come together and are entwined—it is a place of connection and creativity, just like siapo.

*Citing Fibers of Resistance in Diaspora: Sourcing Their Poetics*

The “citational relations,” to borrow Daniel Heath Justice’s term, or kinships that Taesali, Jetñil-Kijiner, and Kihleng establish between their poetry and specific material practices, are “acknowledgements of intellectual genealogies,” or sources in the sense of heritage, but they are also sources in the sense that they refer to these practices and objects as circulating and doing work contemporaneously with their works of poetry (*Why Indigenous Literatures* 241). Thus, they frame these objects as appropriate for theorizing citational, relational, and intellectual ethics for engaging with Oceanic literatures and ecologies today that include complex issues of diaspora and other forms of environmental disruption. The methods of these three poets are distinct but they invoke shared oceanic entangled ecologies in order to center Indigenous women’s technologies, literacies, and histories in their visions of the transpacific.

For Taesali, living in diaspora from her homeland of American Samoa, and contending with family genealogies emerging from the US as well as Samoa, siapo is specifically a practice of inscription and (re)production that cites traumatic legacies alongside creative ones within this transpacific genealogy. The “sourcing” in the title, *Sourcing Siapo*, implies the act of finding siapo, or obtaining it. But “sourcing” can also imply a kind of citational practice, of locating and documenting knowledge. For Taesali, this knowledge materializes in the form of siapo. That is, for her, siapo cites the intellectual heritages and transpacific “ecologies of entanglement” it is a part of and circulates within.<sup>63</sup> She also makes siapo visible as a source for her poetry by including different images of bark cloth designs, created by her sister, Eloise Ali’itasi Taesali, and interspersing them throughout the book in black and white.

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<sup>63</sup> Michelle N. Huang (99).

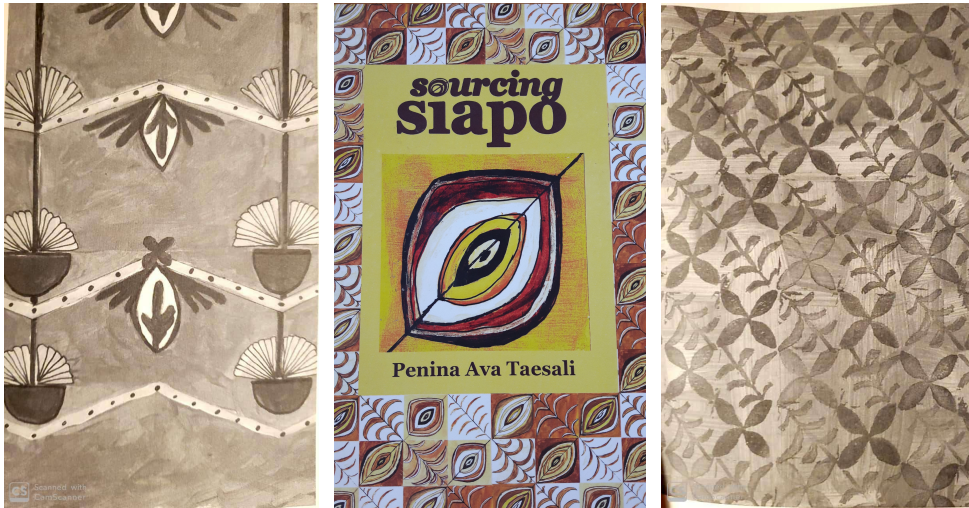


Fig. 5-7. Cover and siapo images from Taesali's *Sourcing Siapo*.

Scholar Paul Sharrad, like Somerville, suggests that kapa/tapa cloth is not just a long-established textile tradition but is also a long-established pre-colonial *textual* and *literary* tradition. He notes the presence of kapa/tapa cloth in many Pacific island cultures and writes that “barkcloth production...spans both Polynesia and Melanesia and has been part of a widespread and formative process of technology exchange and cultural exchange that allows Pacific literature to be seen as part of a continuity rather than something artificially imposed” (134). In fact, “tapa” can also refer to pages (as in the pages of a book), and by describing the ocean as “the realm of tapa,” Te Punga Somerville uses it to argue that Māori and other Pacific literatures are not just “subset[s] of New Zealand [or other colonial power’s] literature” but have more in common with each other as part of “a wider Pacific context” of literatures (*Once Were Pacific* 85, 87). Thinking of Pacific literatures in this way does not collapse differences between Pacific literatures but makes room for us to consider the “diasporic dimension” of them and the ways that these texts “literally, imaginatively, politically, and creatively *exceed* the borders of occupying nation-states” (original emphasis, 85). Sharrad and Te Punga Somerville thus both

imply that kapa/tapa/siapo and paper pages can serve similar functions: as sites for inscription and creative connection.

Drawing from this history of tapa/siapo, Taesali frames her book as part of a transpacific genealogy of siapo-making and authorship, specifically rooted in women's labor and women's knowledge. She repatriates siapo into a family history, or what I call a family archive because the collection becomes a space in which she collects and narrates the stories of her family members' lives. When Taesali's Aunt Tauvela gives her and her sister tapa, Taesali says that she "explained briefly how the siapo was made; 'it is women's work only and it is very hard work...' " (96). By choosing to give Taesali and her sister tapa at the moment of family reunification, Aunt Tauvela suggests that the act of making kinship and the act of making siapo are both "women's work." The gift cites the sisters as part of the family, but also signals that the act of unifying the family, and of making siapo, is an ongoing, often very difficult process, specifically rooted in women's labor and women's knowledge.

Additionally, by situating her poems within a creative genealogy of siapo, Taesali, like Te Punga Somerville and Sharrad, implies that siapo and paper pages are sites of inscription and methods of creative connection. Taesali cites siapo in ways that situate her work within Pacific literatures and traditions of women's work, and her poems also formally echo the work of making siapo by describing the labor of writing poems and making tapa with the language of pounding:

sing beat pound ink dye my *siapo* with all that is written here in these letters poems and  
songs bury me in my bark cloak cover my body with these restricted nouns absent  
fathers mothers sisters brothers crawling standing walking into these arms hands  
fingers legs feet heart sweat out wear out the forced alphabet (64)

In this section, the speaker frames both *siapo* and poems as emerging from similar processes of women's creative and rhetorical labor. She pounds ink into the pages in the same way that she pounds ink into *siapo*. This process is echoed in the strong stresses of much of this excerpt and the abrupt caesuras that connote the pauses someone must take for breath when engaged in a strenuous activity. This act of creation is not easy work. It is "forced," she has to work with "restricted nouns," and it is an experience that requires her whole body. It is sweaty work, and intimately connected to her family and understanding her own genealogy in this poem, as she lists its members, including "absent fathers." If a bark cloth is her burial covering, she implies that so too is this collection, including all the family members that she inscribes into it—inscribed through sweat and pain, but also through kinship.

As this excerpt indicates, this family genealogy also bears the marks of colonial violence, but for Taesali beating *siapo* offers possibilities to transform her family's legacy from one of trauma to one of creativity. There are two main contexts that include "beating" in this collection: first, the context of creating *siapo*/poetry; second, the context of family violence, especially the beating of children. Taesali's poems are brutally open about family violence, but also about the legacies of colonialism that drive and are bound up in that violence. In one poem, referring to a sibling by the month in which he was born, she writes, "September has the darkest skin so he gets beat more" (30). Taesali and her siblings, we learn throughout the collection, are of Samoan, Tongan, European, and African American ancestry, and some of her siblings can "pass" as "Caucasian" more easily than others (30). September's racialization directly coincides with his experiences of violence, and Taesali connects this violence and its accompanying traumas of poverty, family separation, and addiction directly to legacies of colonialism. One way she makes these connections is through the line "who were once warriors" that she repeats a number of

times in the collection. The film, *Once Were Warriors* (1994), directed by Māori director Lee Tamahori and based on Alan Duff's 1990 novel of the same title, is perhaps New Zealand's most well known film. Its impact spread across the Pacific and its diaspora. The film is deeply concerned with questions of alcoholism, family violence, poverty, and Māori identities. It is a film about trauma that reveals the colonial and patriarchal origins of such trauma even as it threatens to reinforce harmful stereotypes and repeat "warrior gene" myths and fallacies that essentialize Māori and other Polynesian peoples, especially men. By citing how this violence stems from ongoing traumatic imperial legacies, Taesali makes these legacies another kind of source, evident in her pounded poetry. But Taesali's collection also takes up the phrase from the film's title to subvert limiting narratives of Polynesian masculinity, writing that, "I want to recover the possible world awaiting at the gates butterflies who were once warriors" (55). While she draws from a literary heritage that includes this film, Taesali's poems document violence but also imagine transformative recovery. Taesali continually expresses this idea of transformation in the collection by juxtaposing delicate images such as "butterflies" against violence, remaining firmly focused on possibilities for life and abundance.

While the collection is very much concerned with the consequences of toxic masculine violence, Taesali uses *siapo* to foreground transpacific relationships between women in transformative terms. When the speaker's women relatives gift her *siapo* they bring her into their circle of work and reproduction, even if this is not necessarily a harmonious circle. Within this circle, the speaker suggests that her *siapo*-as-poetry (or poetry-as-*siapo*) offers her avenues for being a woman that expand reproduction beyond bearing children. At several points in the collection, the speaker suggests that she has not been able to have children. Taesali writes that, "I'll proudly walk inside this stiff strange resiliency of *siapo*...I'll leave behind the childrearing

that failing that was too large” (64). Though these lines suggest that she left bearing and raising children behind her, siapo gives her an opportunity to contribute to her family in a way that gives her pride. She then describes going to the “underworld” where she meets with her grandmother who says, “Fa’afetai tele lava [thank you very much] daughter for your siapo story” (64). This poem suggests that while children may be part of the siapo story of some women in the collection, this speaker’s siapo story is built through her poetry. She expresses acts of receiving, creating, and exchanging siapo—for her, in the form of poetry—as a way of continuing transpacific circulations that, as her grandmother says, allow her to “*carry the water for our ava garden*” (64, original emphasis). In other words, Taesali posits that the form of siapo is capacious and fertile enough to carry her genealogy forward after her death and to continue her family’s lineage in the Pacific with poetry as her offspring.

Taesali writes that she was gifted siapo when she first reconnected with her father’s extended family, but it is the women on her father’s side who repair severed relationships through siapo, making space for her to connect with her father again. Her collection acts as a reciprocal gift of her own kind of siapo, her own kind of “women’s work only.” Taesali asserts her relationships to her family by connecting her poems to a creative transpacific ecology that includes siapo. She frames siapo as a way to reconnect with and tell the stories of her family, in a literal genealogy that spans the ocean. She also frames siapo making as a knowledge process—and a difficult one at that. By citing siapo as the heritage of her poetry, Taesali weaves threads of genealogical, creative, and intellectual kinship that acknowledge and begin to restore connections severed by trauma. Her own siapo is made up of many different transpacific textures, as she uses it to tell stories that move between Samoa and the US, and are deeply scarred by capitalism and militarism. But her siapo are transformed into diasporic art through

what Taesali frames as women-centered practices of making and exchange that bring her and her sister into relationship with the other women of their family. She emphasizes the labor of sourcing siapo and of sourcing her poetry by reconnecting with this genealogy. And she asserts it as women's knowledge, women's labor, and a women's process of belonging.

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In the same way that Taesali frames her collection as telling family stories, Jetñil-Kijiner specifically tells us that her basket doesn't just hold *her* stories but ones from other women relatives ("A History" 116). By citing this inheritance, Jetñil-Kijiner signals the proliferation of stories that the basket has the capacity to hold, and suggests that the stories do not disappear when one storyteller dies, but are passed on to the next woman. The stories Jetñil-Kijiner tells, then, of great arcs of oceanic exploitation, the militarization of Marshallese waters, and the planetary threats of climate change, are deeply entangled in her own genealogy of more intimate passed down stories, from woman to woman. Thus, her more immediate genealogy—including her literary genealogy—is bound up in expansive oceanic ecologies. Her collection explicitly weaves and then leverages these relations to call for environmental justice in the Pacific.

Throughout her poetry, the framework of the basket ensures that the oceanic relations she works to activate come from and privilege a Marshallese perspective, even as she addresses wide audiences. In her thesis, Jetñil-Kijiner writes that she chooses to follow Marshallese-based research protocols, which include "going through the proper channels," talking to elders and following genealogy, and emphasizing reciprocity and self-reflexive scholarship ("A History" 22). For her, the forms of her projects, scholarly and poetic, are part of following these protocols, of *doing* the intellectual kinship work. The basket proverb that opens her collection positions herself first towards her family, and she carries this emphasis on perspective and positionality as



a core value self-reflexivity throughout her work. In her thesis she states that she structures her portfolio not only as basket but also drawing from a Marshallese stickchart: Stickcharts, she says, were used for navigation, a Marshallese form of mapping (25). They were also “made from materials which already existed in the Marshallese environment” and emphasize patterns and connections, resulting, for her project, in “a bigger picture—a map of our history of writing...It is merely showing one perspective, one map, one history of Marshallese writing” (“A History” 26-27). Jetñil-Kijiner draws her work, then, from two material objects in the ecology of Marshallese environmental and intellectual traditions available to her. She prioritizes the framework of the basket, but a basket is woven out of many elements. The stickchart emphasizes the oceanic nature of Marshallese literatures and intellectual history, and so she frames the basket of her poems as oceanic, too.

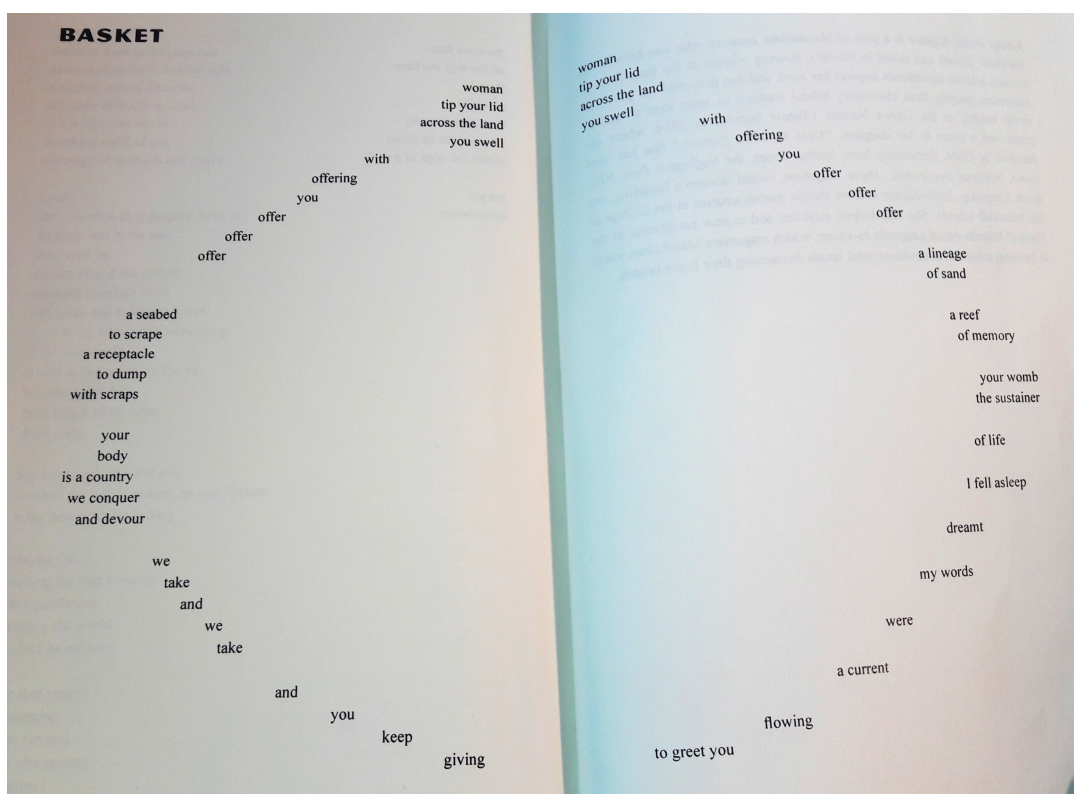


Fig. 8. Jetñil-Kijiner's closing basket poem (80-81).

By acknowledging such oceanic kinships, the basket's weave reveals repeated patterns of oceanic and Indigenous exploitation, especially the exploitation of Indigenous women. Jetñil-Kijiner's opening and closing "Basket" poems both begin by addressing "woman," asking her to "tip your lid" and spill her contents (4-5, 80-81). Both therefore emphasize offering, as the basket proverb suggests. The first poem emphasizes family, and the offering spilled from the basket goes "across the table" and "toward the table," while in the closing poem it goes "across the land" (4-5, 80-81). That is, the first "Basket" is focused on human relatives and the final one moves to focus on the land and its kinship with the ocean and with the ocean's people. Women and the ocean "swell" in these poems, and in the final poem this swelling takes on ominous tones as they are also both exploited, even as the poem's readers and speaker are written as complicit in this exploitation: "we/ take/ and/ we/ take// and// you// keep// giving," Jetñil-Kijiner writes (80). The citational relations of these poems and their intellectual lineage of basketry allow Jetñil-Kijiner to form her collection and her scholarship based on Marshallese protocols of following genealogy, and, in doing so, these relations suggest that facing rising challenges stemming from exploitation of the environment, especially of the ocean and of Indigenous women, will also require protocols anchored in acknowledging Indigenous claims to and kinships with the ocean.

For Jetñil-Kijiner, these poetic forms allow her to have the kinds of transoceanic and trans-Indigenous conversations that acknowledging Indigenous oceanic relations requires, while at the same time making visible imperialism's planetary impacts. The transoceanic entanglements, of conversation and devastation, are especially evident in one of her video poems, "Rise: From One Island to Another" (2018), created with Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland poet Aka Niviâna. In the video poem the two women from different islands address each other as

“Sister.” Their conversation is reciprocal and then mutual as they first exchange lines before joining their voices together. They share different but comparable stories, giving space to each one’s perspective as they lament how climate change is taking their islands from them. “I ask for solutions,” they say, and, in return, “I ask for your problems.” Kinship relations in this poem, as in *Iep Jāltok*, create responsibility across Jetñil-Kijiner’s poems. This video poem and Jetñil-Kijiner’s basket of poems in her collection emphasize the speaking, or offering, of stories as part of this responsibility, and center Indigenous stories in particular in environmental justice efforts.

Jetñil-Kijiner’s creative work, formed through her knowledge of and obligations through basketry, constructs citational networks that conceive of literature as doing particular kinds of storied memory and kinship work. This work addresses urgent environmental issues by centering the conversations, stories, work, and voices of the women who are most affected. The ecological is deeply genealogical for her because these crises directly interrupt Marshallese lineages, and that of other Indigenous peoples. It is “girls [who] continue the lineage,” according to Jetñil-Kijiner’s mother, cited in the opening pages of her collection, so Jetñil-Kijiner frames her work as a strategy to achieve this continuity (3). In her thesis of the same title she makes this connection explicit: “I am a Marshallese daughter offering my own basket full of writing, history, and poetry” (“A History” 10). As a storyteller, then, Jetñil-Kijiner constructs her basket as part of a women’s lineage of basket making, genealogically and intellectually. By framing her collection in this way, Jetñil-Kijiner shows that the genealogies of her creative practice, embodying the literal genealogies of her family, are intimately bound up in ecological networks and her “basket full of writing” becomes a way to perpetuate Marshallese genealogies and heritage in the Pacific despite devastating environmental challenges, thus acknowledging and answering her mother’s claim.

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Citing urohs as part of her own intellectual heritage and kinships, Kihleng writes in her thesis that her work “explore[s] a genealogy and evolution of women’s nting (writing) from pelipel, tattoos, that marked Pohnpeian bodies to cloth production, including dohr, likoutei (wraparounds), as well as contemporary urohs, to my poetry, another kind of dynamic, textual and textured writing” (vii). Urohs aren’t the only heritage to her writing, in this argument, but are part of a constellation of forms of “textual and textured” writing. Both contemporary and older forms of urohs are modes of writing for Kihleng. In other words, she continually cites urohs as an ongoing and integral part of her writing and creative practice. Her urohs, “perpetuates a legacy of menginpehn lien Pohnpei (the handiwork of Pohnpeian women)” that documents, through its patterns, traumatic as well as lively patterns of Micronesian diaspora (“A Poetic Ethnography” vii). That is, urohs allows Kihleng to theorize a genealogy for her poetry that is material and literary, as well as embodied, via the ways it constructs and represents Pohnpeian women’s relations in Pohnpei. By representing her poetry as urohs and using it to tell stories of Pohnpeian women in diaspora, Kihleng also suggests that urohs, and her poetry-as-urohs, is a form appropriate for coming to grips with the disruptions of colonialism, including diaspora.

Urohs, and, subsequently, Kihleng’s poetry, represent colonial forms coming into existing Pohnpeian ones. In her thesis she states that urohs are “part of a long genealogy of lien Pohnpei’s skill, expertise, and creativity...which continues to demonstrate their power and agency in society,” while the various forms urohs have taken over the years, the incorporation of different fabrics and designs, also “reveals the history of colonialism” (“Ethnography” 8). Kihleng’s linguistic choices in her poem, “My Urohs,” achieve a similar effect: asserting her poetry’s connections to a Pohnpeian genealogy of women’s knowledge and creative production,

while documenting the threads of colonialism woven in, often forcefully, to this existing genealogy. The forms of urohs skirts shift and change with the arrival of different fabrics, threads, and techniques via colonial and other trade networks, and they also change with the travels of the women who make them. These moments of contact, travel, disruption, and networks are thus documented in the forms of the skirts themselves. So Kihleng documents the incorporation of colonial “materials” in her poems, primarily through linguistic strategies. If her collection is her urohs, language forms its designs, its fabrics. Some stanzas of her poems are written predominantly in English, while others are written predominantly in Pohnpeian. For example, in the following stanza Pohnpeian words intrude into mainly English lines:

my urohs is lien Pohnpei  
 dancing and singing in a nahs in U  
 after winning a yam competition  
 the envy of the entire wehi (lines 9-12)

This stanza stands in contrast to a later stanza in the same poem in which most of the nouns are Pohnpeian, using English primarily as articles, adjectives, and conjunctions to give a sense of the phrase structure, while centering the stanza on a Pohnpeian subject and objects:

a mwaramwar  
 of yellow seir en Pohnpei,  
 white sampakihda and  
 red hibiscus (21-24)

In this latter stanza, Kihleng describes a mwaramwar (flower garland or necklace), but while we can read its colors in English, the specifics of the flowers that make up the garland are described in Pohnpeian. These lines reveal not just colonial intrusions into Pohnpeian creative forms, but

also Pohnpeian intrusions within English lines. In other words, we see the impact of the colonial language in this poem, but also how, as Birgit Brander Rasmussen puts it, an Indigenous form of literature “inter-animates,” a colonial form (5). Because urohs are “part of a long genealogy of lien Pohnpei’s skill, expertise, and creativity,” Kihleng writes them as a Pohnpeian form, not a colonial one (“Ethnography” 8). Thus, by framing this poem and her wider collection as her urohs, Kihleng shows how the practice of urohs informs her practice of poetry, and how both are intimately linked to a world of distinctly *Pohnpeian* forms, that happen to take up colonial materials and patterns as *part* of their creative practice, not *in place* of.

Because of the innovative and women-centered nature of its design, Kihleng frames her urohs creative practice as a practice that specifically negotiates diasporic issues through women’s knowledge and social relationships. In a footnote to the poem “My Urohs,” Kihleng writes, “Urohs embody lien Pohnpei (Pohnpeian women) and all of the things Pohnpeian women do” (49). Kihleng references many different kinds of lien Pohnpei in *My Urohs*: old and young, with children, and without. In the poem, “She Needs an Urohs,” the speaker uses urohs to work through her concerns about a young woman and discusses more kinds of lien Pohnpei: those who have moved away and those who have stayed close to home, educated and not educated (51-52). Urohs is multifaceted in this poem, used to shame the young woman and question how she dresses, before becoming a symbol of care from the older speaker and a way to express mixed, complex agencies as well as signal belonging. The young woman is beautiful, and the speaker “worries” because she is “too much like me” (lines 4, 5). She also worries that the young woman is like her mother who was “too wild” (22). Anxiety about the woman’s sexuality, patriarchal expectations, and perhaps the speaker’s own sexuality, dominate the poem. The speaker asks, “*has no one taught you how to dress?/ sohte ahmw urohs?*” (26-27). In these lines, the speaker

references urohs as a broad stand-in for “dress” to criticize the addressee for wearing shorts and not traditional Pohnpeian women’s clothing. The speaker wants her to finish school, with “*no babies, no boys*,” and thinks that she needs an urohs and to emulate a more traditional way of being a Pohnpeian woman in order to make that happen (18-19). In other words, at this stage in the poem, the speaker clings to a very traditional view of urohs that, for her, emulates the ideal way that she hopes the young woman will conduct herself in terms of her social relationships.

But the poem undercuts this traditional view of urohs, shifting its focus from societal expectations for the young women to the relationships between the two women themselves as they both negotiate their own ways of being *lien Pohnpei* when diaspora threatens these relationships. As Kihleng points out in a note at the end of her book, Pohnpei is a matrilineal society (61). This lineage is multifaceted in her poems. In her thesis, Kihleng writes that urohs and poems both “tell stories and embody relationships,” and also “provide economic stability and agency,” particularly for women (“Ethnography” 41). Likewise, in her poem, “She Needs an Urohs,” the urohs mediates the relationship between the older female speaker and the younger woman, and symbolizes the kind of stability and agency the speaker wants for her. By the end of the poem, the speaker succeeds in buying the young woman an urohs, but the young woman gets to choose the pattern (lines 37-39). Both women express some kind of agency through the purchase of the urohs. The speaker says she buys it before she leaves—she does not say where she is going, but other poems in this collection suggest that the dominant speaker is one of many Pohnpeian women now living in diaspora, whether for work or education or both, sometimes by choice and sometimes not.<sup>64</sup> In this poem, the cultural production and wearing of urohs give women some power in Pohnpeian society, but it also pulls on complex strands of women’s ways

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<sup>64</sup> See, for example, “Korean Stores” (14), “Micronesian Diaspora(s)” (15), “The Return” (31), and “This Time” (32).

of being and belonging in Pohnpei and while living in diaspora that exhibit generational tensions as well as generational relationships. The speaker is not the young women's mother, but she is a relative and thus part of the young woman's genealogical network. This poem, as it describes the relationship between the two women, becomes a *urohs* itself, a "thing," as Kihleng says in her thesis, borrowing from Arjun Appadurai, that conveys a story of the women's kinship and is embedded in a history of transaction that carries with it social connotations and connections in Pohnpei ("Ethnography" 12). Thus it also becomes a "thing" that cites stories of Pohnpeian women's relations maintained through generations and despite transpacific diaspora.

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All three of these authors center Pacific women's modes of writing and technologies of inscription to tell their stories of diaspora, "coexist[ing]," as Jetñil-Kijiner puts it, along with many others ("A History" 28). Thus, the citational webs of relations that Taesali, Kihleng, and Jetñil-Kijiner's poems express reflect Justice's assertion that "kinship...[is] not about something that *is* in itself so much as something we *do*—actively, thoughtfully, respectfully" ("Kinship Criticism" 148). Kinship, in other words, is *action*, is *work*. Justice argues that the nature of citational practices authors weave is critical because they can be matters of "ethical practices" as well "as relational ones" (*Why Indigenous Literatures* 241). By this he means that who and what we cite has consequences: colonial citational practices lead to violent erasures of Indigenous knowledge and intellectual practices that are deeply connected to the occupation of their lands and waters. Kihleng, Taesali, and Jetñil-Kijiner use their citational practices to foreground and continue particular material, diversely textured, intellectual genealogies through their poetry and do so in a way that centers Indigenous women in their literary histories as well as in their transpacific diasporas.



In all these collections the ocean is the space that facilitates connections between peoples, genealogies, objects, texts, languages, and more. By foregrounding these connections they align with Te Punga Somerville's exhortation that scholars should approach archives and Indigenous texts "assuming Indigenous presence and proximity rather than focusing on distance and loss" ("Our Sea" 121). The ways Kihleng, Jetñil-Kijiner, and Taesali write their collections as part of long continuums of Indigenous material and intellectual technologies and practices, sourced and circulating through the sea makes visible "Indigenous presence and proximity" in their literary histories of the Pacific. They do this in part by emphasizing how archival spaces are, as Lisa King (Munsee) puts it, "rhetorical spaces" (125). That is, archives tell narratives that shape the ways we view people, places, and things. This is why archival spaces are often also hostile institutions for Indigenous peoples, as they frequently uphold and help construct colonial narratives.<sup>65</sup> But these poets also highlight the rhetorical, storied nature of ecological spaces. That is, they show that both archives and representations of environments "carry persuasive and communicative force in the narratives of history and culture they create and present to particular audiences" (King 126). If we return to Kihleng's poem, "Lokaiahn Wai," on teaching English to children as a foreign language, we can see that she portrays the classroom as a kind of archival space. It is a space that contains texts that are selected, arranged and deployed in ways that convey particular narratives about English, about the students, and about the world. The speaker deliberately chooses to emphasize texts by other Pacific Indigenous peoples in order to show her students that "their voices and culture matter" (38). The speaker is hyperaware that this classroom at the College of Micronesia is "part of the colonial institution" and therefore a hostile

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<sup>65</sup> See also Susan Sleeper-Smith's *Contesting Knowledge: Museums and Indigenous Perspectives* (2009), and Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums* (2012).

environment (38). In fact, the preceding poem's title is "No Post in Colonialism at COM [College of Micronesia]," emphasizing that, while the islands and waters of Micronesia are technically not colonized in the political sense, colonization takes many forms, including educational forms in spaces such as COM where the English language and US-centric ideologies dominate (37). To "decolonize" this space, then, the speaker fills it with Indigenous texts (38). But, at the same time, she "do[esn't] know if it works" (39). The overarching structure of the colonial institution remains.

In contrast, Taesali structures her collection by means of *siapo* as a kind of family archive that tells a narrative of her family on her terms, confronting the creative and archival catastrophe of colonialism. By placing *siapo* images, made by her sister, alongside the alphabetic texts of her poems, Taesali continually asks readers to view them in terms of the kinship narratives she tells—that is, she frames *siapo*, drawings of *siapo*, and her *siapo* poems as all forming a transpacific creative genealogy that is also narrated through the collection. Taesali never provides a key or direct translation for her *siapo* images. To do so would suggest that the collection is supposed to perform the same kind of exhibition work and illusion of universal accessibility that a display in a museum with a description on a plaque might perform. But by asking us to view the *siapo* alongside her poems, and as part of her poems, she suggests that these images and practices of making are as integral to the narratives of her family history as the alphabetic text is. In this act of curating a poetic collection, she continually works to restore the relationships between *siapo*, the knowledge it communicates, and her own genealogy.

Because *siapo* is an expression of women's (re)production for Taesali, it requires an active, agential archive that remediates relationships between female bodies, intellectual practices, and their kinships with human relatives and their islands that have been subverted and

destroyed by colonialism. She retrieves *siapo* as a textual, creative, and genealogical work within the archive of her family relationships and as an expression of reclaiming her family history and her female body. Imperialism and capitalism impede and distort reproduction, biologically and creatively, so Taesali draws on bark cloth as a transpacific act of (re)production that will account for as well as persist through such exploitation.

Colonialism is literally a form of archival catastrophe for Jetñil-Kijiner, as she frames the ocean itself is a kind of archive or memory space, in the same ways that Te Punga Somerville describes the ocean as “our sea of archives” (“Our Sea” 121). In Jetñil-Kijiner’s closing “Basket” poem one half writes the “seabed” as “a receptacle/ to dump/ with scraps,” while the other half re-envision the seabed as “a lineage/ of sand // a reef/ of memory // your womb/ the sustainer” (80, 81). The first half of the poem foregrounds both the ocean and a basket as merely a passive repository, while the second suggests a creative locus defined through kinship and heritage relationships. I read these sections as two different approaches to archives, with the latter gesturing towards a vision of what a Marshallese-centered archive can be. The sea is archive here, a fertile place of memory and knowledge, and Jetñil-Kijiner’s depiction of the basket in connection to the sea suggests that it is an active site of knowledge, memory, and genealogy as well. The ocean and its peoples, objects, and stories are not objects for consumption or preservation in her view, but are, as Jeffrey Carroll, Brandy Nālani McDougall (Kanakanaka Maoli), and Georganne Nordstrom suggest in their own “pooling” project on art and literature in Oceania, sites of narrative and navigational activity (2). Somerville points out that “archives are full of interactions, messages, and connections” (“Our Sea” 123). Structuring her collection through basketry—which necessitates highlighting the ocean’s many “interactions, messages, and connections” that she then weaves together—allows Jetñil-Kijiner to navigate the ocean as

archive. She writes it not as a static place of preservation but as a knowledge and memory space that is creative and living and which enables creative and intellectual practices such as basketry and poetry.

Jetñil-Kijiner is invested in how history is curated, and how acts of curation impact the islands in deeply embodied and material ways, because the narratives that archives tell have direct environmental impacts, including impacts on Indigenous peoples' health. In one of her longer poems from *Iep Jāltok*, "History Project," which she also turns into a video poem, a teenager's school history project on US nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands reveals fissures between archives (20-23). The speaker "weave[s] through book after article after website" for her project (20). She looks at political documents, photographs, and reads personal accounts of the after-effects of radioactive fallout—all methods that might be expected when conducting research. But some contesting quotations emerge interspersed throughout the account of the speaker's research. One is a US voice: "*for the good of mankind...God will thank you they told us*" (21, original emphasis). Others are from Marshallese accounts, such as interviews with women who miscarried their babies: "*I never told my husband/ I thought it was my fault*" (20, original emphasis). The US voice repeats, forcing its narrative through Jetñil-Kijiner's archival research. But there is a switch in perspective halfway through the poem from a predominantly first person singular one, to a collective "we." The speaker set out in the beginning of the poem to "learn my own history," and halfway through the poem the "powdered flakes" from the nuclear tests do not just "seep into" her bones, or the bones of others, but "*our bones*," moving from emphasizing an individual history to a collective Marshallese one (20, 21, my emphasis). She begins to identify with the narratives told via the collectively voiced archive over the "official" narrative. The visceral, storied accounts from the Marshallese themselves generates

this shift and map out rifts in the dominant narrative told by the imperial archive.

“Radioactive energy” becomes “ripples of death” as, Jetñil-Kijiner writes, “we mistook radioactive fallout/ for snow” (22, 21). The narratives from the archives are incommensurate with each other—death is only legible as “energy” for the Americans while the Marshallese read radioactive fallout as snow. Jetñil-Kijiner writes of her rage when she discovers that American protesters were distraught over goat test subjects, but not Marshallese test subjects (22). The story of the goats made it through US routes of knowledge to the American people and was legible as traumatic, but the Marshallese accounts were not.

Jetñil-Kijiner’s collective claim on this history, centering on descriptions of embodied experiences of the nuclear tests, illuminates the present and ongoing effects of the tests and refuses an imperial, linear temporality in which the nuclear tests and the Marshallese are relegated to the past. As Mark Rifkin shows, it is critically important for researchers to attend to aspects of embodiment and emotion in archives in order to see narratives of Indigenous presence and concepts of sovereignty that are not necessarily otherwise accounted for or made legible in US-centric narratives and archival accounts of events, of belonging, personhood, and sovereignty (173). Jetñil-Kijiner’s posterboard and flowcharts that she made for her history project at 15 stand in stark contrast to the way her poem documents the “screaming” of “generation/ after generation/ after generation” (23). Her posterboard also failed to communicate the narrative she wanted to convey to the judges of her history project. “I lost,” she says of the history competition (23). The institution is an inadequate archival space, and an insufficient space for protest and history for Jetñil-Kijiner, like it is for Kihleng. But Jetñil-Kijiner’s history-project-as-poem makes space for the embodied experiences and emotions to come through and allows her to “weave” her project in another way that reveals her research process and communicates the

glaring archival gaps, silences, and deceptions (20). Jetñil-Kijiner thus gestures towards a kind of decolonial archive in the vein that Cushman describes as “a place-based learning center where knowledge unfolds through stories told in and on the people’s terms” (132). This archive might be achieved, Cushman writes, “by re-placing and relocating the understanding in telling and sharing within the context of creating meaningful acts of perseverance through time immemorial and countless generations” (128). Jetñil-Kijiner disrupts linear US timelines of the nuclear testing by locating the poem firmly in genealogical and place-based terms—in the “sagging breadfruit trees,” “coral reefs,” and hospital rooms where her relatives are dying (Cushman 116, Jetñil-Kijiner 21). She makes visible the tensions between the archival voices, and the generational and place-based impacts, thus intervening in the narratives conveyed through the US-centric accounts, and repatriating the Marshallese accounts into her poem in a way that honors their lived experiences and relations to their islands.

The archival and interpretive practices that Kihleng, Taesali, and Jetñil-Kijiner’s collections invite are intimate, participatory ones. I use the term “intimate” here in the way that Lisa Lowe uses it to refer to a methodology of reading across archives and the gaps between them in order to think about the possible distributions of power, knowledge, and solidarities that might emerge. Lowe looks for ways to address contradictions, alternative temporalities, and silences in the archives, just as the three poets do. In Kihleng’s thesis she writes, “doing ethnography [on urohs] meant real participation” (7). That is, she placed herself and her own work in the archive she drew from for her research, prioritizing listening, and corresponding to what Lisa Brooks (Abenaki) defines as an “ethical” Indigenous criticism which is bound up in questions of home, community (“including all of the beings, human and nonhuman, that constitute them”), spaces and their connections, as well as “the sources of our intellectual

tradition,” or citational relations (235-236). Also central to Brooks’s and Kihleng’s models of an ethical Native criticism is the notion of “participation,” which implies a collaborative effort from within, rather than *doing* criticism *on* texts (or objects, or peoples) (Brooks 238). For Kihleng, like Jetñil-Kijiner’s “stickchart” method, this means “blur[ring] the boundaries...between creativity and scholarship making room for greater reflexivity and a critical positionality” (“Ethnography” 42). All three of the poets emphasize extensive networks, ongoing dialogues, and the perseverance of long-established traditions that inform their collections, thus foregrounding “Indigenous presence and proximity” in the ocean, in both archival and ecological terms (Somerville 121). Indigenous archival sovereignty, environmental sovereignty, and ocean sovereignty are brought together in the poems as they repatriate narratives of their homelands through basketry, urohs, and siapo, respectively, and work to restore and re-place relationships between objects, practices, and technologies that were displaced. That is they use the ocean as an archive, and the creative processes it facilitates, to tell narratives of persistent Indigenous futures.

### *Conclusion*

Poets Jetñil-Kijiner, Kihleng, and Taesali all connect their writing to entangled ecologies that include genealogies of material creative and intellectual practices. Their patterns of circulation and kinships prioritize and activate currents of Indigenous women-centered knowledge to face present and future challenges at both local and oceanic scales. In their terms, baskets, skirts, and bark cloth are textual traditions with distinct and vast literary possibilities. Queen Lili‘uokalani’s quilt displays her creative capacity to adapt *to* rather than assimilate *under* particular oppressive colonial conditions. Similarly, the three poets’ collections highlight

adaptation and dynamism, as well as embodied experiences and histories of community and conversation. They ask us to read objects and their poetry within the contexts of their relational networks, their archival histories, and their textual and material attributes in order to demonstrate lineages of Indigenous women's diverse forms of intellectual production in the Pacific that extend far before colonial contact. They intervene in Euro/US-centric visions of the transpacific and its ecologies by activating Oceanic citational, circulatory, and archival relations, and assert literary and environmental histories of Oceania that place Indigenous women at the center. In these ways they insist on the sovereignty of Marshallese, Samoan, and Pohnpeian women, respectively, and leverage these sovereignties to protest exploitation throughout the Pacific. The ocean, for these authors, is a space of diverse literary genealogies, it is a space that generates activism, and it is a space of women's work.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I extend my focus on the ways that Indigenous protest literatures emphasize the active work of stories for creating oceanic kinships that amplify specific struggles. I analyze a *Hawai'i Review* special issue assembled by trans-Indigenous activists for West Papuan freedom. These activists frame the publication as a gathering space that evokes the ocean. By focusing on a specific activist movement within trans-Indigenous networks, this chapter shows how activists voice aspirations for reweaving Indigenous oceanic kinships with West Papua that have been severed by colonial occupation and how they express story-making as critical for creating and maintaining trans-Indigenous coalitions for West Papuan independence.



## Chapter 4

## Wansolwara: The Storied Work of Trans-Indigenous Decolonial Imagining With West Papua



Fig. 1-2. Photographs of the walls of Cenderawasih University, Jayapura, West Papua. Dec. 2013.

The white concrete walls of Cenderawasih University in Jayapura, West Papua, are topped with barbed wire and covered with graffiti, usually in a color scheme of red, blue, and black—the colors of West Papuan nationalism. In December 2013, returning to Papua for a visit after several years away, I saw the image of the Morning Star flag on the university’s walls—an overt symbol of Papuan independence. Also spray-painted on the wall was a man wearing an Organisasi Papua Merdeka hat (OPM, or Organization Papua Freedom), and the words “Refrendum” (sic.), “Free West Papua,” “PAPUA MERDEKA,” “FREEDOM,” and “NO” painted over “YES.” Through these words and images, advocacy for—and resistance against—Papuan independence from Indonesia overtly plays out across the walls.

Advocacy for Papuan independence also plays out across the Pacific. In June 2017, in Vancouver, Canada, I listened to Kanaka Maoli scholar and musician Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio sing in tribute to the late Teresia Teaiwa (I-Kiribati) at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association conference. He sang his song “One Salt Water” that includes the lines “West Papua you are not alone/ Wansolwara [One Salt Water].” By singing this song at Teaiwa’s tribute, Osorio acknowledged Teaiwa’s consistent support for West Papuan freedom from Indonesian occupation, and he used “One Salt Water” to frame the ocean as a space of Indigenous Pacific solidarity with Papua. Osorio’s lyrics also brought attention to the fact that, due to ongoing economic and political barriers, there were no West Papuans in the room to present their own song. Osorio centered their plight and their absence. In 2015, Osorio’s lyrics were published in a special issue of *Hawai‘i Review*, *Wansolwara: Voices for West Papua*, along with poems, lyrics, and art by other authors from across Oceania written in solidarity for Papuans after a hui (meeting) in Hawai‘i also called *Wansolwara*.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hosted by Ke Ka‘upu Hehi ‘Ale and Hawai‘i Bleeds Black and Red.

These two experiences set the literary and political scene for this chapter. West Papua, usually described as Indonesia's largest, most remote, least populated, eastern province, is, like the walls of Cenderawasih University, contested space.<sup>67</sup> Papuan activists use symbols like the Morning Star and the OPM acronym to make their activism visible. Like the pages of the *Wansolwara* journal issue, the Papuan independence movement gathers together the stories and voices of multiple Indigenous peoples across New Guinea, across Oceania, and in diaspora, to protest colonialism and imagine decolonization in diverse but interwoven ways. Scholars have examined West Papuan efforts to gain merdeka, or freedom, from Indonesia by drawing on approaches from political science, history, legal and human rights studies, and anthropology.<sup>68</sup> These frameworks have led to many productive analyses of the independence movement within West Papua. However, they fall short of unpacking the implications of the creative expressions and texts that shape aspirations for merdeka and drive support for Papuan freedom beyond Indonesia's borders. I therefore use the 2015 *Wansolwara* journal issue to approach the independence movement via the ways non-Papuan Indigenous artists and writers have taken up West Papua's quest for nationhood as part of wider Indigenous literary history of protest in Oceania, prioritizing story as a site for imagining Indigenous self-determination beyond the limits of colonial structures.

My analysis builds on readings that connect Papuan musical texts to gestures of Pan-Melanesian kinship and Black anticolonial movements worldwide. While scholars such as Camellia Webb-Gannon, Michael Webb, and Gabriel Solis have documented those

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<sup>67</sup> The Western side of New Guinea has been known under many names: Dutch New Guinea, Western New Guinea, Irian Jaya, and West Papua or Papua Barat, etc. West Papua, technically, is now divided into two Indonesian provinces—West Papua and Papua—but usually only government departments differentiate the two. When Papuans use “West Papua” or just “Papua” they refer to the entirety of New Guinea west of the border with PNG.

<sup>68</sup> For example, see Chris Ballard (1999), Peter King (2004), Eben Kirksey (2012), Jason MacLeod (2015), C.L.M. Penders (2002), John Saltford (2002), Julian Smythe (2013), and Camellia Webb-Gannon (2014).

connections—between West Papuan protest and Melanesian and Black Pacific solidarity—to some extent, wider trans-Indigenous, transoceanic aspects of the movement have not received this attention, despite those aspects accelerating in visibility since 2000, and especially since 2010.<sup>69</sup> The movement for merdeka has always been trans-Indigenous in Papua, for it gathers together distinct Indigenous groups across the island. But it is also trans-Indigenous across Oceania, and examining the storied protest in the poems from the journal issue makes those connections visible.

In this chapter I show how “Wansolwara” emerges as a concept of protest that prioritizes Papuan and Melanesian specificities as well as Papuan connections to other Indigenous peoples across Oceania. In the special issue, over twenty authors from across Oceania call for Indigenous collaborations and solidarity.<sup>70</sup> Critically, they reveal that Pacific Indigenous allies are an integral part of realizing a vision for a decolonized Papua. They construct Wansolwara as a framework for imagining a transformative Indigenous-centered, social justice focused, model of protest for and with West Papua that is intimately in conversation with expressions of Melanesian regionalism, like those described by Webb, Webb-Gannon, and Solis. However the journal also reveals how creative expressions of West Papuan protest, by West Papuans and by other Indigenous artists on behalf of Papua, retrieve Papua not just as part of Melanesia but as part of Oceania. I argue that looking at the creative expressions, or storied work, of Indigenous

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<sup>69</sup> Webb-Gannon and Webb have written thorough analyses of the connections between Melanesian protest music and expressions of Black solidarity, as has Smythe, and Solis examines how peoples in the Pacific have popularized certain tropes associated with music produced by Black artists for anti-colonial ends. Robbie Shilliam usefully explores how people in the Pacific define and deploy a concept of the “Black Pacific.” Likewise, Nico Slate’s work on Black Power beyond borders, and Etsuko Taketani’s work on African American imaginings of the Pacific are critical for thinking about ideas of Blackness circulating in the Pacific.

<sup>70</sup> In addition to Osorio, authors and artists included in the issue are Lee Kava, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, No‘u Revilla, Jamaica Osorio, Brandy Nālani McDougall, Craig Santos Perez, Lyz Soto, Bryan Kuwada, Rajiv Mohabir, Jocelyn Ng, Harrison Ines, Malia Derden, Sarah Daniels, Ry Rarai Aku Jr., Joy Enomoto, Bafinuc Ilai, Luseane Raass, Raymond Mulitalo, Culture Shocka, and two anonymous artists.

protest for and with West Papua reveals that the independence movement evokes desires for a Papuan nation-state but also participates in a more expansive push for decolonization across “one salt water.” Calling this protest “storied” emphasizes the ways that activists, both Papuan and non-Papuan, foreground stories in their varied artistic forms as sites for intervening in imperial narratives of Papua as well as tools for building relationships between Papua and the rest of Oceania.

The Tok Pisin term “Wansolwara” has explicitly Melanesian roots and offers new vocabulary for tracing Indigenous networks and relations in Oceania expressed through this storied protest. “Wansolwara” acquired its connections with West Papuan protest through two “Wansolwara Dances,” one in 2014 (held in Madang, PNG) and one in 2016 (held in Vanuatu).<sup>71</sup> These Dances were meetings that emphasized dance, song, and storytelling performances as ways to advocate for self-determination across the Pacific. They were Indigenous-centered events and participants gathered from throughout Oceania, including representatives from the Pacific Council of Churches, universities, the Port Vila Council of Chiefs, activist and human rights groups, and others. While participants came from many different parts of the Pacific, the first event emphasized Indigenous solidarity for West Papua and the latter for Vanuatu—all Melanesian homelands. As a term circulated and popularized through these Dances and the affiliated hui in Hawai‘i, Wansolwara became an extended metaphor for the work of imagining West Papuan freedom in Oceania as bound up in transoceanic struggles. That is, local acts of Papuan self-determination, or, as Tagi Qolouvaki puts it, “decolonial imagining,” connect to “one salt water” acts—a concept that grows from and invokes Albert Wendt’s and Epeli Hau‘ofa’s visions for a relational, Indigenous New Oceania, while foregrounding the storied

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<sup>71</sup> *Wansolwara* is also the name of the University of the South Pacific’s student newspaper (founded in 1996) centralized on its Fiji (Laucala) campus, which is well recognized for its critical political coverage.

work of protest at the core of imagining self-determination. At stake, then, is understanding Papuan self-determination beyond the nation-state, Papuan kinships beyond New Guinea's borders, and, ultimately, illuminating the ways that Indigenous decolonial imagining with West Papua dilates decolonial possibilities across the Pacific.

*The Bird of Paradise in Wansolwara: West Papua's Independence Movement in Oceania*

West Papuan protest consistently foregrounds a homeland grounded in diverse Indigenous traditions with many relationships beyond that land's soil. References to birds of paradise in the context of Papuan protest specifically connote the land of New Guinea: Papuans in both West Papua and Papua New Guinea describe the island's topography as resembling a bird of paradise. Before his assassination in 1984, Arnold Ap, Papua's most famous musician and activist, continually emphasized the land of New Guinea in songs of Papuan resistance. Ap also collected and popularized traditional Papuan songs from the region through his radio station, encouraging what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) might define as "resurgence," or practices and processes that re-center Indigenous systems for being in the world (17). In other words, he used the songs to encourage Papuan pride in their traditions and ways of living. The name of Ap's own band, Mambesak, means bird of paradise in the Biak language.

Colonization, however, divided the island, the bird. The border drawn down New Guinea's longitudinal center was established by the British in 1884; consequently severing West Papua politically, visually, linguistically, and discursively from Papua New Guinea, from Melanesia, and from the rest of Oceania. As Chris Ballard states, the "partition not only divided the land and the people of New Guinea, but also separated 'Asia' from the 'Pacific,' as objects for scholarly study, as regional 'desks' in Foreign Affairs departments, and as modes of discourse" (149). Yet

to imagine the island of New Guinea as a bird of paradise requires viewing the island as a whole, not an entity conforming to or split by colonial borders. It also compels imagining the island not as a static object, but one that is, active, mobile, and can fly.

The UN transferred Papua to freshly independent Indonesia in 1963 after a series of Indonesian military interventions in Papua beginning in 1961. The Dutch government, which had colonized Papua since 1824, planned to acquiesce to West Papuan desires for self-administration; however the US sought Indonesia's support against communism in the Asia-Pacific region and pressured the Dutch to allow Indonesian control of Papua. The Dutch agreed, on the condition that Papuans would vote whether to integrate into Indonesia or become autonomous. In 1969, 1025 Papuan men "voted" in a referendum called the "Act of Free Choice," which was organized by the Indonesian military and held at gunpoint. The coerced result was in favor of becoming part of Indonesia. At gunpoint, then, Indonesia ignored Papuan campaigns to be recognized as an independent nation and began administering Papua as a settler state, extracting Papuan resources, implementing strategies to replace the Indigenous population, restricting foreign media access, and perpetuating other oppressive colonial policies, even after Indonesia granted Papua "special autonomy" status in 2001.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout this occupation, however, Papuans have asserted their desires for "merdeka." A Malay word, merdeka translates broadly as "freedom," but, as Webb-Gannon points out, nationalists invoked it so often across the Malay Archipelago in the twentieth century that it acquired explicit links to political independence ("Merdeka" 355). Webb-Gannon sees merdeka

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<sup>72</sup> For more comprehensive documentation and analyses of the events that led to Indonesia's control of West Papua, see C.L.M. Penders's *The West New Guinea Debacle* (2002), or John Saltford's *The United Nations and the Indonesian Takeover of West Papua, 1962-1969: The Anatomy of Betrayal* (2002). In late 2001, Indonesia did grant Papua "special autonomy" status, but many of the clauses defining this autonomy have yet to be enacted and have done little to slow exploitation of Papua's resources and peoples. Peter King's *West Papua & Indonesia Since Suharto: Independence, Autonomy, or Chaos?* (2004), is also useful for understanding West Papua's history with Indonesia post-1998.

in the West Papuan context as expressing an explicit desire for political independence, but she also reads it as bearing additional associations such as “concepts of positive peace and peace with justice” (356). For civil resistance scholar Jason Macleod, merdeka is “visions of freedom encapsulated in a thick description of self-determination” (18). In Macleod’s reading, merdeka no longer solely refers to an Indonesian structure of nationalism even as it is “a powerful, unifying and transformational ideology that overcomes class and tribal affiliations [in Papua]” (33, 88).<sup>73</sup> In this way, merdeka might also be defined in the way that Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou) defines self-determination as “a goal of social justice which...necessarily involves the process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing, and of mobilization, as peoples” (*Decolonizing* 116). Therefore, interpreting Papuan expressions of and aspirations for sovereignty as only legible through forms such as the nation-state or through the modes of recognition offered by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) constrains their possibilities and decenters the more complex articulations of Indigenous relationships and connections to the land at the heart of Papuan protest. The protest movement continually works not only for self-determined sovereignty but also to reweave ties with Melanesia and Oceania. Activists do certainly articulate becoming a nation-state as a goal, but, while they have petitioned the UN for decolonization, these actions and their limited success speak to what Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) describes when he argues that seeking “recognition” too often means accommodating or assimilating into the settler state for Indigenous peoples (3).

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<sup>73</sup> MacLeod breaks down this definition of merdeka even further to include the following meanings: “The struggle for an independent and sovereign political state” (89); visions of “a more peaceful and just world,” which he says are sometimes unrealistic (90); as “a Papuan liberation theology,” tied to the church (91); as “an *adat*[tradition]-led restoration and recovery of local traditions, indigenous forms of governance and identity,” including letting people in different areas do things in their own way (92); as access to “education and health service and full and fair participation in the economy” (92); “a movement to restore human dignity” (92); and “self-reliance” (92).



Taking up a vision of the island as a whole, contemporary West Papuan and Niu Gini musicians such as Ronny Kareni, the Lani Singers, the Black Sistaz, George Telek, and Airileke Ingram, define merdeka as more than an abstract ideal and do not limit aspirations of merdeka to the colonially defined geography of Papua. They draw from a heritage of Papuan protest music by those including Ap and the Black Brothers as they deploy the slogan “merdeka,” imagery of the land, the Morning Star, and birds of paradise to construct diverse strategies of Papuan resistance, resurgence, and trans-Indigenous relations. Webb and Webb-Gannon identify the Morning Star and references to the land and birds of paradise as tropes common in Papuan independence songs, calling them “flagging” and “mapping” (69). They define these tropes further, as they appear in music videos: “Lyrical mapping takes one of two forms: either a listing of place-names, usually countries but sometimes regions, or a ‘from-to’ contrasting, citing either cities or landscape features that are widely separated...Flagging involves the appearance in the video visual frame of the various national flags of Melanesian countries or nations” (69). We see these tropes at work, for example, in 2016 when Australian-PNG artist Arileke Ingram (Gabba-Gabba, PNG) and Benny Wenda (Lani, West Papua) co-wrote the song “Sorong Samarai” (2016) and produced it as a collaborative effort between multiple Papuan and Niu Gini artists.<sup>74</sup> In its first image the camera zooms in on a map of New Guinea, and viewers see the words “separated only by a colonial border.” Next, the video engages in “mapping” as it displays the words, “from Sorong in West Papua to Samarai in Papua New Guinea. We are one people.” The border on the map then dissolves and instead of West Papua written on one half and Papua New Guinea on the other, we see one word, “Papua,” crossing both halves, coupled with the caption “One people, one soul, one destiny.” This wording may appear at first to be a simplistic and homogenizing

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<sup>74</sup> The song also features Kareni, reggae duo Twin Tribes (PNG), and other musical artists from West Papua and PNG.

message. But, read in context, it speaks against Indonesia's state language motto: "Satu orang, satu Negara, satu bahasa, semua Indonesia": One people, one nation, one language, all called Indonesia. The Indonesian motto erases Papuan presence within Indonesia. But, by reimagining the slogan in the context of "Sorong Samarai," these artists re-center it in Papua—a Papua that includes both halves of New Guinea, and whose "soul" is more capacious than "nation," united by "destiny," rather than language. "Sorong" is a town near what is often called the "Bird's Head" of Papua. "Samarai" is a town on the opposite end of the bird, near the tail.

Exiled Papuan activist Wenda first used the term "Sorong Samarai" to express Papuan protest and independence in an address to the United Nations in 1997. These references, with their explicit nationalist and protest connotations, assert a vision of Papua as one interconnected island and not as split in two or more pieces, divided by borders drawn by imperial maps. While there are over 320 distinct Indigenous groups in Papua, contemporary activists from West Papua predominantly articulate a vision of united Papua, "tanah Papua" (land of Papua), rooting their claims for self-determination and sovereignty in the idea that, together, many different Indigenous tribes make up the body of Papua through shared connections to the land.

I describe the music video because it is an exemplar of contemporary Papuan protest art and it comes from an activist context that the *Wansolwara: Voices for West Papua* poems, written by non-Papuan allies but including anonymous West Papuan-created visual art, engage with extensively. In the *Wansolwara* issue, the writers and editors prioritize the land of Papua, and include moments of "flagging" and "mapping," connecting the issue and its poems to the same creative trajectory of protest from which "Sorong Samarai" originates. But the authors also expand the desire for reunification to include hope that ties between Papua and Oceania can be restored. The writers make it clear that in order for this to happen, allies must engage in

particular kinds of work. At the end of the introduction to *Wansolwara*, the contributors state:

“We hope that in entering this collection, more will be moved to education, to solidarity, to action. We invite you to join us” (2). Through this hope, the contributors indicate that the connections between Papua and the rest of Oceania cannot be passive, and require more than the fact that the ocean touches all their islands. Reincorporating the land of Papua back into Oceania requires that these connections be actively maintained and created, and the hui and journal issue themselves are two ways of engaging in that action. Almost all the contributors to this issue are Indigenous to Oceania, but the invitation at the end of the introduction is not only, even if it is primarily, to Indigenous peoples. However, the introduction makes it clear that the contributors center Indigenous experiences and voices—most importantly, the land of Papua—within *Wansolwara*. Benedict Anderson argued that print publications, circulating and standardizing language into Bahasa Indonesia, were pivotal for creating the “imagined community” that led to Indonesia’s merdeka and formation as a nation-state. The imagined community of merdeka represented in the *Wansolwara* journal issue, however, expands merdeka to look beyond a nation-state future to a “one salt water” one.

### *Pages of Wansolwara*

The contributors to *Wansolwara: Voices for West Papua*, like Papuan activists, emphasize Indigenous resurgence and a Papuan nation-state as a pathway to living freely in their homeland. At the same time, they imagine and celebrate connected Indigenousness through the capacious possibilities of story in its diverse forms that they frame as essential to enacting merdeka. The journal records the range of creative offerings made at the April 21, 2015 hui: from poetry, to songs, to visual art from contributors across Oceania. Many of the artists reflect the hui’s

collaborative, embodied form in their creations, by publishing co-authored pieces and directing their poems to be spoken or sung in multiple voices.

The hui, like the organizers of the 2014 and 2016 Wansolwara Dances (including Teaiwa and Osorio), emphasized the storied, collective nature of Wansolwara. While called “dances,” the Wansolwara Dances both stressed what the organizers labeled as “story” (“Remember” 2014, 1). Before each event, organizers wrote up a “short story” during their planning meetings in Fiji to describe what they hoped the gathering might achieve. The first of these stories, “The Nadave Short Story: Remember, Protest and Proclaim,” was posted on the open publishing platform *Scribd* by Aisake Casimira (Fiji), ecumenical director of the Pacific Conference of Churches (2014). The second story, “Enough is Enough: Affirmation, Celebration, Self-Determination” was posted on *Imi Pono*, a Hawai‘i-based website for foregrounding Kanaka Maoli rights as well as global Indigenous issues (2015). The stories are collaboratively written, each only gesturing to a wide range of contributors in “Appreciations” at the end. They deliberately decenter individual authorship for the story as a whole and use plural pronouns throughout, even as they extensively footnote contributors responsible for specific ideas. While participants in the Dances came from across Oceania, they all gathered to show their support for Melanesia. At the same time, the participants embrace a “one salt water” perspective, as the first short story states, “we share the one dream for our Ocean, free to be self-determining” (“Remember” 1). By foregrounding specific lands but repeatedly invoking “our [collective] Ocean,” the participants suggest that the situations of those lands are magnified examples of decolonial desires throughout Wansolwara.

Wansolwara, in these descriptions, is not abstract. The collaborators in the Dances define it as follows:

One people, One Sea. The ocean that connects us as people of the Wansolwara. It is sacred because it contains the memory of our grandparents and tells us the story about ourselves and who we are as a people.... It is not the idea of the single that is the object of our wonder in our Wansolwara. What is remarkable and extraordinary is the multiplicity of the many forms... We will remember the un-free among us, those at the Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern corners of our Wansolwara and with their permission, we will stand with them on their grandparents' ground to cry freedom. ("Remember" 1-2)

In this articulation, Wansolwara holds and tells of memory and heritage. It depicts an ocean that draws on genealogies of stories for power and knowledge in order to address oppression in all directions of the ocean. It is not about "the single," but it *is* about particulars and how they come together. It is about protest, it is political; it emphasizes multiplicity; it is relationships that foreground consent, respect, and dignity; and it is collaborative, community advocacy and responsibility for freedom. The writers of both the Dance short stories explicitly establish Wansolwara as a site of storytelling or narrative in order to advocate for resurgent visions of Indigenous-centered nationhood and futures, which expand and engage with visions of Melanesian solidarity expressed through songs such as "Sorong Samarai." In the first short story they write, "We are Wansolwara. We live our lives as narrative quests and it is this that defines us. We can understand or make sense of our individual stories only by coming to terms with the stories in which we find ourselves in and are a part" ("Remember" 2). In this passage, oceanic contexts of story are necessary for understanding personal and local stories, and necessary for achieving a decolonial future for West Papua.

Wansolwara's storied practices express a resistance politics built on prioritizing Indigenous systems for being in the world—and, for the writers of these “stories,” the ocean encompasses those systems. This framework of the ocean corresponds with an expansive version of Daniel Heath Justice's understanding of Indigenous “nationhood” as “more than simple political independence or the exercise of a distinctive cultural identity; it is also an understanding of a common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web of kinship rights *and* responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (*Our Fire* 24). Resurgence and nationhood defined through kinship, then, might be better terms than nationalism to describe Indigenous activists' aspirations for Papua's merdeka.

The story preceding the 2016 Wansolwara Dance makes the political dimensions of these storied aspirations—those that resist imperial narratives and create hopeful Indigenous futures—even more clear. The writers assert that the emphasis on “one salt water” is “rooted in liberation history,” particularly the history of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement because it “paved new pathways for cross-Oceanic solidarity bridging islands and impacted peoples together” (“Enough” 2). The authors of “Enough is Enough” imply that we might look at Wansolwara as one of NFIP's offspring, and they finish by affirming the Dance's advocacy for “a celebration of self-determination, a protest against the ‘empire's’ single truth narrative of us, and an affirmation of who we are as Wansolwara” (5). While both NFIP and Wansolwara are overtly political initiatives, the activism that shapes Wansolwara, for these authors, is specifically constructed by storied, textual, and artistic expression. The emphasis on story and artistic work at the center of imagining Wansolwara, and its links to NFIP, are also important because non-artistic, intergovernmental entities designed to politically foster connections

between Indigenous Oceanic peoples—such as the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), formed in 1986—have not always been sympathetic or consistent in their approaches to West Papua, though they have done much other work within the region. The Wansolwara dance contributors, and, I argue, the *Wansolwara* journal authors, do not expect to find hopeful Indigenous futures within political structures based on those created or defined by imperial and capitalist powers.

The term Wansolwara might appear to privilege the ocean over land, but the Dance short stories and the special journal issue all describe the ocean as composed of both land and water spaces. While water connects and creates relationships, references to particular landed spaces prevent the specificities of Papua's context from being washed out. The cover and introduction to the *Wansolwara* issue first prioritize the land of Papua by describing the destructive effects of the Grasberg/Freeport-McMoRan mine located in the Tembagapura district. The dominant image, appearing on the cover and at the end of the issue, is a red block print by Joy Enomoto (Kanaka Maoli) and Bafinuc Ilai (Niu Gini) called *West Papua Merdeka!*, representing “the women of West Papua being severed from their land and the land itself being desecrated by the Grasberg Mine” (2). The issue uses this image to immediately ground its contents in a highly specific aspect of Papua's fight for merdeka—resisting resource extraction, particularly resource extraction through Freeport/Grasberg. The introduction connects the mine's environmental and social effects to “silence” from those who, in the “ ‘modern world’ ... continu[e] to blithely benefit from the bits of copper and gold essential to the constructing of our electronic devices and the building of our cities” (6). This sentence implies that literal pieces of Papua's land are vital for maintaining modernity elsewhere. By using the plural pronoun “our,” the contributors name themselves and readers as complicit in the ongoing destruction of Papua's land and

peoples. At the same time, both the hui and the issue represent acts of “uniting across Oceania to lament and rage against this genocide, connecting our different communities’ struggles for sovereignty and demilitarization, standing with Papua across our ‘wansolwara,’ our one salt water, with furious aloha” (6). “Uniting” for Papua in this way means acknowledging complicity and connectedness as well as the particular effects of colonialism on Papuan soil.

By starting with the land, the introduction suggests that the land is integral to Wansolwara and its activism. But the contributors are also careful to articulate their own positions as well: as non-Papuans and as members of other Indigenous communities connected to Papua through relationships with Oceania. They recognize that other Indigenous communities might use their shared histories of colonization to mobilize, leveraging Oceanic connections, leading to witness, dialogue, and “lament”: a “furious aloha” that calls for collaborative expression and action that goes beyond the hui and the issue’s pages (6). It models a framework for collaborative decolonial activism in the Pacific that depends on relationships between Indigenous Oceanic communities while prioritizing West Papua’s merdeka.

### *Collaborative Wansolwara, Collaborative Merdeka*

The issue, like the hui it grew from, foregrounds collaborative protest and action as part of the work, including textual work, of achieving merdeka. The authors use poems as sites for theorizing collaboration and exploring resurgent Indigenous possibilities that are underpinned by intimate solidarities. The special issue’s first poem perhaps foregrounds collaborative protest the most saliently, requiring the audience to participate in its performance, and, as a result, participate in its act of protest. Written by Lee Kava (Hafekasi/ Tongan), and Tara (Tarcisius) Kabutaulaka (Solomon Islands), the poem “rorongo/ fanongo mai” visually and structurally



commands participation. A line at the beginning instructs, “*italics read by Lee*, regular text read by Tarcisius, **bold text read together**” (8).<sup>75</sup> The title signals the genre of the poem, a kava chant, and instructs people to listen. This instruction is reinforced in the first verse, where the title is repeated several times, and “listen!” is added in English, repeated three times, in Kava’s voice, then Kabutaulaka’s, then in the voices of everyone present (8). The audience must listen to the poem but also take part in select moments when their voices can add to it. These formal expectations construct a model of a “one salt water” coalition and a protest framework that allows different voices to be heard at different times, while making opportunities to come together and emphasize and amplify when required.

For the speakers of “rorongo/ fanongo mai,” kava, as a drink and as ceremony, is an embodied act of “story” and protest. In turn, the speakers offer their definitions:

**we share kava**

*as story*

as body

*as blood*

as memory

**as resistance...** (8)

Bookended by the collective voice, this verse’s layout suggests that the words that fall in between the collectively voiced lines (marked in bold) are part of both kava and resistance. That is, kava is story, body, blood, and memory, and these elements also compose resistance. By offering kava, then, the speakers imply that they also give the recipients storied, embodied acts of shared resistance. After telling the story of the kava plant in both Tongan and English, they

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<sup>75</sup> I keep the original italics and bold font throughout my analyses of the poems.

affirm their place in the “*sea of islands*” (9-10). Kava and Kabutaulaka write, “we are not just Melanesia, *Polynesia*, Micronesia,/ *we are sister*, brother, *auntie*, uncle, **ancestor**,/ *and as connected Islanders/ we are stories of resistance*” (9). In these lines, the speakers affirm shared Pacific island kinship, quoting Hau‘ofa and referring to his vision of the New Oceania as defined and maintained by ongoing relationships between that “sea of islands.” Only after establishing these ties to the connected Oceania, which supersedes Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, do the speakers then say, “*this story/ this bilo [cup]/ this kava/ is for the resistance in West Papua/ so listen carefully*” (10). By telling the very specific, localized kava story first, then establishing the speakers’ connections to Oceania, the writers localize their poem’s—and the speakers’—positions as allies but outsiders in relation to the West Papuan resistance, while also suggesting that the participatory work of “story” and of exchanging kava is part of maintaining kinships within the sea of islands. They suggest that maintaining those kinships can be resistance itself.

The speakers’ repeated exhortations to listen, receive, see, and take part through embodied acts reinforce bonds between story and resistance throughout the connected Oceania. “**Papua Merdeka**// *this is what we serve—/ when you receive kava,*” they say near the middle of the poem (10). They suggest that merdeka can be given through kava and through story. To receive merdeka/ freedom requires that the audience listen and witness, because “*our stories make visible/ our Oceania*” (10). Stories, then, are integral not only to resistance in Oceania but also for building the relationships that create Oceania. This is because “our stories weave relationship/ where border lines are drawn” (11). Weaving can create something new or repair something that was damaged. Merdeka, in this poem, depends not only on witness, through listening and seeing, but through actively constructing and repairing relationships across borders. The speakers use references to blood and land to also emphasize these relationships, writing,

“*our connection to one another/ was strained through blood/ and land*” (11). The references to blood conjure up images of violence, but also of shared familial ties. For the speakers, making visible shared histories of colonial violence in Oceania as well as familial or kinship ties is part of the repair work, the weaving work, the speakers envision for restoring their connections and achieving merdeka. As they assert at the end of the poem, they must not only listen to those stories but also “*tell*” them (12). Making visible “one salt water” requires *telling* and not merely seeing or hearing of West Papua’s experiences and responding with silence. The hui and the special issue both, then, become ways to tell these stories.

Moreover, the speakers make visible shared Indigenous and Black (Melanesian) histories through their telling. Near the end of the poem, the speakers return to themes of shared experience, saying “we bleed /black and red/ **we are connected, wansolwara!**” (12). The shared experiences include violence as well as kinship through Indigeneity and shared Blackness, as implied by the “we bleed black and red” line. This line references an Indigenous-centered activist campaign of the same name; one that Teresia Teaiwa herself links to the Wansolwara movement, and whose slogan appears several times in the *Wansolwara issue* (Anderson n.p.).<sup>76</sup> References to both “Redness” and Blackness remind us that it is imperative that we do not erase “Melanesianism,” as Kabutaulaka calls it elsewhere, from readings of protest texts for and with West Papua (“Re-Presenting Melanesia” 111). Erasing Melanesianism can reinforce how, as Stephanie Lawson notes, narratives of Oceania often “privilege ‘Polynesian-ness’” and obscure anti-Melanesian racism in the region (3). Lawson and Kabutaulaka both show how Europeans constructed Melanesia in an explicitly racialized way against their construct of Polynesia.

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<sup>76</sup> The “We Bleed Black and Red” campaign originated in Fiji and is closely tied to the Free West Papua movement. Other movements linked to Wansolwara include “Youngsolwara,” which refers to youth-focused initiatives of “Wansolwara,” and Oceania Interrupted, a group of Māori and Pasifika women dedicated to spurring collective action in the Pacific.

Activist poems and narratives—or tok stori (conversation), in Kabutaulaka’s words—like this poem, however, also deploy the construct as a marker of kinship and pride (127).

References to “Black” alongside “Red” are critical here, because, as scholars such as Shilliam have shown, Oceanic Indigenous peoples are often invisible in the definition of “Black Pacific,” especially through the eyes of US scholars, even while Oceanic Indigenous peoples have taken up references to Blackness in order to engage in “part of a global infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity” (10).

The speakers do not mention “Wansolwara” until almost at the end of the poem, coinciding with the emphasis on shared Indigeneity and prioritized Blackness. The very last line is reserved for “Papua Merdeka!” (12). At the end of this poem, which so heavily depends on collaborative participation and creation, “Wansolwara” and the call for Papua’s merdeka occur in collectively voiced lines, making visible *and* audible collaborative stories and collaborative protest. In this way the speakers set up Wansolwara as a collaborative resistance framework built through relationships and solidarities made possible through the storied space of the ocean. By finishing with “Papua Merdeka!” the speakers remind participants whose story they amplify in that moment.

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Frequently, in this special issue, the solidarities underpinning such collaboration are expressed as forms of intimacy. While solidarity can simply suggest people or groups coming together with a shared goal or common interest, defining solidarity as an intimate act signals a state of being together that depends explicitly on relationship and attachment, both physical and emotional, and connotes confidence built on trust, accompanied by responsibilities. I especially read this form of solidarity in the poem “A Love Letter for West Papua,” written by Kanaka

Maoli writers and scholars No‘u Revilla and Jamaica Osorio, which works to open up a Kanaka Maoli-Papuan dialogue with West Papua focused on establishing the kind of emotional affinity that leads to intimacy.

The form of the poem itself—a love letter, perhaps spoken in multiple voices—suggests a desire to build intimacy between the speakers and receivers. The speakers figure the addressee of the letter, Papua, as a literal bird of paradise, whose body has been “split in/ half Papua, half Papua” (13). “I met you with your scars,” the poem begins, as the speakers acknowledge the physical effects of colonial and capitalist violence and borders on the land, the body of the bird of Papua (13). The effects are not just physical. The speakers lament that colonialism has interfered with the relationships Papua could have with others in Oceania. They say that they “know so little of [its] body,” wanting to know more of Papua’s “spine, terrain, lifelines,” and describing the land as a living and agential being (13). In effect, the speakers wonder how they can achieve intimacy between themselves and Papua when limited information about Papua is available beyond its borders.

As a love letter, the poem indicates that it is one half of a potential dialogue or exchange of messages. “If I hold you close, will I hear machetes on/ your neck Or drums?” the speakers ask (13). Though the phrasing indicates uncertainty, the possibility that they will hear drums suggests that the speakers hope to open a dialogue with Papua through their poem. Drums across New Guinea are mediums for communicating and creating relationships between people. Read in this context, the poem’s drums indicate hope for trans-Indigenous communication and knowledge exchange. Still, Revilla and Osorio’s poem acknowledges the hurdles placed in the way of the exchange, hurdles echoed in the uneven rhythm of the poem. Some of the poem’s strongest and most regular stresses occur in the stanza that lists “acts of free choice” involved in

the US's colonization of Hawai'i: the 1887 Bayonet Constitution and the 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i (13). By listing these moments of occupation and overthrow as "acts of free choice" Revilla and Osorio link them to Papua's own "act of free choice," in which the referendum determining Papua's fate was conducted at gunpoint.

But the speakers in this "love letter" do not want these "acts of free choice," the "pieces we have in common" (colonial violence and coercion) to be the only reasons for intimacy and basis for dialogue between their communities (13). They want to "push past the language of solidarity," towards more embodied, intimate acts as they know that language alone is not enough when it comes to maintaining sovereignty (13). As evidence, the speakers note the 21,000 Kanaka Maoli signatures expressing solidarity with Queen Lili'uokalani and opposing the annexation of Hawai'i in 1893. The international community subsequently ignored this act of solidarity. While the speakers locate themselves as witnesses to Papua's trauma and as peoples who have persisted through related violence, they ask for a relationship that is more intimate than a connection created by shared experiences. The speakers describe "touching" as "a ceremony of resistance" that will "keep the pit from growing" between Papua's two halves and between Papua and the speakers (13). The touching described—holding hands, kissing where "your bilum [net bag] sits" at the back of the neck—is the kind we associate with people being in a consensual, loving relationship. As a love letter, then, this poem indicates the speaker's desire to connect intimately, even if the outcome is uncertain.

What the speaker or speakers do know and define is what they hope for Papua: "to be in charge of loving itself" (14). I read this line as the poem's own definition of self-determination, made possible through embodied acts of solidarity. This poem, then, is an offer of intimate collaboration, and a gesture of mutual empowerment. In this way, "A Love Letter for West

Papua” firmly situates Papua’s struggles for self-determination within Oceania’s “one salt water” while not diminishing local specificities or efforts. It highlights the absence of consent in colonially imposed “acts of free choice” and models acts that instead uses dialogue, or exchanges of story, to negotiate Indigenous-centered relationships. From one settler colony (Hawai‘i) to another (Papua), the speakers reach out. Read as part of the *Wansolwara* special issue, then, both “rorongo/fanongo mai” and “A Love Letter” represent different ways of enacting and extending visions of a collaborative, intimate Wansolwara.

*Documenting Military and Capitalist Violence & Complicity in “One Salt Water”*

In the section above I suggest that Osorio and Revilla’s “Love Letter” represents solidarity not as passive but as an active form of intimacy, and show how “rorongo/fanongo mai” models forms of ongoing storied collaboration that can lead to such relationships. Other poems in the journal likewise gesture toward intimacy with West Papua, and suggest that achieving this kind of solidarity also involves bringing knowledge of the human costs of colonialism into closer proximity with themselves and their audience. They, therefore, suggest that intimate acts of Wansolwara activism necessitate conveying historical, statistical, and political information about Papua to non-Papuans, documenting atrocities, and framing the poem’s speakers as witnesses. The hui, in the first place, took on the responsibility of raising awareness about Papua and its efforts towards freedom. Two poems in particular, “Nine Percent” by Lyz Soto and Bryan Kuwada (Kanakanaka Maoli) (18-20), and “Pacific Tongues for West Papua” by Pacific Tongues youth poets Jocelyn Ng, Harrison Ines, Malia Derden, and Sarah Daniels (22-25), engage in what

might be called documentary poetics in order to fulfill this responsibility.<sup>77</sup> Documentary poetics have, of course, long been a part of protest poetry.<sup>78</sup> In the case of “Nine Percent” and “Pacific Tongues,” I read a documentary poetics that seeks to record and report significant facts and communicate them in ways that advocate for action and change. The authors of “Nine Percent” construct their poem through statistics and historical, geographic, and astronomical details, and those of “Pacific Tongues for West Papua” focus on the ways military recruiters target Indigenous youth.

Collectively, they use these details to create an account of the effects of settler-colonialism in West Papua and also document their own Hawai‘i-based connections, complicity, and parallels regarding those effects. The Indonesian government obstructs media access to Papua, suppressing information such as that contained in these poems. These poetic documentary acts, then, participate in an act of resistance by disseminating statistics and relaying information despite the ban. The poets curate facts and figures and histories for readers, not so much to cultivate objectivity, but in ways that highlight how subjective, limited, and fragmented “official” narratives about Papua can be. They also show that the speakers are aware of their own distance from Papua and of issues of mediating those facts and figures. Their communal acts of witness and reportage create spaces for non-Papuan readers to gain knowledge, but also to examine their own roles in Papua’s circumstances. In this way, the two poems show how the peoples and the land of Papua are not isolated from their primarily Hawaiian audience’s world,

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<sup>77</sup> Pacific Tongues is a non-profit organization based in Hawai‘i, designed to foster “an active artistic Oceanic community of writers, spoken word performers, leaders, educators, and students of all ages.” Lyz Soto is also the executive director and cofounder (*Pacific Tongues*, “About”).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Muriel Rukeyser’s “The Book of the Dead” (1938), which effectively documents the effects of silicosis on miners in West Virginia.



and, therefore, that knowing about Papua and about Papuan connections to their own contemporary and historical moment is a collective responsibility.

In their poem “Nine Percent,” Soto and Kuwada evoke this collective responsibility by listing significant numbers and statistics at the beginning and end of their poem. The poem begins:

In 2013, the American mining company Freeport McMoRan made  
4,346,000,000 dollars from the Grasberg mine in West Papua, which produced  
885 million pounds of copper and 1.1 million ounces of gold for the 299 million  
computers, 179 million tablets, and 284 million smart phones that we bought  
that year. (2015, 18)

This section of the poem introduces a context that appears distant from most readers’ lives since most of them probably are not familiar with the Freeport-McMoRan company. The mine, opened and largely owned by Arizona-based Freeport-McMoRan since 1973, is the world’s largest gold mine and the second largest copper mine. It is located within a national park, and, in 2017, the Indonesian government became the primary shareholder. Readers might be tempted to skim over the set of numbers beginning “Nine Percent.” But the lines then translate the gold and copper into numbers of objects that might indeed be intimate parts of their readers’ lives: computers, tablets, and smart phones.<sup>79</sup> The other main list of numbers and statistics comes at the end of the poem, and continues to bring those numbers into closer and closer proximity with readers’ lives. First they tell readers that 500,000 Papuans have died during Papua’s occupation. Then:

**That’s 500,000 dead in 50 years.**

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<sup>79</sup> I do not think it is coincidental that all these objects are electronic and used to connect to the internet. See Fijian scholars Jason Titifanue, Jope Tarai, Romitesh Kant, and Glen Finau for more on social media and West Papuan protest.

That's 10,000 deaths per year.

That's 27.39 deaths per day.

That's 1.14 deaths per hour.

9% of a person died while you listened to this poem

What is the price of a Papuan life? (20)

Readers must wait right until the second to last line of the poem to understand what the “Nine Percent” in the title refers to. By this time, the speakers have moved from connecting their numerical documentary of settler colonialism and resource extraction to readers’ electronics to readers’ very acts of reading (or listening to) the poem itself: they communicate death through the minutes or seconds the audience spends with the poem, compelling the audience to not only think about the monetary value of a Papuan life but also the temporal value.

In “Pacific Tongues for West Papua,” the speakers advocate for collective accountability by connecting US military recruitment of youth from other Pacific nations to the deaths of Papuans, due to the ways that the US government has supported the Indonesian military. The speakers make these connections not so much through statistics but through strategic use of military-speak. They point out that they did not learn about Papua in school. Instead, military recruiters visited to create a “brown military,” pitting Indigenous peoples against each other, and taxing them to fund wars (22). Military discourse interferes with the fact that the speakers see themselves and Papuans as “children” of the same ocean (24). “Disassemble sight... Polish clean,” the speakers say repeatedly, chant-like or as if they are marching (23). Here, they use the language of firearms use and maintenance to describe how the militarization of the Pacific “disassemble[s] sight” or blinds other Indigenous populations from Papua’s plight and erases Papuan stories through the repetition of its own narratives of war and control. The speakers’

associations between military recruitment of their lives into projects that perpetuate genocide in Papua grow in force towards the end of their poem:

**load**

mother earth mined for her heart

**lock.**

heart into the chamber of a missile

**safety off**

Watch missile placed into hands of brown body

Watch brother shoot brother

Watch brown bodies break like boulders

**Reload. Repeat**

watch sons shot into soil... (24)

The speakers of this poem place readers in a position of holding the firearm. They do not allow their readers to avoid complicity, all the while emphasizing kinship ties between the shooters and the shot by referring to them as “brother” and “sons.” In this way, the youth poets depict a complex and violent entanglement between Hawai‘i and Papua, built on the recruited lives of Indigenous youth and reinforced through the taxes that fund that recruitment and simultaneously keep Indigenous eyes from seeing each other across the ocean.

Likewise, the middle sections of “Nine Percent” show how the worlds of Papua and Hawai‘i converge, focusing on the Hawaiian audience’s connections to Papuan resources in their electronics, jewelry, and more. Moreover, they refer to Hawaiian landscapes and stars, showing how the morning star, Venus or Hōkūloa, has an orienting role in Kanaka Maoli geography and cosmology just as it does in Papua. The speaker explicitly focuses on her/his position in relation

to the stars. S/he says: “When I leave my house/ I put the morning star to my back” (18).

S/he does not put the star to her back in order to ignore it, but in order to “lea[n] down to work in [its] light” (18). The speaker then uses this position to connect the labor of the poet, dependent on the resources of Papua and bent under the light of the same stars, with different names, to the labor of Papuans in the mine. For the speaker of this poem, the morning star, “Hōkūloa,” “comes from the east...but its eyes too look to the west” (18). Because the poet follows the movements of this star s/he is able to witness Papuan deaths to which the poem refers.

The speaker also emphasizes how exploitative labor practices, in Hawai‘i and Papua, and anti-Blackness attitudes that persist across the Pacific obscure and reduce the value of those deaths. They are:

still obstructed by black of night

justify price with convenience

obstructed by black in the mines

at \$1.50 and a death every hour

obstructed by black in the ledger

drawing out cartographic tracks

of our progress

obstructed by black on the map

constructed by the toll of our lives

obstructed by they are black

and their lives are cheap

(19)

The speaker repeats “obstructed” and “black” in every black line on the left side of this section, juxtaposed against the red type on the right side of the page. Essentially, the numbers recorded in

an accounting ledger, or the borders drawn on a map, are all created through Blackness (black ink in the ledger, black lines on a map), at the same time as consumers devalue Black lives. “Progress” and “convenience” have value here, while Black lives are confined, literally, to repeated obstruction. Both “Nine Percent” and “Pacific Tongues,” in the ways that they foreground how money is valued more than Black and Brown lives, show how capitalism depends on racist policies and erasures. Capitalism and the military force destructive encounters between Indigenous peoples, as we see in “Pacific Tongues” when Kanaka Maoli youth fight in wars instigated by the US and in both poems where speakers use the resources extracted violently from Papua in their daily lives. These kinds of global connections perpetuate using, devaluing, and dispensing of Indigenous peoples.

The authors do also turn their eyes to global connections that they depict as more hopeful, and these connections depend on the kind of witness they try to enact through their poems. They emphasize Blackness and Redness, foregrounding Black Indigeneity, and therefore also referencing Black Power and Red Power movements and the global human rights concerns embedded in them.<sup>80</sup> In “Pacific Tongues,” the poem ends by addressing a global audience:

Dear world,  
 we are here today in the Pacific to make a difference  
 We make a difference by giving voice to the silenced  
 to give voice  
 we wrote this poem  
 to write this poem  
 we first learned

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<sup>80</sup> See sources such as Shilliam and Slate who respectively delineate Pacific and global contours of Black Power, and histories of Red Power and how it is taken up internationally by those such as Bradley G. Shreve.

how to listen. (25)

This ending mirrors the sentence structure of the beginning of the poem, which reads:

They came to the pacific to make money  
 they make money by raping the land  
 to rape the land they kill the people  
 To kill a person you need a gun (22)

The sentences at both the beginning and end depend on a logical structure that traces how one action leads to or depends on another. At first, this logic shows how making money in the Pacific is connected to the killing of Indigenous peoples and resource extraction. But the ending of the poem portrays a logical structure of witness through its syntax. The speakers want to “make a difference,” and, in their perspective, this means “giving voice.” Their poem is one way to give voice, but in order to write it they “first learned/ how to listen” (25). Listening, then, for these speakers, like in “rorongo/ fanongo mai,” lies at the core of witness but does not correspond to making a difference unless the listeners then create a platform for “the silenced” to be heard.

What I read at the end of “Pacific Tongues,” then, is a refusal of the logic that began that poem and a replacement of that logic with Indigenous-centered logic. What I read in “Nine Percent” is a framework of witness that depends on Kanaka Maoli cosmology, not colonial systems of knowing. Even though “Nine Percent” uses statistics to convey its protest, relaying these statistics in a poetic form that began as spoken word means that the poem refuses colonial definitions of what credible documentation or reportage of those statistics looks like. My reading, therefore, aligns with what Coulthard describes as moves away from colonial (and capitalist) forms of recognition, towards “*Indigenous alternatives*” dependent on an “Indigenous resurgence paradigm” (original italics 170, 154). Legibility, in these poems, and in others in

*Wansolwara*, entails translating Papuan struggles into terms that audiences beyond Papua understand. But both these poems create this legibility outside of colonial structures, rather than within them, corresponding also with Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson's notion of "refusal" as an avenue for Indigenous peoples to reject colonial forms of legibility and recognition and to choose their own terms of engagement (11). Legibility in "Nine Percent" and "Pacific Tongues" primarily, within the framework of *Wansolwara*, entails seeking recognition from other Indigenous peoples. In addition, legibility in the poems creates platforms for Papuans themselves to speak. Legibility also requires seeing one's own complicity, one's participation in reading away nine percent of a human life, in using electronics built from Papuan deaths, in the pathways of one's tax dollars, in recruitment into the military industrial complex, and in one's tendency to skim over numbers, over deaths.

Both poems also show how anti-Blackness makes Papuan deaths and resistance efforts less visible, or legible, internationally. The documentary forms of "Nine Percent" and "Pacific Tongues," and the way their focus shifts, force readers to see that complicity and to acknowledge Papuan Blackness as well as shared Indigeneity, shared stars, and shared histories of exploited land, labor, and lives. The combined voices in these poems, heard at the hui and written on these pages, emphasize community responsibility rather than merely community recognition and suggest that responsibility for decolonization and demilitarization means collaborating not just on behalf of their Kanaka Maoli communities but also on behalf of other Indigenous communities across *Wansolwara* such as that of West Papua. In "Pacific Tongues," the speakers ask, if "we [are] still a sea of islands" and imply that if their communities do not actively engage in such acts of documentation and witness then Oceania will conform to the ways imperialism seeks to structure and recognize it: as "just islands in the sea" (24).

*Wansolwara as the Digital, Social Sea*

The role of the internet, especially social media platforms, as networked and storied space in current manifestations of Papuan protest is present throughout the *Wansolwara* journal issue, and this emphasis is integral to the model of trans-Indigenous activism the issue constructs. The poem “Morning Star” by Brandy Nālani McDougall (Kanaka Maoli) and Craig Santos Perez (Chamorro) is especially useful for thinking about the role of social media in the Papuan independence movement. Fijian scholars Jason Titifanue, Jope Tarai, Romitesh Kant, and Glen Finau tie the Indonesian government’s restrictions on news media access in West Papua to the rise of social media in Papua and beyond, and its subsequent centrality in the Free West Papua movement as more and more Papuans get access to cell phones and the internet. In many ways, the digital street has taken the place of the literal street for Papuan protest. During Suharto’s regime (1967-1998), Indonesian and international media sources portrayed the physical presence of Papuan bodies as threats. Narratives of guerrillas taking hostages in the mountains, and of violent youths gathered in the streets en masse to protest their treatment under the dictator, were common. These threats kept many Indonesians from other islands out of particular areas of Papua. However, today, even though protests still take place on literal streets in Papua, other parts of Indonesia, and around the world, the systematic depopulation of Papuans means that the physical presence of Papuan bodies is now much more dispersed and controlled, and narratives of their physical threat are used by the Indonesian military and police to justify violent control methods in the region. Protesting Papuans have thus taken to the virtual highways of the internet, especially social media platforms, intensively. Likewise, non-Papuan activists have also deployed digital strategies to create networks of solidarity between their communities and West Papua. For example, Samoan blogger Jacki Leo-Tamua, who lives in PNG and calls



herself a “Wansolwara Woman,” uses her blog posts to show her support for Papuan resistance and foreground trans-Indigenous witness of the human rights abuses occurring there: “It is not right what’s happening in West Papua,” she blogs. “Because it is not right, I write!” (n.p.).

McDougall and Perez are not the only writers in the *Wansolwara* issue to refer to social media or digital technologies in their poem but they explicitly foreground how social media facilitates transmission of information about Papua to non-Papuans and how the forms of those media shapes how the recipients respond to information. The journal issue itself is accessible online and events at the hui were tweeted, videoed, and shared on Facebook and through hashtags. The poem “Morning Star” references Facebook, watching online videos, sharing articles online, and, again, hashtags. The speakers interweave lines about their use of these digital technologies and social media platforms with verses from Joan Gillespie’s *Twinkle, Twinkle Small Hōkū*, a children’s book about following a star in a canoe.

As they put their own child to bed and read her the story, the speakers in McDougall and Perez’s poem collapse distances between their daughter and Papuan children by juxtaposing moments of interacting with their daughter, Kaikainali‘i, with contrasting stanzas written in italics imagining Papuan children. Following a verse about Kaikainali‘i reaching for her mother, a stanza reads, “*count how many disappeared children/ still reach for their disappeared parents*” (15). The poem frequently asks us to “count Papuan children” right after describing a close, intimate moment within the speakers’ family, contrasting the situations but also bringing the stories about the Papuan children into the world of the family living far away in Hawai‘i. The imperative, “count,” mimics imperatives given to children in lessons or storybooks, and its

effect, along with the verses from *Twinkle, Twinkle, Small Hōkū*, interspersed with devastating facts about the plight of many Papuan children, is chilling and cumulative.

The poem reinforces this bridging effect as the speakers watch a documentary about Papua and share an article with their online audience, affirming the connective role of the digital within West Papuan activism. However, at the same time, the speakers command: “count how many hashtags / it will take to trend / bleeding black / island bodies...” (16). While hashtags elsewhere in the poem may allow a Twitter user to click and instantly be connected with other posts centered on the same concern or the same trend, the speakers come across as cynical here. They are aware of the power of a hashtag, but the irony of dead people needing to “trend” in order to matter is not lost on them. Using the term “trend” continues to embed the poem in the language of social media, but also implies that interest in those “island bodies” will only be temporary—a passing or fashionable interest that spikes then wanes, according to the whims of the internet. The authors specifically point out, too, that those bodies are black, and “strip/ mined by bullets.../ shipped overseas/ and enslaved / by our technology” (16). These lines connect Papuan people and histories to histories of Black enslavement elsewhere. But the agent who enslaves is “our technology,” that exports these stories of Papuans to a global audience who can consume and distribute it as easily as clicking “share.” Thus digital, and especially social media, are double-edged swords for McDougall and Perez. The question for their speakers, then, seems to be: how to make concern about those “bleeding black/ island bodies” last in the fleeting world of the internet? How might digital technologies do more than perpetuate the enslavement and consumption of Blackness?

The next stanza contains a shift that seems to answer these questions, at least in part. Throughout the poem, lines from *Twinkle, Twinkle, Small Hōkū* add notes of hope, especially the

lines that follow the aforementioned stanza that wrestles with the limits and pitfalls of internet voyeurism and activism. In particular, the image of the star suggests guidance and optimism, because “*never fear our star is strong/ Burning bright the whole night long*” (16). The plural possessive “our” in these lines is different than “our” in the lines immediately discussing enslavement through technology. The poem’s title suggest that the “small hōkū” is the Morning Star, the brightest star, the one that carries so many connotations of liberation and community in Papuan storied contexts. So “our star” in these lines is a Papuan star, but McDougall and Perez broaden its meaning to include Oceanic relatives as well. The lines following this verse reaffirm that “our star” includes Papuans and other Oceanic Indigenous peoples: “papuan cousins,” writes McDougall and Perez, “we’re so sorry/ we didn’t see you—/ but we see you now” (16). The speakers now direct their poem exclusively at a Papuan audience, using terms of kinship to suggest relation and shared connection. The speakers “*imagine someday/ we can talk story/ chew betelnut,/ and color the soil / with our spit / as our children / paint their faces red/ and play / in the quiet shelter / of our sacred mountains*” (16-17). Land relations and human, family relations are shared in these lines. They emphasize the color red, conjuring up, again, like other poems in this issue, appeals to shared Blackness and Redness (Indigeneity) that dominate within Melanesian activism. This shared Indigeneity, the speakers imply, is what gives hope for futures that lie beyond the digital. The digital might have helped the speakers “see” Papuans and their stories, but the future needs to be *more* than digital in order to lead to true, mutual liberation.

The final stanzas bring the poem back to the Morning Star, the “small hōkū.” By referring to the star in both these terms, the speakers mark it as both Papuan and Kanaka Maoli: “*Following our brave hōkū/ Like our fathers did before, / We will make it to the shore*” (17, Gillespie qtd.). In these lines, the speakers remind us that their ancestors have used the star for

Oceanic navigation, and that it is a marker of continuity and heritage. Furthermore, following it leads to land. Within the context of McDougall and Perez's poem, another layer of meaning is reached in these lines: following the star does not lead only to land, but to sovereignty on land, and ultimately to "#papuamerdeka" (17). In the meantime, both the speakers of the poem and Papuans may be adrift in "*our canoe*," their shared canoe, but the poem allows for future sovereign possibilities for Oceanic Indigenous peoples (17, Gillespie qtd.). In order to share the canoe, to make the possessive plural pronoun one that retrieves Papuans as joint occupants of the canoe as well, the speakers "promise to rise with you/ until morning finally comes" (17). That is, they promise to keep engaging in actions that include but also go beyond the digital until Papua's decolonial future is realized.

*Conclusion: Wansolwara, A Framework of Protest for Oceanic Liberation*

To tie off the threads of this chapter, I return to the lyrics that began it: those of Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio's "One Salt Water." It is a short song of four stanzas. The first two lines of the first two stanzas read like a lament: "Once I had a memory that was long/ Once I had a garden now it's gone" and "Once I caught my fish within this net/ Once I knew what I should not forget" (2015, 26). By themselves, these lines seem to express mere nostalgia for the past and enduring forms of meaning and knowledge. But in both of these stanzas there is a turn after the first lines that shifts to directly address "Wansolwara": "Wansolwara I believe your song" and "Wansolwara you will lead us yet" (26). These turns indicate more hope than their first lines suggest, invoking the future. The speaker bases his hope in Oceanic song and story and in the Indigenous interdependence "Wansolwara" conveys. The final stanza focuses on West Papua. Its first two lines repeat the formulation of the earlier stanzas: "Once I saw the morning star at

dawn/ Once I saw their armies sailing home” (26). But the formulation seems no longer to be a lament in this stanza. Instead, it seems almost prophetic, as it follows a stanza that focuses on the future tense for Wansolwara, saying “our children will return their lives to thee” (26).

Osorio’s speaker implies that returning lives to the sea, returning lives to their Oceanic heritages and modes of connection, is what leads to “armies sailing home” and ending Papua’s isolation (26). Osorio therefore advocates for activism that is Papua-centered while firmly oriented toward Oceanic heritage and Oceanic futures. His song sees liberation for Papua stemming from shared “one salt water” connections between Indigenous peoples.

My argument about these “one salt water” aspects of protest texts for West Papua is designed to expand arguments concerning trans-Pacific Indigenous activism in the region, while also attending to the importance of Melanesian-ness and Blackness in the texts analyzed. Works such as Bernard Narokobi’s *The Melanesian Way* (1980), advocating for Melanesian solidarity as a basis for anti-colonialism, made room for West Papuan participation in such solidarity. The Free West Papua campaign, run by the office of Benny Wenda in the United Kingdom, connects a “cultural resurgence” of Papuan traditions in recent years to the growth of “Melanesian identity” in Papua (n.p.). They call this a “Melanesian Consciousness movement,” and state that it is a call for other Melanesian nations to “BRING WEST PAPUA BACK TO THE FAMILY” (original capitals, n.p.). The emphasis on kinship in this article, and in many other West Papuan protest texts, includes references to “wantok” solidarity. Wantok, or “one talk,” as Gordon Leua Nanau (Solomon Islands) explains, has distinctly socio-economic and political valences in Melanesia. Originally referring to the ways Indigenous plantation workers in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands found identity and expressed kinship with others belonging to the same language group, politicians and activists, especially in PNG and the Solomon Islands, later used

“wantok” to call for national identities (Nanau 49).<sup>81</sup> For the Free West Papua Campaign, however, this form of Melanesian kinship originates in very specific traditions at the village level, but also “inspir[es] Melanesian people to come together as One People, One Soul and to struggle together against injustice and exploitation” (n.p.). Initially, this unity is Melanesian, but the campaign then links a “Melanesian Consciousness” to the term Wansolwara, and says that the concept of Wansolwara “is now being used across Melanesia and even the rest of the Pacific as a rallying call to unite people together in the spirit of compassion and solidarity” (n.p.). This rallying call, which concludes the article, implies that Papuan activists seek reentry to a family that starts with Melanesia but will ideally go beyond Melanesia to include other Indigenous peoples across the Pacific.

We can read protest texts about the West Papuan independence movement as constructions of the Indigenous “one salt water” Osorio envisions without erasing Papuan distinctiveness and without obscuring Melanesian emphases. Oceania as “one salt water” provides a space for conversations about West Papua that endeavor to set up Melanesian-based structures of solidarity and frameworks of activism, with an eye to Oceania-wide liberational futures. Solis states that protest songs from the Black Pacific “represent an affirmative politics of affinity between black people, not just a response to whiteness” (308). I add that Wansolwara protest literatures do not only foreground Papuan resistance in response to settler-colonialism, but also “represent an affirmative politics of affinity” between Indigenous Oceanic peoples, too.

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<sup>81</sup> For Nanau, when wielded by politicians for national and regional means, wantok can become “a corrupt and exploitative system,” forcing compliance and homogeneity (50, 36). However, he also acknowledges that “wantok” is a dynamic term, and has been used to great effects at local levels. My analysis shows that texts like the Wansolwara Dance “short stories” and the *Wansolwara* issue do attend to the local, and then look to the trans-Indigenous, rather than to the transnational. Kabutaulaka also sees “wantokism” as a central part of “Melanesianism” that can be used as a strategy for resistance (111).

This kind of protest rhetoric, or protest politics, recognizes diasporic Indigenous communities, when nation-state rhetoric does not, which is especially pertinent as so many of West Papua's artists and activists live in exile. Tracey Banivanua Mar (Fiji), identifies the 1970s as the time when decolonization movements in the Pacific became transnational—I argue, trans-Indigenous. She traces the origins of this transnationalism to the West Papuan independence campaign which was (and is) directed at an international, Indigenous audience, saying, it was “the most coherent of the transnational and global threads that underpinned networks of decolonization throughout the Pacific” (182). For Mar, what is more critical than nationalism for understanding decolonization in Oceania is examining “practices of solidarity between Indigenous and colonized peoples, which effectively recognized the interdependency of colonization in and around the Pacific” (211). Nationalism, in the form recognized by the United Nations, merely translates Papuan protest into yet another colonial, Eurocentric structure or mode of legibility. “Practices of solidarity between Indigenous and colonized peoples,” in contrast, offer Indigenous-centered alternatives that can exist outside of colonial systems (Mar 211).

The *Wansolwara* journal issue emphasizes that imagining and take action on these alternatives depends on art and story. These emphases do not come from a vacuum but arise from a rich context of trans-Indigenous activism with West Papua. Teaiwa, in a 2014 interview, as she named freedom for West Papua as a core focus of Wansolwara as a liberatory movement, described protest and art as intertwined. Likewise, Qolouvaki explicitly invokes West Papua's storied connections to the rest of Oceania when she talks about what she calls the “mana” of

Wansolwara, which she connects to the realization of Hau'ofa's vision of a "sea of islands."<sup>82</sup>

For Qolouvaki, this realization looks like "a wansolwara...united in kinship, love and reverence for our ancestors and sacred places—which amounts to the entirety of Oceania—in stories, song, dance, visual art, theater, rallies, marches" (n.p.). As part of this realization, Qolouvaki writes her blog post as "one attempt to bear witness to and articulate gratitude for Oceanic art/story as protest and decolonial imagining" (n.p.). Leo-Tamua suggests in her own blog that writing specifically is central to Oceanic support for Papuan resistance and Oceanic witness of the human rights abuses occurring there. In one post she links the history of Papua to her son's Samoan history. In this post she does not just celebrate and highlight commonalities between Samoa and West Papua, but also highlights the differences between their stories. Just like the Wansolwara Dance stories, and like Qolouvaki, Leo-Tamua narrates the specific colonial situation of West Papua in a way that dilates colonial issues ocean-wide, and invokes relationships that cross the ocean as a way to amplify specific struggles.

The dances, the hui, the blog posts, and the poems in this journal issue show that Wansolwara-based activism in the Papuan context is Melanesian, it is Oceanic, it is Indigenous, it emphasizes Blackness, it is storied and textual, it is literal and peopled and landed and watery, it is digital and social, it is about collective witness and community responsibility and collaborative persistence, and it is about Indigenous-centered terms of engagement, definitions of nationhood, and frameworks of knowing. Osorio constructs "One Salt Water" as a hui space in his poem: it is a place of gathering and conversation and action—specifically an Indigenous place of gathering, conversation, and action that foregrounds not only how colonialism has

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<sup>82</sup> "Mana" is a complex term that is often translated as "respect" but also means much more. It conveys authority, prestige, or power that is given to someone or something, not authority that is inherent in someone. The term also carries notions of stewardship or responsibility (*MāoriDictionary.co.nz*).



excluded Papua but also how other Oceanic and Melanesian peoples have excluded Papua and perpetuated ignorance and racism on its peoples (16). It is also a textual gathering place, a gathering of stories. Says Teaiwa about the first Wansolwara dance: “a crucial dimension of the gathering was a commitment to putting artistic and creative practice at the center of our activism” (Anderson n.p.). The event may be described as a dance, but it included multiple art forms beyond dance—poetry, narrative, music, and even visual art forms, that all are vehicles for story. Qolouvaki, too, states that “creative/storied protest across Oceania” has made it possible for Indigenous peoples across the Pacific to advocate for West Papua (n.p.). Therefore, it is worthwhile examining these rhetorical and literary acts of “storied protest” for West Papua through a lens that address their modes and methods of story-making, showing that the protest rhetoric of Wansolwara cannot be separated from *merdeka* for West Papua.

The literary texts I analyze in this chapter help drive, create, and circulate the West Papuan independence movement and show that the movement is invested beyond colonial forms of national recognition. The texts that constitute the movement are directed at Indigenous audiences, and are designed to foster collaborations and alliances, but at the same time they prioritize the specificities of the West Papuan context without using discourses of unity to homogenize. The vision of Wansolwara, created in the journal, acknowledges the ocean as heritage, connector, and sustainer for Indigenous peoples from Oceania and uses it as an extended metaphor for the textual, storied work of imagining Indigenous self-determination as both local and global. West Papua’s struggle, then, becomes Oceania’s struggle, and West Papua is remapped not as a remote, easternmost province of Indonesia, but as land and people in deep kinship with other Indigenous lands and peoples, and their diverse liberation projects, through the relations that the ocean makes possible.

On the walls of Cenderawasih, and in the *Wansolwara* journal issue I see, played out in microcosm, activism for Papua speaking through and beyond imperial political and archival limits. They show entangled, contested stories of Papuan sovereignty and self-determination, and reveal how the movement for merdeka heavily depends on stories that imagine communal futures. I suggest that we can see the poems from the journal issue as part of a long continuum of diverse modes of Papuan presence and resurgence within Papua and beyond in Oceania, theorizing what Indigenous solidarity, collaboration, and persistence can mean across Wansolwara. Perhaps the Wansolwara short stories, who refused to give authorship to one person or even two people, but meticulously acknowledged specific intellectual contributions, and the Wansolwara poems, with their emphases on communal, cumulative, collaborative processes, can be models for a framework of protest that is truly liberating. Until then, as the Nadave Wansolwara short story contributors wrote, “the dance will go on” (3).

## Coda

It may seem strange to begin and end a literary studies dissertation with stories about bags, but yum/ noken, for me, are how I came to write this dissertation. I have two yum, made by my mother's best friends. My mother's best friends were Marilina Soklayo and Mendina Ndabi.

I prioritize the name "yum" for these bags because that is their name in Nggem, the language in which I received them.<sup>83</sup> Nggem is a language spoken by about 4000 people in the lower central highlands of Papua, clustered around a place called Kobakma. When you fly into Kobakma all you can see at first are mountains. And then a strip of flat green, the airstrip, emerges. To one side is a river in a steep gully. These days much of the forest surrounding the airstrip has been cleared and the roofs of the buildings are painted bright blue.

I received the bags from Marilina and Mendina before graduate school. Often a woman will receive large yum, for carrying babies, but as my yum are meant for books, I received smaller ones. Marilina and Mendina taught me the word yum as they sat finger knitting them on their knees. Yum can be many sizes, and many different designs, there are tribal variations and the variations of their individual creators. Men and women often use them for clothing. The large ones, usually worn by women, are used to carry everything from corn and sweet potatoes, to firewood, piglets, tools, and babies. Yum can be made of natural plant fibers or synthetic. For me, yum are inseparable from sitting with elderly women in my father's literacy classes, or from sitting with them at the pasar (market) listening to them tell stories as they knitted. By the Kobakma airstrip there were always women knitting yum as they waited for a plane to come in; in church their bright colors spread out on the floor; at funerals they surrounded the coffin. Later on I saw how many young Papuans also wear yum, usually small ones, as a central part of their

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<sup>83</sup> The "u" in "yum" is pronounced similarly to the "u" in the Spanish "usted."

protests against Indonesian occupation, often knitting their yum to form an image of the Morning Star flag.

Yum are not necessarily literature, and nor do they need to be to have value. Nor is the ocean literature, though it contains and enables many stories. Both yum and the ocean become vehicles for storytelling, the kind of story-making that creates networks (net-works) and collaborations and relationships that span distances, geographic and temporal, while incorporating differences. They are vehicles and spaces of knowledge, of diverse literacies, of intellectual and creative production. They are made up of gaps and fibers, communities and complications.

Marilina was murdered; Mendina died from malaria. As I finish this dissertation, I want to remind myself of the embodied work that Marilina and Mendina put into their yum. Contextualizing their yum within the relationships they created and maintained is my way of trying to follow the creative and political acts of “Sorong Samarai” and “A Love Letter for West Papua”: foregrounding Papuan relational networks while not forgetting how the processes of empire have violently disrupted them. I tell of the deaths of Mendina and Marilina in order to not let us forget the actual people, often women, who are killed by the settler state. Marilina and Mendina both made many yum, which now are spread throughout Kobakma, and beyond. Those yum are used by Nggem women who learned from Marilina and Mendina and now make yum themselves. By focusing on embodied acts of making yum I am reminded of Nggem acts of presence and persistence despite the layers of colonialism in Papua. Yum, along with other Papuan objects and creative practices, were heavily collected, documented, and commodified by anthropologists, tourists, and art collectors. At the same time, both in the past and in our contemporary moment, these objects and practices are claimed and reclaimed by Indigenous

peoples across West Papua, like Marilina, Mendina, Omince, Yepina, and Rosa, in ways that refuse colonial discourses about those objects and practices. Their embodied acts show Papuan perspectives speaking through imperial limits. This dissertation, in the end, is for and *with* Marilina, Mendina, Omince, with Yepina, and with Rosa. Their story-making continues.



Fig 1. Yum, by Marilina Soklayo and Mendina Ndabi.

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