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Breath as Metaphor of Sovereignty and Connectedness in Pacific Island Poetry

Recent calls in island studies for a "coherent theory of islandness" (Hay 19) and "islandness as a commanding paradigm" (Baldacchino 279) challenge us to rethink the relationship between islands and theory. If islandness is an undertheorised condition, this is certainly not the result of European and American continental neglect toward islands but rather an effect of the way islands have long been claimed as empirical and conceptual supports for theory-building, based on their apparent lack of spatial extension and hence their availability to the elaboration of systems of thought, commerce, and government. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey has noted, "[i]slands have not only functioned as colonial or socio-political spaces of experiment, but have facilitated tremendous ecological, anthropological, and biological theory" ("The litany of islands" 29). Their strategic role in the spatial expansion of Western power around the globe has also contributed to, and in part been supported by, their strategic usefulness epistemologically, in the production of (Western) knowledge. This strategic value of islands, as DeLoughrey also points out, has depended (and continues to depend) on their being secured, militarily and politically as well as conceptually, as remote and isolated places. This is based on restriction and control of access and movement, variably involving removal and relocation of island populations, limiting islander mobility, and attempts "to erase islanders' migratory histories" ("The litany of islands" 26).

Calls for a renewed theorisation of islandness therefore inevitably have a strategic orientation of their own, in that their insistence on the recognition of islandness as a distinct condition coincides with islanders' postcolonial pursuit of sovereignty and recognition of the distinct cultural and political spaces that have emerged in the course of long histories of island settlement. Pete Hay indicates the strategic shift to be espoused by island studies when he observes that renewed interest in islands calls for theories of place that are capable of contesting visions of "globalization advancing inexorably over the planet" (31). This ties in with Arif Dirlik's argument that the challenge of place-based thinking is to go beyond theoretically granting places the capability to "appropriate for their own meanings the cultural meanings propagated by transnational communication companies" (38). For places to effectively contest the hegemony of space-driven models of economic, political and cultural development, according to Dirlik, requires

“the projection of places into spaces to create new structures of power, which may provide protection to places, because, rather than repudiate places in the name of abstractions, they incorporate places into their very constitution” (39). Place-based theories of islandness therefore must not only vindicate the precedence of place over space but seek, as Dirlik proclaims, “to reintegrate the two in new reorganizations of space—from below” (39).

Hay highlights the difficulty of disentangling islands as places from their spatial ramifications by identifying what he, intriguingly, calls three “faultlines within island studies” (20). Two of these contested areas refer to the difficulty of properly delimiting and stabilising islands, despite their seemingly obvious boundedness and isolation: the arbitrariness, on the one hand, of determining where the space belonging to an island ends and the rest of the world begins, and the concomitant futility of determining how far islanders’ sense of belonging may extend, on the other. The third “faultline,” dividing, according to Hay, natural scientists interested in “the reality of islands” (26) and “scholars working within cultural and literary studies paradigms,” who are more interested in “the ‘virtual’ status of the island as metaphor” (26), is closely related to the first two. The question of the “proper” representation of islands hinges on our conceptualisation of the constitutive relationship between islands as places and their function(s) in spatial imaginaries. Islands confront us most forcibly with the semiotic relationship between place and space precisely because the spatialisations they sustain are not readily evident. In this regard, Hay’s skepticism toward “perspectives that dismiss the physicality of islands whilst promoting the relevance of metaphorical abstractions” (29) is well taken, but his call for a “phenomenology of islands” implies recognition of a greater interdependence of “the reality of islands” and their metaphorical interpretations than his tracing of a faultline suggests.

Michel de Certeau offers a distinction of places and spaces that is useful for understanding the semiotic relationship between place and space and its cultural and political significance for indigenous island societies in particular. Place in this distinction refers to a particular material arrangement of things in a given order. “It ... excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location” and therefore, according to de Certeau, the “law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place: ... each [element is] situated in its ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines” (117). As a given order, which forms the material ground for everyday life, place is

therefore also, as Dirlik suggests, “the location ... where the social and the natural meet, where the production of nature by the social is not clearly distinguishable from the production of the social by the natural” (18). Space, on the other hand, refers to a composition of elements as a result of movements and activities within and between places. It is dependent on and actuated by these movements and activities, which de Certeau identifies as “the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it” (117). As such, space does not have the stability or singularity that characterises place. Quoting Maurice Merleau-Ponty, de Certeau points out that “there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences” (118).

This distinction suggests a semiotic relationship between place and space because the operations that are constitutive of space form a set of signifying practices that “produces ... a representation of places” (de Certeau 120) in relationship to each other. De Certeau emphasises this representational character of space when he suggests that “in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken” (117). The movements and activities that actuate space as a representation of places can be considered as metaphorical inasmuch as they assimilate particular places to other real, remembered, or imagined places. In their metaphorical nature, these operations express attitudes toward place as the ground of experience and insofar as they have a conventional coherence, they articulate a cultural worldview.

In considering place-based cultural representations of islands, the important thing is then not so much to avoid metaphorical interpretations as not to forget the metaphorical nature of any geographical vocabulary and its groundedness in specific ways of making use of places. Social life and politics unfold in the interplay between a place as a given order and the spatialising activities it sustains, which in turn transform and develop the place. As de Certeau points out, this interplay became increasingly prescriptive in the colonial elaboration of Western modernity, as spatial representations became seemingly independent of the organised activities that underpinned them. The chief example of this is the map from which the itineraries of commercial and military expeditions that generated it have been removed, “to form the tableau of a ‘state’ of geographical knowledge, push[ing] away into its prehistory or into its posterity ... the operations of which it is the result or the necessary condition” (de Certeau 121). The effects of this development of Western cartography are a curtailing of the metaphorical interplay between given places and their spatialising

actuations, as well as the attribution to spatial representations qualities that naturally adhere to the materiality of places, reflecting the commodifying worldview of capitalism. In the process, as Dirlik notes, “places [and, one might add, particularly islands as places] were marginalized in a hegemonic consensus over the location of significant political activity at supraplace levels, which in its derogation of places differed little from the consignment of places to ultimate oblivion by the motions of capital” (19).

Such a reductive perception of places contrasts with indigenous worldviews expressed by Pacific Islanders, which contest the hegemony of map-based representations of the island world and emphasise the metaphorical character of island-based concepts of space, derived from specific activities and concrete places. Emphasising the groundedness of indigenous development in a given natural and cultural environment, Manulani Aluli Meyer thus observes: “Our cultural as well as physical geography is the foundation of our creativity, of our problem solving, of our knowledge building” (129). As French geographer Joël Bonnemaïson points out, such a place-based worldview differs from Western geographical representations, which conceive the meaning of places in terms of more abstract operations articulated in scientific discourse: “Such a vision is not expressed by means of a constructed discourse or ideology but through images and metaphors that give rise to thoughts and representations” (2). Bonnemaïson’s observation echoes Meyer’s identification of “[l]and, sky, and ocean [as] the home of metaphors that [Hawaiians] continually draw on” (129).

This continuity of metaphorical interpretation in indigenous worldviews is a characteristic of the “connectedness” that, as Hay points out, “describes the island condition better than isolation” (23) and lends it a particular temporal dimension, grounding the “mapping” of islands in cultural histories of settlement. Epeli Hau’ofa describes this time/space continuum as “ecological time” (“Pasts to Remember” 459), which situates human activities in a cyclical relationship with a natural environment that also bears the mnemonic imprints of ancestral activities. The ecological orientation toward land, sky, and ocean therefore acknowledges indebtedness to the gifts of nature as well as to genealogy and an expectation of human activities to cultivate the physical environment as both a natural and a cultural resource. This cultural attitude is expressed, as Hau’ofa also indicates, in the way in which Oceanic languages “locate the past as ahead or in front of us ... on our landscapes in front of our very eyes” (466). More

generally, it is expressed in a metaphorical view of language as a cultural resource itself which, according to Teresia Teaiwa, characterises “many of the native linguistic traditions of Oceania” (29):

One word can have many layers of meaning: the Hawaiians call this *kaona*. Thus, a limited vocabulary does not constitute a limited worldview; the *kaona* principle enriches, makes complex and versatile a limited vocabulary. No word is disposable—if the singular referent it ‘originally’ represented is no longer, then the word is recycled to represent a new referent. But more often than not, words will have multiple significations in a single enunciation. (29)

Such an awareness of the malleability or elasticity of language accounts for what David Welchman Gegeo calls “the portability of place” (495) in indigenous Pacific epistemologies, whose complex connotations of rootedness or source can be stretched to encompass new situations, without therefore relinquishing their home in a particular physical and cultural location.

In their introduction to a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* on “Native Pacific Cultural Studies,” Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui relate this flexibility of place-based vocabularies to the particular sense of rootedness “on the move” that “Pacific Islanders have enshrined ... in cosmologies and performance, as well as in seafaring technologies and dynamic cartographies” (316). Drawing on the traditional Carolinian method of “triangulating among moving islands in a fluidic pathway,” they “suggest that it might serve as a tactical figure for indigenous political and cultural struggles” (317). In doing so, they acknowledge Hau’ofa’s influential description of the Pacific as “a sea of islands,” which contests what he calls “the smallness view of Oceania” (“Our Sea of Islands” 36) that is fixated on islands separated by watery distances. The focus on the sea as the arena of historical activities that connect islands in complex relationships, Diaz and Kauanui point out, establishes the canoe as a paradigmatic metaphor in Pacific spatial imaginaries. Grounded in the literal sense in which, from a seafaring perspective, the canoe is the “stable point from which one gauges one’s position” (317) among islands whose positions relative to each other are in flux, it also lends itself to a different organisation of what in another epistemological tradition might be conceived of as a “field” of knowledge. Thus, according to Diaz and Kauanui, “Pacific studies [too] can be likened to a canoe” (322).

DeLoughrey, in a chapter entitled “Vessels of the Pacific: An Ocean in

the Blood," "traces the ways in which the Pacific voyaging canoe has been utilized by agents of colonialism and indigenous sovereignty" (*Routes and Roots* 99) to promote "contiguous forms of Pacific regionalism" (100). In her analysis, these competing discourses overlap in the use of the image of the voyaging vessel to articulate the idea of ocean-going craft conquering a feminised water-body and the idea of male bloodstreams circulating through the vessels of an expanding yet closed ethnic body. DeLoughrey shows how the notion of Anglo-Saxon seafaring blood, which served to naturalise and legitimise an imperialist enterprise of colonisation (117-18), has been appropriated by Pacific Islanders to reclaim suppressed indigenous histories of voyaging and regional kinship since at least Sir Peter Buck's (Te Rangi Hiroa's) *Vikings of the Sunrise* (1938), a text which sought to inspire confidence and solidarity in Polynesians facing contemporary challenges (DeLoughrey 136). Accounts like Buck's can be read as postcolonial appropriations, countering the hegemony of colonial narratives and preparing the way "(blood) vessels of sovereignty have been used to signify an indigenous regionalism in contemporary literary texts" (DeLoughrey 127). Yet as rewritings of colonial narratives, as DeLoughrey also points out, such texts tend to "reiterate the gendered logic of national belonging" (98) and the regionalism they promote tends to privilege "metaphors of movement and fluidity that ultimately are embedded in the etymology and semantics of the term diaspora itself: sperm and blood" (100).

Following a suggestion by Diaz and Kauanui that notions of "race and blood" should be considered as "imposed categories" (318) in discourses of Pacific indigeneity, I would like to explore the possibility of associating the importance of the canoe with another bodily image, which figures more prominently in indigenous epistemologies and in conjunction with the canoe renders a different spatial or regional imaginary and a different notion of sovereignty than the trope of bodily fluids, which tends to emphasise circulation within (and between) ethnically circumscribed social bodies. I turn to the metaphor of the breath and argue that the recognition of its literal and metaphorical importance in Pacific worldviews underpins the use of the canoe metaphor to promote the value of an island-based concept of breathing space in three recent collections of poetry: Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard's *Alchemies of Distance*, Robert Sullivan's *Star Waka*, and Teweiariki Teairo's *Waa in Storms*.

Breathing forms part of the phenomenology of a Hawaiian

conceptualisation of knowledge, according to Meyer, who in her chart of Hawaiian perceptual terminology associates the sense of smell with the activity of "breath[ing] in" (131). By including in the relevant vocabulary words referring to breathing in through the nose and the mouth, Meyer suggests that the sense of smell may itself be part of a more encompassing sensory experience and that breathing in as such may be a mode of perception mediating knowledge. Accordingly, Meyer points out, "[b]reathing into [a person's] mouth is one way knowledge was given and is a metaphor for how Hawaiians engage in knowledge maintenance" (132). Attention to breathing thus concretises a conceptualisation of knowledge that emphasises awareness of a relationship with a living environment, interdependence, and causation. As such, it is also associated with the location of understanding or intelligence in the centre of the body, in the stomach region. Hawaiians, according to Meyer, call *na 'au*, which—similar to the Maori word *ngākau*, according to Anne Salmond (240-41)—refers to both the intestines and the heart (Meyer 143). As Meyer explains, this location of intelligence in the viscera expresses an understanding that effective knowledge involves awareness of feelings and affective responses, which are experienced as qualities of breathing.

Albert Wendt has related this sense of awareness to an Oceanic concept of space, *va*, which emphasises connectedness that may not be evident to the eye but may manifest itself in the experience of breathing. Wendt paraphrases the meaning of the Samoan concept *va* as "the Space-Between-All-Things which defines us and makes us part of the Unity-that-is-All" (181). Quoting Wendt, Paul Sharrad indicates that this concept of space has a perceptual basis in the epigastric area of the body that is also the centre of breathing: "*Va* is relationship, not objects, it is the spirit core (*moa*, centre) of our body that lies in the space between: 'not quite in the heart and it's not quite in the belly either'" (Sharrad 193). Designating a centre in a bodily as well as a broader spatial sense, the meaning of *moa* in connection with the concept of *va* seems similar to the Hawaiian "idea of *na 'auao* (enlightened stomach)" which, according to Meyer, refers to "a cosmic center point" (144) in the form of centred relationships, including ancestral relationships. In an interview with June Ellis, Wendt explains that "*Va* and *Gafa* [genealogies] express the same connections: people and space and time. ... The space between us is not empty; it forms relationships. Genealogies, *gafa*, convey the same thing" (Ellis 55). Meyer's observation that the use of breathing as a metaphor for knowledge maintenance "is

deeply embedded in other, in elder, in spirit" (132) suggests that breath concretises this dynamic sense of connection. As such, it may lend itself as a metaphor to express the circular time/space continuum that, according to Hau'ofa, characterises the ecological worldviews of Oceania. Breathing in this sense is associated with an acknowledgment of the presence and precedence of other life and recognition of its influence on one's own. This sense of breath as something to be respected as also a property of others, and in some situations a sign of their authority, may explain its association with ideas of sovereignty in Hawaiian, where *ea*, according to Mary Pukui's and Samuel Elbert's dictionary, means "sovereignty, rule, independence" as well as "life, breath, vapor, gas, breeze, spirit" (34). Sovereignty, in this understanding, seems to imply mutuality and its preservation to require the cultivation or protection of breathing space in an encompassing sense.

II.

Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard emphasises the importance of breath as a guiding metaphor in *Alchemies of Distance*, where it provides the connecting line throughout the introductory essay that she calls "a kind of genealogy" (11). Associating poetry with the need to breathe, "underst[anding] poetry as oxygen" (11), she explains the cultural significance of breath in relation to a concept of space embedded in "Polynesian creation narratives, [where] breath (or fragrance, its cousin) precedes the creation of light" (18) and thus the visible world, and to the Samoan concept of *va* (20), space constituted by relationships. For Sinavaiana-Gabbard, poetry is an art of creating and cultivating breathing space, a way of responding to stifling situations and of transforming "distance(s)—of space, time or the heart— ... into deeper proximities, other ways of being connected" (12). As a metaphor for poetry, breath also concretises the metaphorical view of language Teiwa associates with "native linguistic traditions of Oceania" (29), which takes and transforms meanings from language in place while remaining mindful of its sustainability as a cultural resource. Sinavaiana-Gabbard relates this to a more conventional association of poetry with orality but particularises this notion by referring it to Polynesian oral traditions of "talking story, fragrance, and breath—transmigrating ... onto the printed page" (15) and by linking it with the image of the canoe as connecting and world-enlarging vehicle, carried by "the moving line of breath—of poetry" (12). The twenty poems of her collection appear as metaphorical canoes, sailing on the poet's breath. Each poem has a different spatial appearance on the

page, drawing attention to connecting space, just as each poem responds to the presence or precedence of a relationship.

Alchemies of Distance is organised in four sequences according to the metaphor of a journey with "departure," "traveling party," "lament," and "reunion," emphasising a cycle of separation and (re)connection, imaginatively forging new relationships and bringing them back to the fabric of old ones. The metaphor of breath allows the poet to make connections with distant places and to relate poetry to the cross-cultural communication of music, as in the poem "adobe duet," which evokes an encounter in a landscape reminiscent of the American Southwest. Dedicated to the deceased son of a musician, the poem joins a mother in

her grief / a firey stream
poured into the ear of a
small clay flute / her breath
swirling there / ocarina exhaling (63),

and in departing transforms the experience into a memory sustained by the image of a canoe:

we hasten to follow
this melody home / we climb into mist
& the breathing of streams
we climb onto feathers / on the back
of her song / then rise from deep canyon
sailing out above trees. (64)

Teweariki Teairo likewise organises his collection, *Waa in Storms*, on a spatial metaphor, a cycle of "waves" entitled "Pond Storms," "Lagoon Storms," "Ocean Storms," and "Calm Again," emphasising the importance of centred relationships. The sequence evokes the value of breathing space, as Teairo uses the metaphor of storms to refer to problems weighing down on relationships at family, local, and regional levels, resulting in separation, isolation, and anguish. Like Sinavaiana-Gabbard, Teairo points out that he wrote his poems during "a particularly difficult period of [his] life" (x); the poems are especially focused on the value of relationships. The central importance of cultivating relationships is emphasised at the beginning of the collection in the image of a formal garlanding of its readers and invoked in other poems that acknowledge the presence or precedence of someone familiar, such as a family member or mentor to whom the poet pays his respects. As vehicles for the cultivation of relationships as well as in their design to weather metaphorical storms, Teairo's poems are likened

to canoes (*waa*), suggesting a conceptual affinity between the canoe as vehicle propelled by wind and the poem as vehicle for the poet's voice carried on the breath.

The figures of the canoe and voice represent connections that are not directly visible but nevertheless have a spatial shape. Both Teairo and Sinavaiana-Gabbard foreground specific connections in many of their poems. Both date their poems, without arranging them chronologically, and indicate for most of them the place where they were composed. This precise location is coupled in many poems with a specific address or dedication. Reading the poems thus becomes a movement back and forth between different (island) locations, imaginatively following each poem as it establishes or acknowledges a relationship, and the collections as a whole constitute a space made up of many intersecting pathways. Both poets, but Teairo in particular, use the graphic arrangement of their poems to indicate that connections, although invisible, are not to be imagined as abstract lines connecting dots but have a spatial extension and changing shapes, similar to the pathway of a canoe negotiating wind and currents or the quality of a voice modulated by changes in breathing. In the final section of his collection, "Calm Again," Teairo includes a rare undated poem entitled "steady *waa*," which sums up the value of centred relationships captured in the metaphorical coming together of poem, canoe and voice:

this
 my *waa*
 of learning
 it is strong
 truly balanced as it should be
 it is anchored so very strongly
 very firmly
 to the sky
 the land
 the sea
 all

(89)

The canoe looks stationary, symmetrically balancing learning, associated with ancestral and mentor relationships, and relationships with sky, land, and sea. At the same time, reading orients it in space, with sky, land, and sea "firmly" in front.

The metaphorical clusters of poem, canoe, and voice also centre the relational worldview of Robert Sullivan's collection, *Star Waka*, but while

the underlying principle is similar, Sullivan's exploration of the metaphorical possibilities of sustaining an all-encompassing worldview by way of the canoe (*waka*) metaphor is more ambitious and far-reaching, especially in its association of the reclamation of sovereignty with the restoration of breathing space. Assembled in a numbered sequence, Sullivan's 100 poems, likened to *waka*, evoke a giant fleet, but the *waka* also brings to mind the image of a shuttle in a loom, weaving the ramifying connections that hold together an Oceanic worldview in an intricate tapestry. Yet the image of a tapestry with its connotations of flatness and covering does not quite fit the spatial imaginary Sullivan evokes, which celebrates the space-between constituted by a myriad relationships and is therefore more aptly described in terms that Bonnemaison derived from his studies of Oceanic canoe societies: "a complex network, a flexible and reticulated system of places and roads of alliance, weaving nexus upon nexus around various places of confluence, which themselves are connected with spatial configurations farther away" (8).

Sullivan's collection can be read as a single poem, charting the voyage of the eponymous "star *waka*" past 2000 lines, and as such it represents a space/time continuum held together by the constant renewal of connections. The 2000 lines of the poem signify spatial extension as well as time, referring to years and genealogies. *Star Waka* thus recreates the "Pacific [as] a far-flung society" (70), reaching into the past of navigational histories as far as Hawaiiki and out to an imagined future of "spacecraft *waka*" (50), bringing oral traditions as well as textual and electronic archives into a vast and yet intimate conversational space. Significantly, while taking part of his inspiration from Western literature, Sullivan does not organise his poem on the model of an epic, with a single narrative voice and hero: "There is no Odysseus to lead this fleet— / not even Maui who sent *waka* to their petrification" (70). Instead, like Sinavaiana-Gabbard and Teairo, he gives each poem a different shape, mirroring the distinct and dynamic spatial nature of individual relationships that fill and animate the vastness that Wendt describes as "the Space-Between-All-Things which defines us and makes us part of the Unity-that-is-All" (181). As a vehicle that holds together a space of constantly moving relationships, the canoe therefore appears in many guises, including Sullivan's old car in "Honda *Waka*" (8), computers in "*waka rorohiko*" (59), a TV program, "*waka hui*" (63), the Civic cinema in Auckland (49), books, and of course the vessels that brought Sullivan's Maori and European ancestors to Aotearoa

(89). Anything can become a *waka* that connects, down to “molecules of waka, powered by breeze” (62), and *waka* can be found everywhere: a milk carton, for instance, becomes a *waka* by virtue of its Waitangi Day expiry date (65). In effect, *waka* become an “attitude” (85), an expression of “the psyche of [Pacific] cultures, [their] closeness” (46), which in Sullivan’s collection permeates every aspect of everyday life, like breathing.

Indeed, the spatial imaginary that nourishes the metaphorical attitude at work in *Star Waka* may be described by the image of space itself as breathing. This space refuses to submit to any contour but constantly shifts, expands, contracts, and always connects, as Sullivan suggests, with startling effect, by moving from a vision of “spacecraft *waka* ... singing waiata to the spheres” (50) to a picture of the “emanations from the breathing of [his] daughter” (51), sleeping in the intimacy of the family bedroom. Breathing freely as a sign of empowering connectedness thus ultimately appears as a metaphor of sovereignty in *Star Waka*, expressed in the celebration of the poet’s sense of connectedness and capability, manifest in the sustained power of his voice, and in the imaginative commitment to the restoration of an indigenous universe in the form of relationships concretised in the image of the breath and sustained by the metaphor of the canoe. This association of sovereignty with breath becomes increasingly explicit toward the end of *Star Waka*. “Waka 78 An historical line” represents the onslaught of colonisation on the Maori in a single 25-line sentence: “In the New Zealand Wars ... the Empire took the waka” (87), literally leaving the reader out of breath in its expression of the destruction of indigenous sovereignty associated with the loss of ancestral *waka*. The last three lines of the poem acknowledge the resulting marginalisation but also express the resilience of the indigenous worldview that underpins Sullivan’s imagination: “The iwi hid the old ones / we have today. Or built them again. / They had the psychological template” (87). “Waka 100,” the last poem, finally brings the collection to the threshold of a “New World” (110) and the recovery of “a culture / that has held its breath / through the age of Dominion” (111). This is captured in the resurrection of *waka* that “rise—rise into the air—rise to the breath— / rise above valleys into light and recognition” (111), invoking breath as a cosmic gift associated with divinity:

holder of the compasses—
wind compass, solar compass,
compass encompassing known
currents, breather of the first breath

in every breathing creature,
guide the waka between islands,
between years and eyes of the Pacific
out of mythologies to consciousness. (111)

III.

The metaphorical association of sovereignty with breath and with what Samoans call “nurtur[ing] the *va*” (Sharrad 248) has particular significance to Oceania where, as the three poets suggest, this resonates with deep cultural attitudes toward family, elders, history, and the environment. But it is also relevant to a globalising world in that it can influence our imaginative attitude toward islands, and by extension, toward other places as well. To people whose livelihood depends on the sea, islands may quite literally represent breathing space in the sense of a place to call home, as Hau’ofa suggests when he notes that “[o]ur natural landscapes ... are maps of movements, pauses, and more movements” (“Pasts to Remember” 466). The presence of the sea indeed seems to accentuate the value of breathing space insofar as it not only reminds us of the fact that the ocean sustains the atmosphere and photosynthesising environment that is a condition of terrestrial life, but in its very vastness and perpetual motion naturally limits and threatens breathing space as a resource. Islanders cannot afford to forget the periodic visitation by storms, which temporarily force them to seek shelter. At the same time, the limited space for settlement on islands imposes natural limitations on the place anyone can claim for their home and oblige people to accommodate the potentially contesting claims of their neighbours, as Vilsoni Hereniko pointedly observes: “The sea of Oceania may be vast, but no one I know is fighting for a piece of the ocean to build a house on” (167-68). As is well known, the forces of colonialism, nationalism, and globalisation in the Pacific have exacerbated pressure on island breathing space in the form of military and commercial encroachment, pollution, and rising water levels. This suggests what Gegeo calls the “implosion of place” and a concomitant tendency of “space ... to explode” (498 italics removed); a result of over-population and the disruption of customary mobility. These effects of globalisation accentuate the focus of indigenous struggles for sovereignty on the protection of breathing space, as Meyer suggests when she describes the effects of colonial education in Hawai’i as a form of “carbon monocultural poisoning” (125). At the same time they emphasise the inextricable association of these struggles

with respect for the sovereignty of the natural environment and the need to strengthen cooperative bonds across regional boundaries.

The three poets address these issues and indicate the relevance of the restoration of breathing space in the wake of global pressures. Thus Sinavaiana-Gabbard associates her poetic quest for breathing space with her relocation from Samoa to Honolulu, "away from the toxic milieu of colonial isolation," emphasising the importance of regional connectedness that provides "[s]aving distance, perspective, breath" (12). Sullivan laments the destruction of the global environment, which threatens to devastate island worlds in "Waka 57 El Nino Waka": "El Nino is blood from our mother. She bleeds / internally; then from ocean into air in a maelstrom" (64). And in the poem "49 (environment I)," he asks, "will the next makers of waka / live in submarines ...?" (53), suggesting that global warming may not leave any remaining place for a breath of oxygen. Similarly, Teaero, in "natural meal" (62-63), denounces corporate greed that gobbles up the island world, cyclone and all, and in the poem, "What is ...," he pithily lists the effects of global development on island settlement:

rising rising rising?
 global warming
 population
 cost of living
 expectations
 blood pressure
 unemployment
 inflation
 stress
 temper. (69)

Teaero acknowledges the visitation by storms as an ordinary aspect of island life, a confrontation of the always longer breath of the natural environment, "bursting into our pacific lives / from across the eternal ocean / breathing restless hurricanes" (4). The storm thus also provides him with a natural metaphor for the social problems that compress the island breathing space:

Spare a thought for ourselves
 All tense and taut
 Tightly wound up
 Ready to explode or is it implode?
 Upon ourselves or is it others?
 In a stormy mess. (61)

Perhaps the most important implication of the association of sovereignty with breath, however, is its emphasis on the cultivation of connections and the negotiation of political and cultural boundaries. Herein lies the principal difference between conceptualisations of sovereignty in terms of blood and those imagined in terms of breath; while the metaphor of blood emphasises interiority, incorporation, and sameness, the metaphor of breath puts the emphasis on kinship and a relationship to others, implying the recognition of and respect for difference. As a metaphor for sovereignty in a sea of islands, attention to the breath thus literalises a reckoning with the presence and precedence of other agents, and an awareness of the need to negotiate boundaries. To say that such an attitude underpins the writing of the three poets is not to deny that the image of blood also forms part of their metaphorical repertoire, which it does, but to suggest that the relational values associated with the image of breath take precedence. Sullivan conveys this most strikingly when he turns the idea of "blood relations" into an image of articulation, of "veins touch[ing] veins" (109). Speaking of sovereignty, Sullivan exclaims, "we are peoples united by more / than genes, by more than the tongues / of our ancestors reciting names / of great ones" (46), pointing to a psychic closeness, which he elsewhere punningly refers to as "a waka attitude" (85).

As a metaphor of sovereignty, the image of breath also highlights the cultural ability to negotiate boundaries, a point Joakim Peter emphasises in his study of Chuukese travellers, where he notes that "strong clan connections and trade partnerships must be maintained for basic life support" (263). This he explains requires attention to "boundaries [that] require negotiation" (262). Travelling, in Peter's analysis, "can be seen as a series of purposeful negotiations and conversions of unfamiliar and unfriendly forces to serve a defined purpose or a set of purposes" (262). This also applies to the metaphorical itineraries charted by the three poets, which foreground cultural boundaries with an invitation to familiarisation, notably by including words in indigenous languages and assisting the non-native reader with glossaries or references. Including twelve poems in Kiribatese among the 64 of his collection, Teaero evokes the experience of communicating across linguistic and ethnic differences in "Wordless games." In that poem the speaker watches a Tuvaluan and an I-Kiribati-Fijian boy at play and observes "You do not know / Each other's language / Yet you talk together / Communicate nicely / Understand each other / So well" (93). His question, "What connects you so?" (93), draws attention to

a relatedness concretised by the image of the breath and its grounding in histories of Pacific settlement and migration whose patterns of similarity and difference, as John Terrell (122-51) has shown, are not explicable in terms of hegemonic models of assimilation or diffusion.

The affirmation of non-hegemonic dialogues distinguishes the metaphorical experiments of all three of these poets. This possibility is based on the metaphorical grounding of language in particular island worlds. This supports its conceptualisation as a shareable resource, which links these poems to indigenous epistemologies and linguistic traditions. Metaphor in this view does not lead to abstraction but expresses an attitude that recognises its relationship to other, potentially rivalling, claims. In the final section of *Star Waka*, Sullivan suggests this in a sequence of poems (Waka 84-90, 92-96), most of which begin with "I am." Successively, a series of speakers including the ancestral navigator Kupe, an anonymous English settler, Odysseus, Maui, Hawaiki, Tanemahuta, and Tangaroa step forward and each make a bold claim of sovereignty. Individually, these claims contest one another, but as Sullivan steers his *Star Waka* past them, they emerge, to borrow Diaz's and Kauanui's metaphor, as "moving islands," in view of which the poet triangulates his own location, encouraging the reader to do likewise.

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