22. *He Reo Hou*, 11.
23. Patricia Grace, *Waiariki and Other Stories* [1975] (Auckland: Penguin, 1986).
24. Bruce Mason, *The Pohutukawa Tree* [1960] (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1978); *Awatea* [1969] (Wellington: Price Milburn for Victoria University Press, 1978).
25. Simon During mentions this in "Postcolonialism and Globalisation" *Meanjin* 51, no. 2 (1992), 343.
26. King, *Maori*, 70.

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21

Theory "versus" Pacific Islands Writing: Toward a *Tama'ita'i* Criticism in the Works of Three Pacific Islands Woman Poets

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naming myself

"Tusitala"
teller of tales
that i never heard
till yesterday
born away
for another life

today
the tale i tell
is my own
and theirs and yours
a way of seeking
some more
of Samoa
of my sacred self

the tale i tell
will book its way
through tongued histories
timeless mysteries
sanctioned violence
spaces of silence
telling lives

"tala tusi"
tell the book
word the spirit of brown
in theory
in creativity
we make our sound
renown

This poem is an artwork about theory and a theory about art. Tusitala, my mother's maiden name, is laden with meaning and nonmeaning for me. I have unraveled meaning through the modern continuation of our ancient oral histories, one that I pass on through poetry. "naming myself" is about the process of theorizing my own existence into existence. This was an action born out of my realization, half way through the writing of this chapter, of the danger of theorizing the voices of Pacific Islands women, and of myself, away. Beginning with my own creative voice has become a political act as I straddle the border between theory and creativity.

The aim of this chapter is to create or rediscover a new way of approaching poetry by Pacific Islands women and, by extension, the literature of the Pacific. This act of creating is theorizing in its essence, and thus this chapter is also a theory about art—written art. It is my refusal, first, to see theory and art as incompatible entities, and second, to view theory solely as something foreign and outside of myself. The impetus behind this chapter can be summed up in a recent exchange I had with a student. I was lamenting the lack of Pacific content in the available university English course in Aotearoa, New Zealand, a country located in the Pacific. Exasperated by my exasperation, the student replied, "Pacific Island works are just not up to par." Such an exchange is fairly typical. I had no reply then, just a sense of foreboding. The following is an attempt to formulate a reply, with the aid of contemporary poetry written in English by three Pacific Islands women: Konai Helu Thaman from the Kingdom of Tonga, Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche from Western Samoa, and Jully Makini (née Sipolo), from the Solomon Islands.

The conceptual framework of this reply is based on what I have chosen to call *mana tama'ita'i*. *Mana* is a word used throughout the Pacific to refer to issues of power and respect. *Tama'ita'i* is the nonexclusive Samoan word used to refer to a woman.[1] It is used in this context in a culturally nonspecific way to refer to Pacific Islands women, for want of an ethnically neutral term. The term was inspired by the creation of Mana Wahine, a Maori-based theorized feminism. The Mana Wahine movement encourages Maori women to "assume control over the interpretation of our struggles and to begin to theorize our experiences in ways which make sense for other women. . . . We as Maori women should begin with an understanding of our own condition and apply analyses which can give added insight into the complexities of our world" (Middleton and Jones 1992, 35).

This attempt at forming a specifically Polynesian feminist critique stems from fledgling Pacific Islands feminist voices in New Zealand. However, to place the problematic label of "feminist" (with all its Western connotational baggage) on to these poets would be to theorize their voices away from culturally and historically specific contexts, to perpetuate (though under an arguably more "progressive" mask) the power structures that have rendered Pacific women invisible—exactly the premised antithesis of this paper. All three Pacific Islands women poets have resisted such labeling.[2]

This chapter, does, however, recognize that gender issues are a common scene of struggle in their poetry. It identifies the creative treatment of this "gender agenda" and parallels it with characteristics commonly identified as feminist. Thus, literary feminism can simply be defined as the study and promotion of women-oriented works that are potentially empowering.

A selection of readings are presented in which the pertinent issues in feminist and postcolonial theories are utilized as a way of approaching these works and issues. A theoretical intersection is realized in black feminist theory, which draws parallels to the situation of women in the Pacific, who are also subject to "multiple jeopardies," though in different cultural, social, and political contexts. But to what degree can transgressive bridging theories like those surrounding black feminism be "Pacificized" and "indigenized"?[3] In a literary context, mana tama'ita'i is attempt to explore this question. As a gendered and culturally based paradigm, mana tama'ita'i seeks to reveal complexities that stem from being Pacific Islands "women of color." This is a term used deliberately to identify with the global community of women who have encountered the colonialism of the West. The availability of different interpretations allows both indigenous and nonindigenous peoples a way of evaluating the critical assumptions that inform their own readings. Such incorporative enlightenment is also advocated by the African American literary critic and feminist Barbara Christian, who specifically exhorts white women to read not as "white other" but as white women reading black women, with the hope of finding a redefinition of their own concept of "woman" (Caraway 1990, 27). Inevitably, however, mana tama'ita'i, which admittedly leans heavily on "foreign" foundational theories, must wean itself from other theories that have grown out of their own specific contexts in order to become Pacificized and indigenized to each island context. There is a need for more Pacific theorists within each island context to study their local literature and rediscover their own ethnically specific cultural theories. As one of Gloria Anzaldua's "borderlanders" (Anzaldua 1987), and as a migrant between cultures occupying a liminal space between race and class, and as one who is in a position to bridge aspects of local culture with some global theories and, I hope, to take the reader on a new and different journey, I offer this contribution to a growing body of theory as my link to empowerment in critical literary circles.

Already the traditionally read theoretical voice has prismed into many tones—as personal, as woman, as theorist, as artist, as New Zealand-born Samoan writer and reader. Postmodernist subjectivity allows me, as a Polynesian feminist cultural critic to admit my own positionalities in the reading, thus displacing the authorial (and potentially colonizing) "I" behind the text. Because this "I" is seen, in postcolonial terms, as synonymous with the colonizing West, its use foments in its decentralization. The self-reflexive "I" also displaces a demand for "authenticity," a demand that becomes impossible to meet. Therefore, as a strategic employment, I am using concepts of postmodernism to break down the "grand narrative" of modernity within and without the text—concepts used in both bodies of theory. I must also confront my position as theorist and my history of gender, race, and class. It is specifically my feminist and postcolonial readings stemming from my New Zealand background and Western education that form what Lata Mani terms the "political impulses" that shape my research (Mani 1989).

The theoretical thought patterns in decentering that allow for the possibility of multiple realities, as opposed to one validated reality, parallel the artistic patterns of the spiral, a symbol used by many Polynesian peoples to holistically represent political and spiritual principles. The spiral's structure confronts and defies the Western linear hierarchical way of thinking, urging the mind's eye toward a center that allows for the possibility of multiple centers; it "looks" back even as it progresses forward, hence embracing the common Polynesian adage: "We face the future with our backs." Such subjectivity is reflected, for example, in the shifting nature of knowledge. The Samoan historian Malama Meleisea talks about the differing revisions of historical events where many perspectives, all claiming to be the "truth," are given on one historical event. The what, the who, and the where all depend upon the orator's village, district, and genealogical links.[4]

The University of Auckland's relatively new Pacific Studies course, Indigenous Thought and Western Science (a title that initially seems to juxtapose these forms of knowledge, which have historically been considered mutually exclusive) purports to discuss "different ways of knowing" by acknowledging cultural and social bases of all knowledges.[5] The definition of science is thus extended, transformed, and "Pacificized," and indigenous forms of knowledge are finally acknowledged. Tongan poet Konai Helu Thaman talks of a similar need to recognize indigenous lore in her poem "Bush Medicine." Here, a grandmother, possessor of knowledge and the arts of healing, attends to a younger generation of women who have outwardly succumbed to a Western suspicion of things "bush" but inwardly (and by their very presence) acknowledge the value of "traditional" wisdom. The second stanza ends with the lines:

> now the wise men say
> that there might be something
> in my grandmother's cure
> and the leaves that flavored it
> I only hope that one day
> they too would be sure (Thaman 1981, 3).

The last line reveals the unquestionable authority of indigenous knowledge from within, an authority gaining recognition in the West, despite modern doubts.[6] Thaman is less charitable with outside ignorance and its influence on the devaluation of culturally based knowledge in her later poem, "Langakali":

> Must you throw this medicinal branch
> Out the door?
> It will put out roots
> And one day the tree will destroy
> Your brick house,
> You, and your sick son (Thaman 1981, 13).

The initial capitalization of each line formalizes its tone. There is a serious price to be paid, a sober consequence to be suffered, for the displacement of "tradition" by those who take on foreign values (as symbolized by the "brick house") without question.

Many Pacific Islands students I have spoken with viewed literary theory as a European construct that has sapped the creative juices of our indigenous works, dryly describing them as substandard. One Pacific woman's reaction was to announce that "critiquing is a *Papalagi* 'white' construct and alien to our culture."[7] However, to dismiss theory because of its strong Western implications seems senseless. As an abstract framework used to view the world, its mere use is not Eurocentric. Although the construction of the framework may largely have been dominated by Western thought, it is a construction we can also define for ourselves. If we see theorizing (or ways of critiquing) as exclusively a "papalagi 'white' construct" we limit our reading physically and mentally. We must continue to create our own theories, indigenize concepts, discover and recover our own "medicinal branches."[8]

The paucity of critical resources in the Pacific by people of the Pacific has entailed looking beyond our centers and tuning in to the multiplicity of voices around the globe that are engaged in reclaiming, reestablishing, and renewing themselves after (and throughout) the experience of colonialism. At least the globalization of colonization ensures that international networking is not too difficult. Our Epelian "sea of islands" forms a community with a broad basis of similarities, in spite of differences (see Hau'ofa 1994). The struggle for self-determination and self-definition in our varying relationships with colonialism, in all its "de," "post," and "neo" forms, links and

globalizes the political agenda of people with shared histories of colonialism, thus widening its political power base (Gunew, 27).

One central concept in postcolonial thought is termed by African writer and critic Ngugi wa Thiong'o as the process of "decolonising the mind" (Thiong'o 1986). The first step in our mental decolonization is to recognize the effects of colonialism, which Thiong'o characterizes as "the cultural bomb"—the largest weapon of imperialism. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Pacific was formally colonized by British, French, and American powers. It was subsequently invaded by Germany, as described in Samoan poet and artist Momoe Malietoa Von Reiche's "I Can't for the Life of Me" (Von Reiche 1988, 47), and Japan, as described in Solomon Islands poet Jully Makini's "Okinawa Fishermen" (Sipolo 1981, 5). With the added complication of two world wars, the Pacific experienced exploitation and devastation of its peoples and lands and was subjected to bombing, military bases, nuclear testing, and nuclear-waste dumping. Whether the islands of the Pacific remained colonized, became independent, or as in the case of Tonga, were unofficially colonized (that is, placed under a Protectorate), stubborn imperialist ideologies continue to be reflected at all levels of society.

The "cultural bomb" annihilated a people's belief in their names, languages, environment, heritage of struggle, sense of unity, capacities and ultimately in themselves (Thiong'o 1986, 76). Our own ways of knowing were viewed with suspicion and ridicule. Poisonous gases altered our vision and we began to believe that value could only be found in things outside of ourselves—like the "real" knowledge of Thaman's poem "Reality" in which a young educated man, realizing the sterility of his Western qualifications in an island context, is reeducated by a wise islander:

> An old man close-by whispers,
> "Come fishing with me today
> For you have a lot to learn yet." (Thaman 1974, 17).

Arguably, the more subtle the deracination and alienation of a people, the more inherently damaging. The culturally divorced critiquing of our works by outsiders is damaging but not surprising. Such critiquing from "insiders," from those who have a vested interest through heritage and a bond with the works, acts as a form of self-negation and is comparable to V. S. Naipaul's self-imposed colonial gaze (see Dissanayake and Wickramagamage 1993, esp. chap. 2).

Deactivating the bomb means deconstructing imperialist hegemony and questioning the norm: Why is it that, after more than a hundred years of establishment, that the English Department at the University of Auckland, a tertiary institution situated in the largest Polynesian city in the world, has still yet to see a specific Maori literature course?[9] Why is it that only in 1995 did it have its first specific course on Pacific literature?'[10] Where are all the Pacific women writers? Why is it that I am only now questioning? Deconstructing imperialist hegemony means decentering the West and recentering ourselves. Our oral knowledge and experiences, must be validated as formal centers of indigenous thought, our cultures, our "ways of knowing," as the starting point of indigenous theory.

Leading the counterattack in challenging the Western voice of authority from the Pacific, Samoan author and scholar Albert Wendt spoke for us all in 1976: "The colonizers prescribed for us the roles of domestic animal, amoral phallus, the lackey, the comic and lazy and happy-go-lucky fuzzy-haired boy . . . We must not consent to our own abasement" (quoted in Sharrad 1993, 13). However, the "we" Wendt uses repeats the potential patterns of domination and oppression he seeks to challenge and change. When the male is the norm in postcolonial societies (exacerbated by the overwhelmingly patriarchal face of nationalism), women's voices are consequently silenced and suppressed; our image is overlooked, superimposed onto a universal masculinist point of view (see Boehmer 1991). As Pacific Islands women, we need our own voices to be asserted, heard, and heeded. For the colonizers also prescribed roles for us as the sexual servant, the dusky maiden, the exotic native, the innocent savage, the "happy-go-lucky fuzzy-haired" girl. We must not consent to our own abasement, or invisibility—by anyone.

Thus, the added complexity of gender to race informs the lives and work of women of color universally. Angela Davis coined the term "double jeopardy" (Davis 1981, 3). Patricia Hill Collins notes that this becomes "triple jeopardy" with the consideration of class (Collins 1991) and, as Andre'e McLaughlin points out, "multiple jeopardies," with the addition of religion, sexual orientation, and regional differences (Braxton and McLaughlin 1990).

In seeking visibility and creating space for Polynesian women's stories, opinions, and voices, forms of analysis must be provided that ensure that such multiple jeopardies are incorporated and their intersections engaged. Makini and Thaman concern themselves with political issues arising from colonialism. Makini's poem "Development" (Sipolo 1986, 13) concerns the imposition of "foreign values," causing "urban drift" and "forgotten customs;" while "Noro" (ibid., 15) exposes the "pigsty of development," the "outside" culprit, emphasized with a repetitive "You" in "Solomon Blue" (ibid.). Thaman's postcolonial society smacks of neo-colonialism. Her poem "My Blood" recounts a thematic "false gleam" pointing to the culpability of Pacific Islanders, wherein elements of racial betrayal, elitism, and V. S. Naipaul's "mimic men" syndrome are exposed: "Don't forget YOU are their product And YOU must sell" (Thaman 1974, 5).

The deconstruction of patriarchal hegemony, discussion of gender relations, and rebellion against perceived and "real" female subordination are

also on the thematic agenda. Much of Von Reiche's poetry exposes the exploitation of women in their role as wives while also revealing the personal implications of catch-22 situations where attraction and disgust feed off each other in love/hate relationships. Von Reiche's problematic solution lies in passivity: an abused spouse, in "A Lost Toy" passively says "I wish you'd leave us" (Von Reiche 1988, 31). Arguably the greatest asset in such poetry lies in its role in exposing domestic dissatisfaction, overtly forcing public acknowledgment and covertly eliciting private identification. Makini's "Wife Bashing" (Sipolo 1986, 12), questions the oppressive role of "custom"[11] and points to the need for change, as signified by the muffled frustration and horror in "A Man's World" (Sipolo 1981, 10) where the exploitation of a woman's role as sister is sanctioned by an unresponsive society.

The interweaving of the two concerns is highlighted when the face of the oppressor is seen to be overwhelmingly both indigenous and male. In Thaman's "My Blood" (1974, 6) the mask wearer is gender specific—the "brother" is "other." It is a man undergoing an "identity epidemic," torn between the common people and the elite thereby reflecting a colonial reality. Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask offers the explanation that "men in the chiefly system or the economic system . . . had more opportunities to join the colonial system" (quoted in Riveira 1990, 19). Women are considered lesser threats.

Most notably in such poetry, feminism envelops postcolonialism when black women and women of color find themselves measured against Eurocentric standards of beauty (see Collins 1991, esp. chap. 7). In Von Reiche's "My Husband" (1988, 12), the wife is compared by her husband with a flirting, perfumed, false-lashed, red fingertipped, bottle beauty. Ultimately, the wife is despised:

> Because I am brown
> And my eyes are black
> He despises me because I
> Don't have the light eyelashes
> Of white girls
> The flaxen hair
> Of white girls
> The long legs
> Of white girls.

The internalization of these measures manifests in a process Thiong'o terms "sentencing the self to irrelevancy" (Thiong'o 1986, 87–108), hating what is inherent in our brown selves. Makini's *Civilised Girl* (Sipolo 1981, 21) recounts a dressed-up woman with all the signs of Western beauty: perfume, six-inch heels, newly softened hair plucked and primped, and face painted. Makini proclaims,

> Why do I do this?
> Imitation
> What's wrong with it?
> Civilization.

The speaker has seen herself as the Other's other; or in the African American black feminist theorist bell hooks's terms, she has "internalized with supremacist values and aesthetics, a way of looking and seeing the world that negates her value" (hooks 1992, 3). Although she relays her husband's comparison of her with "the backside of Aia's one-eyed dog," the wife never once hints at internalizing this self-hatred by adopting pretensions to whiteness or actually *feeling* these things. She merely forwards the behavior of her husband to the reader while continuing to burp and sing loudly in public.

The process of decolonizing the mind begins with recognizing these imposed values, deconstructing and challenging this form of colonialism, however subtle. By verbalizing these, Von Reiche and Makini have (even if inadvertently) begun the process.

Double colonialism issues are not and cannot be divorced from each other, as some advocates of postcolonialism and feminism have endeavored to do in the past. In the black nationalist movement of the 1960s, African American women pursuing issues of gender were often accused of causing divisions in black solidarity movements (Angela Davis was one of the leaders in this, see Davis 1981, Introduction). Similar reactions were seen with the African Uhuru movement, as is evident in Felix Mnthali's poem "Letter to a Feminist Friend" and his infamous "First things first" refrain (cited in Petersen 1984, 36–37). Feminist concerns were and are pressured to take a back seat to racial concerns. However, in response to Mnthali, fellow Nigerian academic Leslie Molara Ogundipe, argues that cultural liberation cannot be separated from women's liberation (Ogundipe 1984).

The reverse is also true. Western feminism causes invisibility when it ignores differences and parallels gender oppression with that of race. This was powerfully demonstrated in the early 1970s, when white American feminists used the analogy of "women as niggers" to further their cause (Wade-Gayles 1984, 8). Conversely, invisibility is bestowed through categorization. Chandra Mohanty argues for the deconstruction of a hegemonic homogeneity created by Western feminists when looking at "Third World Women" (Mohanty 1991). It is here where all must tread carefully, for Mohanty is potentially including women of color in the West. Universal terms such as "Third World Women" and, by extension, "Pacific Islands women," when used to designate a whole spectrum of widely differing groups, can become tools for the oppression of these subjects. Such assumptions of homogeneity are best highlighted when contradicted. My choice of poets from three diverse islands in the Pacific is a move toward illustrating such diversity. How-

ever, the scope of this chapter necessarily marginalizes such concern. I acknowledge, if in a peripheral way, the need for both connections and disparities to surface. The emergence of writing by black women and women of color necessarily intertwines these issues, validating their experience of "double jeopardy," opening up and shedding light on what Gloria Wade-Gayles visualizes as the "narrow space of race and [the] dark enclosure of sex" (1984, 8). The lived experience of women of color will always render complex any dichotomous construction of race and gender.

African writer Chinua Achebe poignantly asserts that "art for art's sake is like so much deodorized dog-shit" (Achebe 1988, 58). Much of minority writing has a political agenda that aims to fulfill more than aesthetic purposes. Many Pacific women writers are not only engaged in wider social and political organizations but form the backbone of these organizations (see "Women's Rights" 1994). Such writing, which Wendt refers to as the "social realist's" writing (cited in Hereniko 1993, 55), simultaneously seeks and provides what Thiong'o calls the "quest for relevance" (Thiong'o 1986, 87). We return to the political prerogative of altering realities at the grassroots level, something Barbara Smith views as vital to a black feminist critic (Smith 1985, 9). As a writer, Thaman initially wrote for a purpose: to satiate the starved minds of her Tongan students, who were being fed English daffodils and winter Christmases (cited in Hereniko 1992, 15). She sought to restore value to things Polynesian through content, symbolism, and structure in the curriculum.[12]

As a "colored" theoretical framework, mana tama'ita'i encourages control over the interpretation of our struggles: we do this by studying ourselves and understanding our own condition.[13] Starting at the center, with the self, is also the logical (Western) thing to do. Unfortunately, many of Wendt's researching "ologists" failed to arrive at the same "logical" conclusion. Reading literary texts in their multiple contexts means challenging the trendy postmodernist approach when, as Wendt claims, the text is read in an artistic void (see Hereniko 1993, 55). In the absence of an informed reading, a common criticism of much Pacific poetry is its simplicity of style, a "fault" directly related to a perceived lack of complexity and low quality of work (Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 1992, 86). Acclaimed Nigerian writer Buchi Emecheta notes that she is continually criticized for the simple use of language in her novels. Emecheta argues that she deliberately endeavors to reflect reality for "the common people." Her message to critics who claim to know exactly what she should write and in what manner is customarily direct and simple: "Write your own truth!" (ibid.).

To the student for whom Pacific literature was "just not up to par," I pose two questions: Whose standard are we being measured against? And why? Literary complexity can also be used as a gate keeping strategy, an exclusionary tactic for only a few privileged eyes and voices. Simplicity (often read derogatively as didactic and polemic writing) is often more inclusive and indicative of Pacific Islands cultures which emphasize the importance of the group over the individual, and continues to reflect the primacy of a political agenda in ongoing, politically tumultuous social contexts.

Is being seen as "up to par" a worthy objective? Would the removal of literary "standards" be taking relativism to such an extent that no value judgments are allowed? Is there room for critical analysis of the text beyond sociological readings? Certainly there is room for critical analysis of the reader. The underlying assumption behind the student's comment is that if the writing is in "English" then one can read it as one would English literature. This view is naive, misguided, and arrogant. Similar readings exist to some extent because "English" and the genre of the written "poem" have certain traditions. However, to view work solely in terms of its similar generic traditions is to look forever through colonial-glazed spectacles. Such "outside" thinking reiterates colonial intentions. I use the word outside not in reference to Papalagi, or non-Pacific or nonindigenous persons but rather to an inherited, colonized, culturally desensitized attitude that divorces the brown self from reality. The student who made this comment was of Pacific Islands origin. Part of Thiong'o's definition of alienation is "an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment" (Thiong'o 1986, 87). Of course, the student may have simply read the "wrong" poetry.

Within a culturally based theoretical framework, profound and complex subtleties are uncovered in Pacific women's writing. For example, all three poets use island ecology to critique changes in their societies. Flowers are a particularly popular symbol, and are used extensively by Thaman and Von Reiche. Three of Thaman's four collections are named after sacred flowers native to Tonga: *Langakali*, *Hingano*, and *Kakala*. Thaman consciously uplifts ancient symbols, blossoming with meaning, from Tongan legends, songs, dance, and poetry to preserve oral traditions and forms of nonwritten narrative. However, flowers do not just represent island beauty: they are tissued pockets of seeded meaning. Thaman uses the flower imagery to illustrate the disappearance and destruction of ecology and, by extension, Tongan cultural values. *Kakala*'s blurb openly acknowledges that such familiarity with the culture ensures greater insight by describing her poetry as "a garland of fragrant flowers with deeper symbolism for Pacific Islanders" (Thaman 1993).

The indigenous terms incorporated throughout their poetry are not only pockets of privileged wisdom but can also be seen as a claim to power. Coupled with postcolonial poetical theories, the utilization of macronic power works to destabilize and undermine the "universal" language of English.[14] The incorporation of mother tongue in the "Fatherlanded"[15] language of colonial English is seen by Sneja Gunew as a "way of signifying the digestible element that will not be assimilated" (Gunew and Yeatman 1993, 15). In

some cases there is simply no English equivalent; Gunew claims that culture is too expansive for mere English.

Bilingual writers are able to exclude or include precise versions of reality. Neither Makini nor Von Rieche provide glossaries, arguably giving priority to the author's indigenous audience and furthering the struggle for the assertion of cultural identity. They become part of the solution of "moving the center." For the earnest nonindigenous reader unfamiliar terms stimulate investigation and further enlightenment.

However, issues of resistance and power can be used to argue both for and against keeping the text inaccessible. In contrast with her earlier works, Thaman's later works provide a way "into" her poems by incorporating an explanatory glossary. As well as guaranteeing a larger market, Thaman also fulfills the spirallac pattern of affirming the cultural center and outwardly passing on traditional forms of knowledge. By placing the glossary at the back, the text continues to exist in its own right without the interruption of footnoted meanings. In Thiongo's humanistic terms, Thaman is part of political movement involved in moving the center, for her poetry exists "between nations and within nations . . . [which] . . . will contribute to the freeing of world cultures from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender" (Thiong'o 1993, xvii).

Resistance also operates at the level of publication layout. Notably all three women weave text and original image together, creating suggestive and evocative spaces that defy the politics of traditional page layout. Smith specifically defines this as "the confines of white/male literary structures."[16]

The historical and spiritual aspects in Thaman's work transcend the written words themselves and lie behind the formation of her poetry. The last four poems in *Kakala* are differently formatted. Thaman notes that the repetition of the quadruplet stanza form reflects experimentation with ancient Tongan poetry, in which three lines are chanted in repetition, creating an indigenized unity and form, one which Thaman claims provokes immediate cultural identification: "The kids [in Tonga] really identified with it" (Lua 1994, 2).

The retention of cultural nuances, the primacy of the indigenous audience, the inclusion and exclusion of realities as dictated by bilingual authors, and the retelling and preservation of traditional symbols and styles aid in the political assertion for cultural identity and provide ways of "moving the center." This short critique has overturned derogatory assumptions by exposing complex dimensions of these indigenous writers' reality. Such a critique seeks not to measure, but to evaluate the work appropriately.

The presentation of one's own reality is implicit in the global community Susheila Nasta identifies under the term "black writing." Nasta writes that the "term is being used in its broadest political sense as a means of drawing links, despite important social and cultural differences, between the writings

of women of color who have suffered the effects of a double colonization brought about by history and male-dominated social and political systems" (Nasta 1991, xviii). Elleke Boehmer presents feminist possibilities of redress by women whose identities have been rendered invisible in post colonial societies based upon patriarchal nationalism. Boehmer challenges women to write themselves into history as they express their own reality: "To write is not only to speak for one's place in the world. It is also to make one's own place or narrative, to tell the story of ourselves, to create an identity" (Boehmer 1991, 7). Without blanketing our differences, the ripple effect created by the political power base worldwide, premised by our sameness as women of color, has enabled previously "invisible" groups a legitimated space and voice to be heard, identified, supported, nurtured, and contended with.

A return to our own ways of knowing necessitates stepping out and claiming the world as a feminized and culturally ethnicized space. *Blackwomantalk* the first black women's publishing press in Britain, began in 1987 with such an assertion:

> Women
> Black women
> of different—
> ages colors nationalities religions classes
> backgrounds cultures . . .
> have entrusted us their work. . .
>
> . . . These are the words,
> quartered, divided, and whole
> whose contradictions
> Words of resistance
> which in sharing
> we move forward —
> claiming what is ours. (Quoted in Braxton and McLaughlin 1990, 166).

Incidentally, the last stanza parallels a poem I wrote to commemorate the 1994 inception of Fingalo,[17] a group of Samoan woman writers based in Tamaki Makaurau, Auckland, of which I am a member. The poem, named after the group, follows:

> the birthplace screams
> for fetal dreams
> worded and sounded
> ever grounded
> in the bearer of meaning:
>
> she goes forth into our world

The move forward into the world, claiming it as "ours," is a united stance by politically driven black women the world over. As we write, read, dialogue, and produce our experiences and thoughts, we aid in the creation and validation of our complex and evolving identity.

All three women have been exposed to a transPacific milieu of ideas and theories and influenced through Western forms of education, religion, capitalism, and feminism. They have broken Western stereotypes of the uneducated Pacific Islands woman and the educated domesticated Pacific Islands woman. They have problematized Norman Simms' passively colonial syndrome of the "read" and the "led."[18] Just as Polynesian peoples disproved the "fatal impact" theory,[19] the "read" and "lead" also actively interacted and indigenized foreign structures.[20]

Ironically, the colonial education that aimed to assimilate in many cases had the opposite effect. Trask calls the enlightening experience of such education the "radicalizing revelation" (Riveira 1990, 19). Thaman, Von Reiche, and Makini are cases in point. Thaman holds a doctoral degree from the University of the South Pacific, Fiji, in indigenous education, where Makini has also furthered her education. Von Reiche attended Victoria University, Australia, and teaches at Teachers' Training College in Western Samoa. Although all received some form of higher education, their opportunities were seemingly contradictory, as boundaries had the potential to be stretched and broken. In "Another Dimension," Thaman finds education both alien and exciting; the discovery of different ideas parallels the discovery of different lands. However, the bestowal of knowledge and its associate powers comes hand in hand with a felt social responsibility, as is seen in this line from "Brains and Paddle," where the voyaging metaphor is used to illustrate the journey of education:

> i carried with me scars
> from loving and knowing
> many planets (Thaman 1993, 35).

In the poem "Leaving Home," Makini relates her experience of having to leave the Solomon Islands for the first time on a government scholarship. Unlike the village-oriented life that had given her mother "work worn hands," Makini is about to enter into the "yawning chasm" of an unknown world (Sipolo 1986, 2). Makini would eventually return to the Solomon Islands and expand a space in the Pacific literary scene, long dominated by men. The introduction to her first book of poetry, *Civilised Girl*, reiterates the articulation of this new and vital voice: "This collection is a first in several ways: it's Jully's first published work and some of the first writing of Solomon Islands women; and it's the first time that one is able not only to hear or sense a woman's views on certain matters but also to see them in print in a complete book in this country" (Sipolo 1986, 2).

The year was 1981. Although Barbara Christian asserts that women writers and African American writers have been excluded from mainstream exposure in general, she notes that "women of color are the group to suffer most from this exclusion" (Christian 1985, 119). These women rebel against such exclusion. For them, the intended purpose of colonial education backfired as a space opened for potential rebellion against imposed colonial and patriarchal structures.[21]

In poetry, the personal has political possibilities as oppression is exposed and critiqued. The many influences of appropriated self-defined "feminisms" that have stemmed from "outside" exposure have led these writers to proffer different possibilities in an ever-changing culture. In the poem "Husbands," Makini presents the different choices available through the voices of seven women. The last voice points towards a mutual equity between the sexes. Among the drunkards, politicians, businessmen, laborers, and unemployed, there is a househusband "cleaning our home while I go out earning our daily bread" (Sipolo 1986, 27).

Also providing alternative choices for women in their own lives is Thaman's succinct poem "Woman's Lib" in which, though nationalistic loyalties are acknowledged, she calls for her sister's hand, for "After all, we cannot all go back / To the land" (Thaman 1974, 1). In von Reiche's poetry, I identify a feminist critique of patriarchy, deconstructing and subsequently disabling "the male gaze." With a Freudian twist, she objectifies a cocky young man with "penis vanity," in "To Keri" (von Reiche 1988, 4).

These works are spirallic because they refuse to be linear. Smith would classify them as lesbian in nature, "not because women are lovers, but because they are the central figures, are positively portrayed and have pivotal relationships with one another. The form and language of these works are also nothing like what white patriarchal culture requires or expects" (Smith 1985, 9). Thaman reclaims the voices of our foremothers, older women who are the powerhouses of knowledge and cultural wisdoms.[22] Makini demonstrates the strong mother-daughter bond and its role in the continuity of cultural values. She also calls for the formation of a sisterhood by means of formal and informal women's organizations, in "Not Satisfied" (Sipolo 1981, 1) and in "Take Off Your Shoes" (Sipolo 1986, 21). In von Reiche's poetry, although women possess the power and responsibility of nurturing men—as is evident in the use of the soft imperative, "Just grow and grow and be a man," in the poem of the same title, (von Reiche 1988, 88)—women also nurture themselves. Women's (hetero)sexuality is exalted, as love and passion are fully expressed, in a Pacific context. Sexuality and sensuality are strongly linked to the land, where lovers are waves over driftwooded selves, as in "Silent Admiration" (ibid., 3) or are earth receiving rain, in "Rain" (ibid., 7). These women go "beyond the act of resistance to domination" (hooks 1992, 4), by providing

ideologically women-oriented cultures through the communication of women-centered experiences.

Critiquing ourselves, we define new selves and offer alternative images, different options. But the poetry itself offers a theoretical equivalent to redirecting readings. Cultural identity undergoes a redefinition with the omission of the "versus" between the contestatory "modernity" and "tradition" and its implications. Two lines in von Reiche's "Flying" suggest a peaceful coexistence of previously mutually exclusive ideologies. Here, a nervous

> flat-footed Samoan . . .
> prayed to all the gods
> and the one God (von Reiche 1988, 7).

In Thaman's "Problem Solving," one's own culture is the frame of reference (Thaman 1993, 10). In "On Waking," thought patterns are directly related to the Pacific context (Thaman 1974, 4). But perhaps the most overt example is Von Reiche's "Nanking" (Von Reiche 1988, 38). The speaker relays her travels to China where, in order to comprehend the beauty and purity of the lotus flower (another sacred blossom), she attempts to see it through its own light, "in lotus position." The refusal to impose her own will on another culture leads to the unflowering of different levels of appreciation and the dispersal of new seeds of cultural sensitivity.

hooks asks, "From what political perspective do we dream, look, create, and take action?" (hooks 1992, 8). I take up hooks' "dare" to desire differently, and view Pacific Islands literature with defiant paradigms, alternative perspectives and ways of reading by considering these texts alongside the gendered and culturally based paradigm of mana tama'ita'i.

For the creation of mana tama'ita'i, I have taken different strands of postcolonial and feminist theory and woven them together on a background of cultural, political, and historical contexts. I have noted in particular the crossovers and complex intersections that have arisen at meaningfully textured places of overlapping "jeopardies." Here, I have plaited indigenous creative works, intertwining art and theory. In exposing selected dimensions to the light of this research, the upper side has been dyed with my perspective, with the aim of weaving a finely patterned theoretically "colored" framework. It is my hope that many other possible patterns will be created from its suggestively loose-stranded underside as such theoretical weaving continues. The pattern I have considered is spirallic in design and nature. Its winding paradigmatic helix provides a way of evaluating indigenous works that defy hierarchically linear "pars" while centrally celebrating our holistic colored images and textured voices.

NOTES

1. While G. B. Milner's definition includes "lady, princess . . . woman . . . woman doctor . . . village maiden" depending upon syntactical context, the limitations of this word must also be acknowledged (1993, 239). It is commonly used socially to refer to an unmarried woman and therefore has exclusionary connotations for some Samoan speakers.

2. Makini's ambivalent relationship to feminism demonstrates the need to distance oneself from the Western-defined, gender oppositional meanings, while simultaneously embracing its ideology of equal worth: "I want to say that the word "feminism" scares me. I am not a feminist. What is it? We are quite happy with our lot in the village. It is only when people see my writing, they say, "So, you are a feminist. You are for women's lib." Then I say, "No, I am not. I am just trying to point out that in our male-oriented society, women are regarded as being lower, but we are just as good as the men . . ." (Griffen 1989, 16). Thaman (personal correspondence, June 7, 1994) and von Reiche (personal correspondence, July 28, 1998) have privately stated that they are not 'feminist.'

3. In the light of the resistance I encountered while writing this paper, perhaps the more pertinent question is, "Should they be?" The overwhelming response I received was that "feminism" is a Western construct espousing an individualism in direct opposition to island-based communal ways of living. Some Polynesian women proactively working within women's organizations are at pains to differentiate their difference from what they perceive as Western feminism, as illustrated in a recent article in *Pacific Islands Business*: "Most island women who are seeking change are unlike some of their more strident counterparts in the Western world." We're not trying to overtake the men," said Bernadette Pereira, of the South Pacific Commission's Women's Resource Bureau. "We want to complement them." ("Women's Rights" 1994, 18). This chapter is evidence that I have attempted to answer the first and have considered the second question. While Tongan poet Konai Helu Thaman encourages the initial consideration of relevant Western literary traditions, she also acknowledges that the process of indigenizing and developing our own critical theories, is less forthcoming: "We do not seem to possess enough courage to create our own culture and our own traditions" (Lua 1994).

4. Malama Meleisea, personal correspondence, March 14, 1994.

5. Introductory handout at lecture, June 2, 1994.

6. For an example of scholarly validation of "different ways of knowing" in the area of medicine, see the introduction to Macpherson and Macpherson, 1990.

7. Dialogue recorded at PING (Pacific Islands Network Group), an interdisciplinary seminar at Auckland University, November 8, 1994.

8. I use "continue" because indigenous theories already exist, but many have yet to be recognized in an official capacity by Western academia because they have not been given form or voice in a way that is authorized academically.

9. Since the writing of this chapter, the Maori Studies Department at the University of Auckland, established a course on Maori literature in 1995 convened by Dr. Jane McRae. It reviews the historical development of Maori literature, focusing on

Maori oral traditions and its written records of the nineteenth century. Also, in 1997, the English Department established a Maori and Polynesian literature course, convened by Maori writer and scholar Witi Ihimaera. While an official English Department paper, it is only being offered off campus at a South Auckland Polytechnic Institute.

10. This course is offered at Master's level and is convened by Professor Albert Wendt.

11. As does the Ni-Vanuatu poet Grace Molisa's poem "Kastom," which reveals that "custom," "culture," and "tradition" are used by Pacific Islands males to justify exploitation of Pacific Islands women and to subjugate children (Molisa 1983).

12. Significantly, it was another woman, the Cook Island Maori Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, who was vital in the establishment of *Mana* magazine and integral in putting the words of Pacific women writers into print.

13. hooks advocates this ideological type of movement from the margin to the center in her book *Feminist Theory* (hooks 1984). Thiong'o's latest title, *Moving the Center* (Thiong'o 1993), shifts the emphasis by advocating the need to center ourselves.

14. As seen in the fiction of Maori authors Patricia Grace and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku.

15. See Boehmer (1991, 3) for parental terminology for language distinction.

16. Smith is speaking in the context of African American women's writing in the late 1970s in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (Smith 1985, 9). Both Makini and von Reiche further break the mold by producing their own original art. Whether these were personal or editorial decisions need to be clarified. The authors were unavailable for comment.

17. Samoan word for thoughts, feelings, desires.

18. Norman Simms writes that with colonization (or Western imperialist contact) came a newly imposed social matrix whereby the indigenous people moved from being subject—the doers of reality,—to object—the passive receivers of given knowledge (Simms 1986).

19. However, this theory was also in large part disproved by European scholars: see Howe 1981.

20. For example, Malama Meleisea (1992) posits that Western religion was "Samoanized" to the extent that it is now firmly rooted in what is called traditional and ingrained in fa'a Samoa. Also, Marshall Sahlins and "new historicism" argues against a commonly perceived "victim" status of indigenous peoples and views culture as a two-way interaction. Similar dynamics operated in the Anglo-American feminist movement where it was recognized that nineteenth-century authors, from Austen to Bronte to Dickinson, simultaneously conformed to and subverted patriarchal literary standards (see Moi 1985).

21. When Western feminism fails to deconstruct the term "woman," when postcolonialism fails to deal with the term Third World or postcolonial, when middle-class cultures are seen as the norm and working-class histories are codified as the "other," then they too are implicated in the perpetuation of imperialism, where our real selves are rendered invisible (see Mohanty 1991, 55).

22. As is apparent in Wendt's acknowledged debt to his grandmother and her wisdom, in the interview cited here (Hereniko 1993).

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22

Bloody Mary Meets Lois-Ann Yamanaka: Imagining Hawaiian Locality, from *South Pacific* to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond

Rob Wilson

> and if especially
> those insistent mushrooming discourses
> on life for all Pacific
> spell genokamikaze through and through—
> then I'll gather up this debris; up, once
> all over again: for you, Island.
> —Russell Soaba, "Island: Ways of Immortal Folk"

"*South Pacific* will run forever!" Walter Winchell once remarked of t smarmy cold-war Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. But, from Suva Papua New Guinea to the local site of Bamboo Ridge in Hawaii, Pacifi based writers have challenged these Micheneresque U.S. national produ tions of Asian Pacific and indigenous cultures with local constructions place, sublanguages, and alternative grounds of identity. This essay count the global machinery of cultural texts like *South Pacific* and *Blue Hawaii* wi interior constructions of the Asia Pacific as place and identity and posit, the core, the turn within Asian/Pacific literary culture in Hawaii toward pressing and coalescing into some kind of *oppositional regionalism*. This Paci regionalism, at its most powerful reimagining of place, nation, and langua in Maori novels like Keri Hulme's *Bone People* (1983) and Patricia Grac *Potiki* (1986) as well as signal works of Hawaii's "local literature" like Milt