

IDENTIFYING THE VĀ:
SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY PASIFIKA CREATIVE WRITING

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
IN
PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

MAY 2017

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Keywords: space, spatiality, vā, Pacific literature, identity, diaspora

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the support of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies. The Center first opened its doors to me as a student assistant in 2011 and has since nurtured my growth as a scholar and a woman of Oceania through my time as both a student and an employee. For my scholarly career and beyond, the halls and people of CPIS have been a home for me and have profoundly shaped the ways I engage with place, space, and indigeneity.

ABSTRACT

The concept of space is fundamental to language and cognition and is uniquely organized within and across different cultures of the world. This thesis investigates the cultural concept of *vā* (space; the space between) as arising out of Samoan and Tongan cultural contexts. It also explores an associated cultural practice called *teu le vā* (Samoan) or *tauhi vā* (Tongan), both of which connote the nurturing of space between peoples and things. I tease out the ways in which these concepts are made concrete and active in the day-to-day lives of Tongan and Samoan persons both within their island homes and abroad, particularly through the uses of language. More than being prominent in writings throughout the region, *vā/tā* can be applied as a methodological approach to reading Tongan and Samoan literature in ways that reveal the significance of space-time, the concept of a space between, and discourses on identity, in writings that embody these concepts but do not explicitly refer to them. I argue that *vā* can be used as an ontologically and epistemologically rooted tool – or framework – for doing critical scholarship with literature of these places – scholarship that helps us read space, place, and identity. As I track the uses of these concepts among a number of scholars and writers of Pacific literature throughout the region, I also search for concepts emerging out of other Oceanic cultures that resonate with Samoan and Tongan conceptualizations of space, time, and sociality through *vā*. Having engaged with the Samoan and Tongan conceptual frameworks of *vā* as emerging from its respective cultures and literatures, I test the applicability of the concept as a framework for reading the creative writing of three Pasifika poets based in New Zealand.

INTRODUCTION

Space and time are foundational concepts for almost everything we think and do.

David Harvey

The *space between* is a prevalent metaphor in the Pacific, including within its scope indigenous concepts such as *vā* (in Samoan and Tongan culture) and *wā* (in Māori and Hawaiian culture). It has been referred to as an intermediary site — a liminal zone marked not only by tension and transformation but also by confluences and connections.

A Marata Tamaira

Since the emergence of Pacific Islander writers in the 1960s and 70s, Pacific literature has been engaging in the process of writing back to the colonial center — to colonial forces, structures, and processes (Ashcroft et al. 2002; Fresno-Calleja 2012; Wendt 1995). This process particularly involves addressing the years of misrepresentation and exploitation of Oceanic cultures by outsiders. As island nations began gaining their independence during the postcolonial transition period, many voices within Pacific literature turned towards addressing the active and ongoing wounds of neocolonialism in its many forms. The era of colonialism as it once was is over, but the nature of such a structure is that it changes and adapts. The process of internalizing the damaging nature of colonialism can have devastating consequences while simultaneously working against internal — and external — processes of decolonization. Threaded throughout

the writing of contemporary Pasifika creative writers is a theme of resistance to the internalization of colonial processes and forces, addressing the political sides of neocolonialism, yet also taking it beyond to explore its effects on self and community. Inherently divisive in nature, colonialism and its “fruit” (Va‘ai 1999, 4), neocolonialism have facilitated worlds and identities characterized by binaries and multiplicities.¹

Negotiating space, place, and identity in an era of globalization and neocolonialism is a theme that has grown to characterize a large scope of contemporary Pacific literature. Within this literature, writers have begun to articulate the layers of a space between with the “tension(s) and transformation(s),” and the “confluence(s) and connections” that converge within such a space. The theme of a space between is articulated through the voices of a number of writers throughout the region, particularly voices arising from a central Pacific cultural context, such as Samoa and Tonga, or writing in settler-colonial locales such as Hawai‘i, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Fiji, and the Continental United States. These writers intimately pen themselves into the *vā* — the Samoan and Tongan concept of a space between — embodying within their work its foundational nature. Contemporary Pacific literature has grown to speak to the identities and spaces that continue to be traversed and navigated by Pacific Islanders both in the region and abroad.

This thesis argues that the concept of *vā* can be used as a culturally grounded tool — or framework — for doing critical scholarship with Pasifika poetry; scholarship that helps us read space, place, and identity. I explore contemporary manifestations of *vā* through Pacific literature, particularly creative writing, and its relationships to discourses on sociality, identity, and decolonial praxis. I discuss the cultural concepts of *vā* (space) as arising out of Samoan and

¹ Here I am not referring to the binary of an “us” versus “them” mindset, though that has certainly been an aspect of colonialism on behalf of both the colonized and the colonizer, but rather to binaries that exist within the individual.

Tongan cultural contexts. I also explore an associated cultural practice called *teu le vā* (Samoa) or *tauhi vā* (Tonga), both of which connote the nurturing of space between peoples and things. I tease out the ways in which these concepts are made concrete and active in the day-to-day lives of Tongan and Samoan persons both within their island homes and abroad. I use Giovanni Bennardo's foundational cultural model of radiality as developed through an analysis of Tongan spatial language and apply it to concepts of *vā* and the practice of *tauhi vā* to illustrate the integral relationships between spatial cognition in language and sociospatial relations as understood and performed in Tongan culture. Furthermore, in a comparative investigation of lexical similarities in related languages throughout Polynesia (such as Samoan, Māori, Hawaiian, Tahitian, and Marquesan), I argue that *vā* is potentially foundational for multiple cultures within Polynesia. More than being prominent in writings throughout the region, *vā* can be applied as a methodological approach to reading Tongan and Samoan literature in ways that reveal the significance of space-time, and the concept of a space between, in writings that embody these concepts but do not explicitly refer to them. As I track the uses of these concepts among a number of scholars and writers of Pacific literature throughout the region, I also search for concepts emerging out of other Oceanic cultures that resonate with Samoan and Tongan conceptualizations of space and sociality through *vā*. Having engaged with the Samoan and Tongan conceptual frameworks of *vā* as emerging from its respective cultures and literatures, I test the applicability of the concept as a framework for reading creative writing of Oceania.

The potential of an exploration such as this poses a variety of intriguing questions: How is space understood and conceptualized generally in Samoan and Tongan cultures? How are the concepts of *vā* and a space between understood and articulated by Samoan, Tongan, and other writers, scholars, and literary critics throughout the region? How might the concept of *vā* be used

as a methodological tool for critically engaging with Pacific literature? How are creative writers using contemporary understandings of *vā* as a method for problematizing authenticity and articulating the fluidity of indigenous identity? How are these understandings being used to negotiate identities and express connections across time and space? How does the concept of *vā* relate to conceptual frameworks for space and time in other Oceanic cultures, either in language or in literature?

This thesis explores the above questions through an engagement with the works of three female Pasifika poets — Selina Tustitala Marsh, Karlo Mila, and Grace Teuila Taylor. A complex endeavor such as this is best pursued through use of interdisciplinary, comparative, and decolonial methods that are positioned within the field of Pacific Islands Studies.

A Place for Space & Literature

This work is positioned within a series of related scholarly and creative conversations that are informed by a relatively recent shift in the field of Pacific Islands Studies towards processes of decolonization and indigenization. In light of this decolonial process, scholars within the field have been attempting to refine and articulate a theoretical fluency, a philosophy of scholarship, and decolonized methodologies that are uniquely centered within the region. Significant conversations taking place within this process include debates about interdisciplinarity, complex and contested notions of insider/outsider, the privileging of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, representations of Pacific Islander identities and cultures, and developing methods for critical, creative, and reflexive scholarship with and for Pacific Islander peoples, places, and communities. The field of Pacific studies has been influenced by postcolonial studies and the larger postmodern turn in academia, and as such my work is necessarily positioned within and

briefly engages with these broader discourses. As a reader of Pacific literature, my work will necessarily engage with themes of postcolonialism and decolonization. While the “post” in postcolonial is contested and negotiable, literatures from colonized regions of the globe are often described as postcolonial writings and literatures of Oceania are similarly placed within this category.

Because the growth of the field of Pacific studies has occurred simultaneously with political decolonization in the region, it is difficult to discuss distinguishing characteristics of the field without also referring to its inherent need to decolonize and indigenize. Much of what we understand Pacific studies to be remains “the fruit of western scholarship and research” (Thaman 2003, 2). In her critical and influential essay, “Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education,” influential Tongan poet and educator Professor Konai Helu Thaman (2003) offers her perspective on the need to decolonize the field. She writes,

For me, decolonizing Pacific studies is important because (1) it is about acknowledging and recognizing the dominance of western philosophy, content, and pedagogy in the lives and the education of Pacific peoples; (2) it is about valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world, particularly those rooted in the indigenous cultures of Oceanic peoples; and (3) it is about developing a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive. (Thaman 2003, 3)

Here Thaman illustrates, with her last point in particular, that developing Pacific studies into a distinguished field with a new philosophy of scholarship and research is necessarily intertwined with its decolonization and vice-versa.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's groundbreaking work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012) delves deeply into the dominance of western philosophy, content, and pedagogy and the implications it has for indigenous communities. Smith explains the ways in which western research, science, and knowledge have been used to deconstruct and dehumanize indigenous peoples as the "Other." Research and its links to western knowledge have engendered a "site of struggle" over knowledge production and legitimization, creating a particular relationship for indigenous peoples that continues to be problematic (41). She writes,

Research...continues relentlessly and brings with it a new wave of exploration, discovery, exploitation and appropriation. Researchers enter communities armed with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets... No matter how appalling their behaviours, how insensitive and offensive their personal actions may be, their acts and intentions are always justified as being for the "good of mankind." Research of this nature *on* indigenous peoples is still justified by the ends rather than the means... (25–26; emphasis in original)

The hidden agendas and disguised intentions that Smith describes here characterize the way scholarship has been, and often continues to be, carried out in the region — especially with indigenous communities. With the intent to claim, appropriate, transform, dehumanize, and "civilize," research of this nature has generated suspicion of the academy and the peoples engaged with it among many indigenous communities throughout Oceania. Similarly, Thaman emphasizes Pacific studies has been "constituted, defined, and perpetuated as an integral part of western knowledge and modern social science" (2003, 5). Smith and Thaman draw explicit links between scholarship in higher education and its domination by imperial western hegemony and

why this necessitates a paradigm shift in Pacific studies specifically, and in scholarly practice and research methodologies generally.

In his 1995 article, “Rethinking Pacific Islands Studies,” Terence Wesley-Smith emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary scholarship within the field, the accompanying critical process of reflexively engaging with such scholarship, and the valuing of indigenous voices and epistemologies. His call for interdisciplinary study is also echoed by other scholars of the field, and resonates with three prescriptive characteristics of Pacific studies outlined by Teresia Teaiwa (2010). She writes, “Pacific studies shall be interdisciplinary, account for indigenous ways of knowing, and involve comparative analysis” (2010, 209–210). Wesley-Smith explicitly links the process of becoming interdisciplinary to processes of decolonization, explaining that, “In a sense, decolonization is an inherent part of the business of becoming interdisciplinary, in that this process requires the critical scrutiny of established modes of inquiry” (1995, 129). Teaiwa also discusses the reflexive nature of being interdisciplinary, citing William Chapman (1985) in emphasizing that Pacific studies has value for the humanities and social sciences by way of providing a space for “conscientious interdisciplinary engagement” with established modes of inquiry and knowledge production (2010, 210). In threading together Wesley-Smith and Teaiwa’s interdisciplinary and reflexive characteristics of the field, we are brought back to Thaman’s first step in the process of its decolonization. All of these illustrate recognition of the need for what Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1986) calls “decolonizing the mind,” a phenomenon that drastically affects postcolonial theory, scholarship, and literature.

Also in Wesley-Smith and Teaiwa’s prescriptions for the field is the need to account for indigenous Pacific voices and indigenous ways of knowing. When compared with Thaman’s passage above, this feature of Pacific studies directly correlates to her second decolonial step: the

valuing of alternative ways of knowing. There is great danger in perpetuating the academic imperialism that has already plagued indigenous scholarship if there is not a commitment to indigenous epistemologies (Teaiwa 2010, 210; see also Efi 2005; Hereniko 2000; Meyer 2001, 2014; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo 2001; Nabobo-Baba 2006; Smith 2012; Subramani 2003; Vaiioleti 2006). Similarly, in his 2003 article, “Between Knowledges: Pacific Studies and Academic Disciplines,” Edvard Hviding argues that interdisciplinary practice should extend beyond the mere combination and integration of established academic disciplines to include local worldviews and indigenous epistemologies in dialogue and collaboration towards a “plurality of knowledges” (43).

The final element in Teaiwa’s prescription for Pacific studies is comparative analysis. “Pacific studies,” she writes, “cannot be about a single ethnicity, single nation, or single locality: to live up to the Pacific, our work must reflect a commitment to making comparisons within and across the region” (2010, 211). I believe that an exploration and emphasis on this comparative approach is a crucial element in developing a new decolonial scholarly philosophy that distinguishes Pacific studies from other fields. Comparative analysis is not necessarily lacking in other disciplines, but it is its combination with interdisciplinary work and the valuing of indigenous epistemologies that enable a certain amount of flexibility and creativity in the comparative approach that is being developed in the field. Though emphasizing this comparative approach, Teaiwa — following in the footsteps of Epeli Hau‘ofa in his essay “The Ocean in Us” — stresses the importance of recognizing, respecting, and praising the differences throughout the region that give as much strength as unity and that embody the lived experiences and realities of different peoples. She is an advocate of connection through difference, a growing aspect of Pacific studies’ attempts at decolonization.

Scholar and poet Leora (Lee) Kava's recent MA portfolio for the Center for Pacific Islands Studies is an engaging work that has deeply influenced the ways I approach my research and understand its significance — to the field, to students, and to peoples in Oceanic communities both in their island homes and abroad. Kava's main argument — the re-articulation of decolonial praxis into Tongan contexts as a critical and creative engagement of genealogy and a process of self-determination through creative practice — illustrates powerful implications for scholarship within Pacific Islands Studies. Her work also provides concrete examples for how students of the region may go about indigenizing their processes of research and making them relevant to particular communities by reflecting upon the reciprocal relationship between theory and action. Through her research and writing, Kava critically and creatively practices engagement with self-reflection and reflexivity in addition to contextualizing and grounding her work within the key themes and issues of the field of Pacific Islands Studies. Her work also reflects the comparative approach that Teaiwa deems essential to Pacific studies. While her portfolio intimately centers upon Tongan culture and the daily, lived experiences of Tongans, she also parallels her processes and conclusions alongside the wider experiences and contexts of persons in Oceania.

Throughout her work Kava argues that decolonial action can be itemized and indigenized through a critical engagement of genealogy and self-determination within the contexts of creative practice and praxis. This theme is incredibly empowering for students of the region. She writes, "I believe that our creativity as Tongans specifically, and as Pacific Islanders in general is a vital tool we need in order to support one another, challenge one another, and assert our own power" (65). The emphasis that Kava places upon the validity of experiences, identities, and realities of contemporary Tongans, and by extension other persons of Oceania, has powerful implications

for all areas within Pacific Islands Studies scholarship, and particularly for creative writing and the arts. Traditional, western methods of scholarship have continued to fall short of appropriately representing and researching Oceania. In one sense, through her articulation of decolonization as creative practice, Kava opens up creativity as a method for indigenizing the academy and as a way for making decolonization relevant to Tongan realities.

...we need to foster and invest in our creativity in order to imagine a multi-faceted and culturally-rooted future of self-determination. To me, this where the ideas of creative practice as decolonial action become important to the everyday realities of Tongans. What I hope to have conveyed...is that creative practice in Tonga, and the Pacific more broadly, can engage how we practice freedom, self-determination, and connection. By defining Tongan creative practices as decolonial action, my goal has been not just to indigenize “decolonization” to Tongan contexts, but by doing so, to position Tongan perspectives and knowledge as important to the wider conversations of decolonization within the Pacific. (66)

It is truly empowering to define creativity as a medium for personal and collective agency. By positioning Tongan perspectives and knowledge as important to conversations of decolonization within Oceania, Kava simultaneously positions indigenous Oceanic perspectives and knowledge as important to these discussions for all peoples within the region, but particularly within Pacific Islands Studies scholarship.

Significance of Space & Literature

To quote the geographer David Harvey, “Space and time are foundational concepts for almost everything we think and do.” Cultured spatiality and spatial orientation permeate our everyday

thought, language, and behavior. We find convincing evidence of this in Lakoff and Johnson's work on contemporary theory of metaphor (1993). Much of what is real in a society or in the experience of an individual is structured and understood via conventional metaphor. Metaphors can be understood as an ontological mapping across conceptual cognitive domains — from a source domain to a target domain. Lakoff and Johnson's analysis of metaphorical mappings in English reveal that metaphor systems, which are largely based on spatial reasoning, further give rise to everyday abstract reasoning (Lakoff and Johnson 1993, 25). In other words, much of our abstract reasoning is spatially based and conceptualized via metaphor.

Space and place have particular ontological and epistemological significance in Oceania (Hau'ofa 2008; Mawyer and Feinberg 2014). Recent years have seen an increase in the number of works on space and spatiality at the intersection of language, culture, and cognition both globally and in the region. These works span a variety of topics including space and sociality (Duranti 1992, 1994), navigation and wayfinding (Feinberg 2014; Genz 2014), and the organization of the human material world (Shore 1996, 2014; Van der Ryn 2016). In light of an ever-globalizing world, where migration and diaspora have become the norm for many contemporary Pasifika persons, concepts of space and place find creative articulations in the context of a new Oceanic mobility. The Pasifika concept of *vā*, within the spatial literature, is also receiving increased attention across a range of disciplines including psychology, social work, performance art, and literature. A variety of voices throughout these disciplines are taking this Pasifika concept of space and creatively re-articulating it into contemporary contexts.

Throughout history the world has seen the power in words, both spoken and written, to shatter realities and to start wars, to affect change and to inspire emotion. In the aftermath of World War II, often referred to as the “postcolonial transition period,” (Simanu-Klutz 2014) the

written and spoken word have become expressive tools of empowerment for indigenous peoples, communities, and nations as they explore the path(s) to and of “independence,” and/or self-determination.² Often subversive, literature has the quality of “speaking truth to power,” as it critiques and explores the politics of power throughout history, within cultures, societies, and communities, and across the globe. In the Pacific, writing has served as a powerful tool in the reclamation of representation, identity, and self-determination in response to the region’s complex colonial history and present.

In addition to the political and subversive nature of writing, literature and poetry have the ability to take the elements of lived experience and weave them together in a way that is deeply felt by the reader. Contemporary poets of the region instill within their works a variety of languages, poetic styles, cultures, emotions, ideas, and calls to action; often times fusing and overlapping in playful and provocative ways and holding within their patterns messages intended for particular audiences. A good example of coded messages is given in Monberg’s article “Poetry as Coded Messages,” in which he explains the function of *kananga* on Bellona island, a Polynesian outlier near the Solomons group. *Kananga* are short songs composed by individuals (sometimes groups) that contain encoded messages intended only to reach the ears of a specific person. As Monberg describes, persons on the island used these songs to communicate with other persons, or express one’s emotions, across and within cultural restrictions on the circulation of information (i.e. those within kinship systems or between opposite genders). On the themes of (en)coding meanings, protecting certain social relationships, and subverting others, I am reminded of the ways in which contemporary poets in Oceania use similar poetic elements in their writings today. This is reflected in Monberg’s data on *kananga*, which demonstrates the

² While many former colonial territories gained independence, some entered into political associations with the former colonizing power (i.e. Hawai’i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands – United States, Niue, the Cook Islands – New Zealand.

evolution of composition and function (and eventually banning) as Bellona experienced rapid exposure to outside forces. The use of a poet's access to various kinds of knowledge serves to communicate to specific audiences and express emotions and identities in safe spaces of communication.

Significance to Pacific Studies

As students of Pacific Islands Studies, we are encouraged to develop critically responsive and reflexive methods of scholarship that are interdisciplinary and centered in indigenous epistemologies. Related to this is a practice of representation and research that continuously evolves to respond to the needs and desires of the indigenous peoples and communities that we work with. Centered upon indigenous Tongan and Samoan epistemological understandings of space and time and their relationships to sociality and identity, this work explicitly gives prominence to indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and place-specific philosophies and pedagogies. In attempting to understand comparative connections and distinctions throughout the region, particularly Polynesia, this work also privileges indigenous ways of being and knowing in other places.

This research first seeks to understand *vā* in the Tongan and Samoan cultural contexts from which this concept arises. I then employ comparative analysis of Polynesian language and regional literature to explore themes that resonate with *vā* and similar concepts of space and a space between. While time and space are foundational concepts for all peoples, these concepts are both understood and expressed differently within and across cultures. In looking for themes that resonate with *vā*, I pay acute attention to distinctions and nuances in the ways that these or similar topics are expressed. In the development of *vā* as a methodological tool for reading

space, sociality, and identity in literature, this research contributes to the need for decolonizing and indigenous methodologies in the field of Pacific studies and for engaging critically with literature of the region.

This work provides an overview and cross-cultural analysis of spatial concepts and cultural spatialities in language and creative writing. It offers a new way of engaging with Pasifika creative writing through the concept of space, particularly the notion of *vā*, and explains how writers who draw upon these concepts contribute to dominant themes and trends in Pacific literature in unique ways. This thesis is of significance to theorists, scholars, and students of Pacific Islands studies and Pacific literature, in addition to contributing to the larger discourses on postcolonial literary studies. Specifically within the field of Pacific studies, this work also contributes to ongoing discussions about identity, belonging, insider/outsider relationships and dynamics, in addition to discourse on decolonizing the field, the research process, and creating new philosophies for research and education that look to indigenous epistemologies.

Methodology

As indigenous peoples have sought more active and knowing engagement in the activities of self-determination, decolonization, and scholarship, the development of new frameworks and methodologies for indigenous education, community engagement, and research by and among indigenous peoples have been grounded in indigenous epistemologies — indigenous ways of knowing, being, and communicating (Johansson Fua 2014; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo 2001; Nabobo-Baba 2006; Smith 2012; Thaman 1993, 2003, 2008). This research engages with Oceanic persons, texts, and media, particularly through a focus on critical and creative analysis and interpretation of spatial concepts in Pasifika creative writing. While most of my work

involves archival research and poetic analysis and interpretation, my aim is to compliment this heavily text-based method by engaging in the research process solidly positioned within the decolonizing field of Pacific studies and guided by Pacific protocols and methodologies for research that give value to indigenous epistemologies. One such methodology that has influenced the way I conduct my research is the Kakala Research Framework.

Originally woven together by Professor Konai Helu Thaman in her 1993 article “Culture and Curriculum in the South Pacific,” the Kakala framework is a conceptualization of teaching and learning that is rooted in Tongan philosophies, values, and customs. Kakala is a Tongan term that literally means fragrant flowers, but also refers to the practice of using these flowers in the stringing of garlands, and to the garlands themselves (Thaman 1993). When Thaman first articulated the framework, she began with the three main processes associated with the stringing of kakala – toli, tui, and luva. The framework as it is understood and applied today is a collaboration of ideas between Thaman, Dr. ‘Ana Taufē‘ulungaki, Dr. Seu‘ula Johansson Fua, and Dr. Linita Manu‘atu, and includes the addition of the Tongan concepts of teu, malie, and mafana.

In its entirety, the Kakala Research Framework is comprised of six major processes – Teu, Toli, Tui, Luva, Malie, and Mafana. Johansson Fua (2014) describes each stage in relation to research practice. Teu is known as the conceptualization stage and connotes the time of preparation before beginning work (Johansson Fua 2014, 53). Toli is the gathering of the fragrant flowers, a process that Thaman explains as demanding knowledge and skill. Along the same lines, Johansson Fua clarifies, “When picking flowers for a garland, the flowers are purposely selected and carefully picked depending on the design that has been chosen during the *Teu* stage” (2014, 53). Tui is the physical stringing of the garland, which often involves different types of

kakala, a variety of methods, and entails a process of negotiation and growth (Johansson Fua 2014; Thaman 1993). Johansson Fua refers to this as the analysis stage, and when looked at critically, the concept emphasizes interdisciplinarity in the research process, both in data and in methods.

The final three stages of the framework touch on the sharing of the research and its reception by the intended audience or community. Luva, which means, a gift “given with sincerity, humility, and honour,” refers to the reporting and dissemination of the research process (Johansson Fua 2014, 54). On this Johansson Fua writes, “...the reporting process must give voice to the Pacific people...with respect and always to protect Pacific knowledge systems, ensuring that it serves the needs of Pacific people” (2014, 54). Malie (beauty; “well done”) and Mafana (warmth) refer to the processes of evaluation and reflection – both by the audience or community and by the researcher(s) (Johansson Fua 2014; Ka’ili 2008). While the Kakala framework is culturally specific and intimate to research within Tongan communities and undertaken by indigenous researchers, there are many lessons to be learned in this framework for the ways we approach relationships and work with indigenous peoples and texts in the region. I look to this work in particular and to other related texts to design a methodological approach that is grounded in Pacific epistemologies and ontologies, in the field of Pacific studies, and that may be applicable to peoples and texts I engage with who come from different (but sometimes similar) cultural backgrounds in the region.

A critical, creative, and decolonial aspect of this work, and also the main element of my research, is the development of the concept of vā as a methodology, or critical framework, for engaging with contemporary Pacific literature. First, for exploring the cultural literatures out of which this concept arises, and second for engaging more broadly with literatures of Polynesia

and potentially Oceania. My research seeks to articulate *vā* as a methodology for writing in the region, and through this for understanding how identities are expressed through writing. In addition, the Tongan phrase *tauhi vā* (to nurture or care for the space between), has been identified by ‘Okusitino Māhina, Tēvita O. Ka‘ili, Albert Wendt (*teu le vā*, in Samoan), and others, as *practice* — the art of performing sociospatial relations, a pattern of sociocultural behavior enacted on a daily basis by Tongans and Samoans both in their respective island nations and abroad. My engagement with Oceanic persons, places, epistemologies, ontologies, texts, and much more (and everything in between), will make evident the practice of nurturing the spaces between peoples and things in the ways that I design and conduct my research.

My relationship to this research stems from my upbringing on the Big Island of Hawai‘i and my undergraduate education with the Center for Pacific Islands Studies. Throughout my adolescence, I was consumed with finding a sense of belonging to this place that I call home. When I began my scholarly career with the Center, this feeling intensified as I encountered the politics of colonialism and settler-colonialism. As a non-indigenous woman to Hawaii Nei and Oceania, I struggled to come to terms with my position as a settler on Kanaka Māoli soil. When I first encountered the concept of *vā* through the writings of Albert Wendt, I was drawn to the idea as a relational and transitive space. Wendt describes the Samoan phrase, “*teu le vā*” (or *tauhi vā* in Tongan) as the nurturing of *vā* spaces, the cherishing of relationships. While I do not belong to this land or ocean genealogically, I developed an understanding of my belonging to this place in the ways that I nurture my relationship to this land that has also nurtured me, and to the people who have called this land home for thousands of years. It is through *vā* that I have found a sense of belonging and an understanding of how to care for the relationships that I have with the lands and peoples of Oceania.

Chapter Overview

Chapter one maps out a brief history of foreign and colonial representations of Pasifika peoples and spaces. These representations are active, powerful, and ever present in shaping both external and internal understandings of the region (Hau‘ofa 2008). I explain how Pasifika writers seize and respond to this history and present of colonial representation through an active and engaged “unwriting” of Oceania (Winduo 2000), and propose that space and spatial culture become a critical tool used by Pasifika writers to respond through self-representation.

Chapter two examines Pasifika notions of space through the growing literature in anthropology and cognitive science on spatial models. Linguistic anthropology and cognitive science give us insights into how space is organized, represented, and reproduced culturally. Delving particularly into Samoan and Tongan cultural concepts, models, and examples, I discuss how spatial organization influences multiple cultural domains. Within these two island groups I also engage with a particular cultural notion of space known as *vā*, and related cultural concepts and practices. The concept of *vā* is receiving increased scholarly attention across a number of disciplines including anthropology, linguistics, architecture, psychology, and social work. The concept has also been explored and utilized by a number of writers and poets in the region in their works.

Chapter three takes the spatial concepts discussed in chapter two and applies them to the works of three female Pasifika poets based in Aotearoa/New Zealand — Selina Tusitala Marsh, Karlo Mila, and Grace Teuila Taylor. Analyzing the text itself in addition to its physical arrangement on the page in two to three poems from each poet, I investigate how the nature of space and cultured spatialities are present in these women’s writings. The concept of *vā* and other spatial concepts as explored within these poets’ works points to spatial and relational

awareness, to complexities and ambivalence in relationships, and elucidates space made present and active in Pasifika creative writing.

CHAPTER ONE. (RE)PRESENTATION & WRITING IN OCEANIA

This thesis engages with Pacific Islander perceptions and conceptualizations of space, or a space between, and time, and their relationships to identities of contemporary persons both within the region and abroad. Culture and identity are slippery terms; concepts that have proven to be complex and contentious in all spaces and places of the globe. In regions of the world that have experienced the damaging nature of colonialism, these concepts are found to be even more intense and controversial in light of colonial histories and entanglements (Ashcroft et al. 2002; Hereniko 1994, 2000; Jolly 1992, 2007; Va'ai 1999). The contemporary Pacific is such a place, and discussion of culture and identity in the region cannot be removed from the dynamics of power involved in centuries of outside representations of Pacific Islander places and peoples. In his essay "Unwriting Oceania: The Positioning of Pacific Scholars Within a Folk Narrative Space," Papua New Guinean scholar and poet Stephen Winduo (2000) helps us to understand the relationship between historical foreign representations of Pacific Islanders and the contentious concepts of culture and identity.

Indeed for Pacific people it is not so much the erasure of their cultures, but the overwriting of their cultures with European inscriptions. In other words, European explorer/"discoverers" did not so much erase indigenous self-representations and cultural expressions, but in most instances overwrote them. Even where erasure as a process occurred, it was never complete and uncontested, and this tension has affected the process of representation in the Pacific to the present. (599)

Issues of power relations, knowledge, and otherness are central to fleshing out these dynamics. A number of scholars, writers, and literary critics of Oceania have discussed in depth the colonial histories of representation and their implications for contemporary Pacific Islander cultures and

identities (Hau‘ofa 2008; Hereniko 1994, 2000; Jolly 1992, 2007; Stella 2007; Va‘ai 1999; Wendt 1983, 1995; Winduo 2000). As Pacific Islander writers, scholars, and artists began raising their voices through a variety of media in the 1960s and 70s, the “empire” began “writing back” (Ashcroft et al. 2002) in an effort to subvert hegemonic and belittling colonial representations. Pacific literature is a wonderful avenue for illustrating how Pacific Islanders have been agentic in the reclaiming of self-representation and for exploring how contentious concepts such as culture and identity in the contemporary Pacific are navigated, articulated, and expressed in a variety of ways, including the ways in which concepts of space figure into these explorations. Through a juxtaposition of colonial and indigenous representations of Pacific Islanders we can also understand how concepts such as authenticity and inauthenticity are problematized in light of colonial and foreign representations of the Pacific.

In this chapter I take on discussion of foreign representations in, and of, a sea of islands. Cartography, scholarly discourse, and literature (predominantly travel and adventure writing) have served as major media for producing and circulating outside representations of the “other.” These representations are colonial in nature, intimately linked, however subtly, to the dispossession and conquest of indigenous Pasifika lands, waters, and peoples. I move from foreign representations of a sea of islands to “self”-representations of a sea of islands through a discussion of “unwriting Oceania.” The connection between representation and discourses of knowledge and power potently amplify the significance of Pasifika self-representation and decolonization, an era that coincides with the early blossoming of a distinctly Pacific literature. Illuminating the significance of literature to society and culture, I discuss how contemporary Pacific literature continues to poignantly re-work foreign, false, and belittling notions and perceptions of the region and its peoples from the inside out.

Knowledge & Power in the Representation of the “Other”

In his monograph *Imagining the Other: The Representation of the Papua New Guinean Subject*, Regis Stella (2007) introduces his work by establishing important connections between the study of representations in literature and dynamics of power.

Through the use of such tropes (sexual violation, debasement and idealization, and the discourse and image of the native (female) body as sexual fetish) a social hierarchy is produced and indigenous peoples are relegated and dispossessed as Others. Therefore the study of how Papua New Guineans and their cultures have been constructed and represented in nonindigenous fiction is, at heart, an examination of the relationship between Otherness and the dynamics of power.

(10)

Drawing upon ideas put forth in Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*, Stella immediately identifies a number of colonial tropes in the representation of Papua New Guineans and explains how these tropes are used in a process of “othering” that is intimately linked to imperial ideologies. When describing the emergence of creative writing from the region during the 1960s and 70s in her book, *Literary Representations in Western Polynesia: Colonialism and Indigeneity*, Sina Va‘ai (1999) explains in a related vein how, “the conceptual backdrop which frames these texts is one that pertains to the power relations that existed and to a great extent still exist today, between the colonising powers of European nations and the colonised” (24). These power relations are intimately embedded within colonial representations of the colonized and have profound and long-standing implications for the identities of the subjugated. Stella further helps us to understand how representation is related to identity. “When dominant groups control representation, they produce social knowledge, which constitutes the ‘reality’ and identity of

those represented” (1). This “social knowledge” about the Pacific has been produced and disseminated in a number of ways and by a variety of peoples involved in the colonial project. These include (but are not limited to) early explorers, navigators, and cartographers; artists and writers; anthropologists and historians; natural, physical, and social scientists; missionaries, colonial administrators, and politicians; and foreign military forces. Drawing upon Foucault’s influential works on power and knowledge, Stella explains, “Representation monopolized by a dominant group is a silencing act for the ‘others’ who are represented because representation is always connected to power and knowledge” (Stella 2007, 2). Thus, social knowledge of the type described above has always been produced in direct benefit of those in power and at the exploitation and subjugation of “others.”

In his groundbreaking and influential essay “Our Sea of Islands,” originally published in 1994, Tongan scholar, creative writer, and gardener Epele Hau‘ofa (2008) brings explicitly into light the belittling, colonial view of the Pacific and Pacific Islanders as small, isolated, and cripplingly dependent upon foreign aid. Mostly propagated by social scientists and the like, this view is that “all of Polynesia and Micronesia, are too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centres of economic growth for their inhabitants to ever be able to rise above their present condition of dependence upon the largesse of wealthy nations” (Hau‘ofa 2008, 29). This view, which is still widely perpetuated today, has its beginnings in the earliest representations of the region — particularly spatial ones such as geographic and cartographic representations.

In her essay “Imagining Oceania: Indigenous and Foreign Representations of a Sea of Islands,” Margaret Jolly (2007) asserts that our imaginings of the world are often linked with its cartographic representation. “Yet,” she explains, “the maps we draw are never reflections of the

world as it is, but always partial representations of it — representations powerfully shaped by who we are, where and when we are, and what motivates our interests in that place” (508). From Jolly’s words, we can already connect early cartographic representations of the region by outsiders to their own self-serving motivations and visions. While we tend to regard maps as factual representations and unbiased records, Brian Harley (2009) writes about maps as reflective images that contribute to discourse and dialogue in a world that is socially produced (53). Maps are not unbiased representations of reality, but rather symbols that are able to reproduce political, economic, and ideological power, and are further used to justify the exploitation of geographical features, natural resources, and even people. In the Pacific, this is particularly evident in the historical and contemporary expansion of American military force in the arbitrary region known as Micronesia. On this symbolism Harley writes, “A map can carry in its image such symbolism as may be associated with the area, geographical feature, city or place which it represents. It is often on this symbolic level that political power is most effectively reproduced, communicated, and experienced through maps” (2009, 54). Here we are brought back to the dominant and belittling view described by Hau‘ofa, and can see its connections to early European and American imaginings of the geography of the Pacific as small, isolated islands far flung throughout an expansive sea.

Related to cartographic representation of the Pacific is the carving up of the region into geographic boundaries that have also attempted to be defined by outsiders as organized by “racial” and cultural similarities and distinctions. This carving up led to the construction of the infamous and intensely problematic terms Polynesia (many islands), Melanesia (black islands), and Micronesia (tiny islands). In his 1832 essay “On the Islands of the Great Ocean,” French explorer Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d’Urville officially divided the places and peoples of

Oceania into the four categories that are most commonly in use today across a wide range of disciplines: Polynesia (Eastern Oceania), Melanesia (Southern Oceania), Malaysia (Western Oceania), and Micronesia (Northern Oceania). Drawing from the work of his predecessors and contemporaries, d'Urville carved out these arbitrary geographical regions with invisible lines, simultaneously dividing Oceania's peoples into two distinct races; the "black race," which he relegated to Melanesia and parts of Micronesia, and the "copper-skinned race," which he assigned to Polynesia, Malaysia, and Micronesia. The "science" with which d'Urville and others like him prescribed race, and therefore degrees of humanity, to the peoples of Oceania has been used and re-executed to divide the "'almost white,' friendly Polynesians from the decidedly more savage and hostile, 'black' Melanesians," forming the racial discourse for what Maile Arvin terms, the "Western project of Polynesia" ("Polynesia is a Project, Not a Place," 2). This racialization of the region has had lasting implications for contemporary Pacific Islander cultures and identities. Speaking to this, Bronwyn Douglas (2010) demonstrates how "Dumont d'Urville's racial geography was ultimately normalized in geopolitics and modern indigenous identities, but the genealogies of such usages are by no means indirect or unproblematic and remain to be elucidated" (209). The mapping of Oceania by outsiders has also served to ignore the distinct realities and experiences of different peoples and cultures, instead lumping peoples and places together underneath umbrella terms.

Representation due to imposed geographical boundaries has also had implications for issues of mobility in the Pacific. Hau'ofa explains that the "imaginary lines" that were drawn across the sea forged the "colonial boundaries that confined ocean peoples to tiny spaces for the first time" (2008, 32). He goes on to illustrate that Pacific Islanders never saw their worlds as small or isolated but rather,

The world of our ancestors...was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers. From one island to another they sailed to trade and to marry, thereby expanding social networks for greater flows of wealth. They traveled to visit relatives in a wide variety of natural and cultural surroundings, to quench their thirst for adventure, and even to fight and to dominate. (33)

Similarly, Damon Salesa (2003) speaks to the expansive ways in which Samoans navigated and enlarged their world. In his essay “‘Travel-Happy’ Samoa: Colonialism, Samoan Migration, and a ‘Brown Pacific,’” Salesa evokes the metaphor of a “Brown Pacific” to illustrate how Samoans in particular, and Islanders in general, have always been mobile, even “travel happy,” and how this has shaped Pacific Islander identities in the past and in the present as Pacific peoples continue to be on the move in an era of neo-colonialism and globalization.

The idea of maps and mapping is quite profound for representations of Oceania, and carries implications beyond the concrete practice of producing cartography. Echoing Hau‘ofa’s “Our Sea of Islands,” Jolly explains how foreign representations are sometimes, and to different degrees, internalized by Pacific Islanders in ways that affect how they see themselves.

Indigenous visions have, since the late eighteenth century, been challenged and partially transformed through encounters with the imagined cartographies of travelers, missionaries, traders, planters, and other agents of colonialism, capitalism, and development. As Tongan scholar Epeli Hau‘ofa suggested (1994) outsiders’ representations of the Pacific matter not just because of their geopolitical and discursive hegemony but because Islanders have, in part, come to see themselves through the Outlander’s lenses. (509)

Hau'ofa's "Our Sea of Islands," and its companion essays "The Ocean in Us," and "Pasts to Remember," were profoundly influential for shedding light on the dangers of internalizing colonial representations, but more so for his reimagining of the region and his prescription for the term "Oceania." In "Our Sea of Islands," he reworks belittling, imperial representations of Oceania as small, isolated, and dependent islands scattered across a vast sea. Here, Hau'ofa first articulates the idea of the ocean as a force of connection rather than division; a circuitry of pathways through which Oceanic peoples have always been, and continue to be, expansive in the production and maintenance of their worlds and realities. "The Ocean in Us," can be viewed as a continuation of the reflections put forth in "Our Sea of Islands," as Hau'ofa expands upon the necessity of connection in order to advance collective interests in the region. Hau'ofa argues for the construction of a regional Oceanic identity that is rooted within a framework of connection through oceanic metaphors. While connection and commonalities are important for overcoming the divisive tendencies of colonialism, Hau'ofa stresses the positive establishment of connection *through* difference, or acknowledging, respecting, and celebrating difference. He illustrates the practical value of this larger identity as strategically significant in the face of "the homogenizing forces of the global juggernaut" (2008, 42).

Albert Wendt's 1995 lecture, "Pacific Maps and Fictions," provides a bridge from cartographic representations to other kinds of representations. Wendt engages in a deconstruction and exploration of the concepts behind the words "maps" and "fictions," particularly the ways in which these concepts are related to literature, history, and colonial representations of Oceania. In explaining the title of his lecture, Wendt comments:

...the title wanted two meanings: Fiction as a branch of literature concerned with stories/novels/romances; and Fictions as things invented and imagined by

‘untrue,’ false, or not true of the realities of a place, a people, and so on. It is through fiction that we create a lot of fictions and maps. (60)

Among these “fictions” are representations of primitive and static Pacific Islander cultures and identities that have been circulated by European and American explorers, missionaries, and western theoretical and philosophical discourses. Explicitly implicating missionaries in this process, Hau‘ofa explains, “The wholesale condemnation by Christian missionaries of Oceanian cultures as savage, lascivious, and barbaric has had a lasting and negative effect on people’s views of their histories and traditions” (2008, 28). In addition to the condemnation of Pacific cultures is the romanticization and eroticization of Islander men and women through the tropes of the noble savage and the dusky maiden. These representations are particularly evident in colonial writings and literatures. Representations of cultural identities as savage and primitive, or exotic and paradisiacal are intricately linked to the racialization of the region by peoples such as Dumont d’Urville. As discussed by Arvin, Stella, and Winduo, representations of Papua New Guineans and other Melanesian peoples tend to be racialized in ways that reflect savagery and violence. Places such as Hawai‘i, French Polynesia, and Samoa, on the other hand, are portrayed as paradise, more civilized, and fetishized through the tropes of the dusky maiden and noble savage. These differences in colonial representations have similarly led to differences in the ways that identities are navigated and reclaimed in different parts of the Pacific today.

“Unwriting Oceania:” An Overview of Pacific Literature & Creative Writing

Since the emergence of Pacific Islander writers in the 1960s and 70s, Pacific literature has been engaging in the process of writing back to the colonial center — to colonial forces, structures, and processes (Ashcroft et al. 2002; Fresno-Calleja 2012; Wendt 1995). This process particularly

involves addressing the years of misrepresentation and exploitation of Oceanic cultures by outsiders. As island nations began gaining their independence during the postcolonial transition period, conversation within Pacific literature turned towards addressing the wounds of neocolonialism in its many forms. The era of colonialism as it once was is over, but the nature of such a structure is that it changes and adapts. The process of internalizing the damaging nature of colonialism can have devastating consequences while simultaneously working against internal — and external — processes of decolonization. Contemporary Pasifika writers engage with a number of themes, concepts, and methods to both critique and subvert dominant hegemonic systems and to explore experiences of being in the world. Pacific literature and creative writing touch upon issues of knowledge, power, representation, identity, and language. In the works of female Pasifika writers, we also see the notion of *mana wahine*, which translates roughly to “female empowerment.”

The Politics of Power

In regards to the early blossoming of Pacific literature in the sixties and seventies, Va‘ai (1999) explains how, “the conceptual backdrop which frames these texts is one that pertains to the power relations that existed and to a great extent still exist today, between the colonising powers of European nations and the colonised” (24). These power relations are intimately embedded within colonial representations of the colonized and have profound and long-standing implications for the identities of the subjugated. In a related vein, Wendt touches on the heavy weight that the process of decolonization, in its many shapes and forms, carries in this process of writing back.

Decolonisation still inspires much of our writing. Colonialism, racism, modernization, and their effects on us remain major preoccupations in our literature. A sense of profound loss still pervades that writing. At the same time in those countries struggling for their independence the writing is full of anger and of hope. (Wendt 1995, 5)

In “Towards a New Oceania,” Wendt draws upon Konai Helu Thaman’s poem, “Uncivil Servants” as an example of writing back within Pacific literature. “Uncivil Servants” in particular is a poem characterized by “examining and attacking the growing corruption and abuse of power in our elites” (Wendt 1995, 5). The poem illustrates the political corruption that has been characteristic of newly independent island nations; friends and family turned politician or government pawn, getting rich in the wake of lies and broken promises to their communities. “Many of my friends / Are civil servants / With uncivil thoughts / They smile at my weaknesses / And thrive on my poverty...” (l. 1-5). The lines that follow also employ metaphor as a means of describing the physical impact of the switch from subsistence living to the mundane and inactive nine to five of office work, “Their bodies though weakening / From muscular indifference” (l. 6-7). Wendt highlights the elements of resistance woven into her words, “But they cannot erase my existence / For my plight chimes with the hour” (l. 8-9). The poems of Ni-Vanuatu writer Grace Mera Molisa also heavily explore this topic of corruption, and are characterized by “disillusionment, irony, anger, and cynicism...” (Wendt, 1995:5). A stanza from Molisa’s poem “Insurgent Rebellion,” encapsulates much of the dynamics of power, knowledge, and resistance that are woven throughout modern indigenous Pacific poetry:

The renaissance / of Melanesian consciousness is / the spiritual release / of
a people oppressed / pre-empting the common / recognition and allegiance

/ to the sole and singular / goal of state sovereignty / succeeding self-
determination / and political autonomy / the flowering reverence for
authority / in the reign of peace and order / proclaimed and maintained /
by the people for the people / the blooming of a people fulfilled. (l. 91-
105)

Through their works and poetry, writers give voice to subversive issues that are difficult, or even taboo, to discuss in many social situations. Speaking boldly on the politics of power has a tendency to ruffle community and political feathers, disrupting a peaceful oblivion (or outright denial) of issues. Giving voice to topics that are uncomfortable (to phrase it delicately), puts Pacific Islander writers in a space between as they question their communities and the colonial state, often criticized in return by either party. Yet, “speaking truth to power” in such a way brings subversive issues into the light, where they can be explored and examined, effecting solutions and producing change. The examples of writings by modern indigenous Pacific women poets here are illustrative of these “power relations” that permeate Pacific literature.

Representation & Identity

In her book, Va'ai explores the ways in which Oceania and its peoples have been viewed and portrayed throughout literature (both within and outside of the region), how these representations have impacted Pacific Islanders, and the ways in which these impacts are being expressed through the creation and growth of a regional body of literature. Central to Va'ai's discussion is her assertion that considering colonialism and neo-colonialism's impact on the region and understanding the seeds and perpetuation of western imposed representations of Oceania is crucial to understanding the driving forces behind the formation and sustenance of a regional

Pacific literature. Va'ai cites Sharrad in highlighting that the western imaging of the Pacific has resulted in the representation of Oceania, "not as a political space or an economic one in an active, productive sense, but as a passive receptacle of observation, a space for European adventuring, an area of natural science, history, anthropology and development studies" (1999, 15). Here, I would also include "a space of European fantasy, imagination, and romanticism," as is evidenced in the number of fantastical and romantic novels (and later films) produced about the region by European and American writers.

Representations of Islander identities as primitive, savage, or antiquated and traditional have been portrayed as the sole identities of Pacific peoples. They have been portrayed as static and unmoving, complicating, in particular, notions of authenticity and cultural identity.

Antithetical to western representations and conceptions of "authenticity," the "post-colonial image" of Pacific peoples within Albert Wendt's essay, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," speaks to the dynamic nature of Pacific Islander identities in flux. This image is woven throughout modern Pacific poetry, expressing resistance to the internalization of (neo)colonial processes and forces, and insistence on the fluidity of Pacific Islander identity. In a different essay but in a related vein, Wendt notes that a map is typically a representation of a part of the earth's surface, a method of reading place, yet explains that the "s" in "maps," comes out of a need to talk about Oceania as having many maps,

Not just geographical/political ones, but maps of the moa (centre), the heart, the imagination...cultural, artistic, literary/language, spiritual, philosophical...emotional maps; maps emerging out of the Pacific, maps brought in and imposed...maps which are deliberate erasures and replacements; maps

which reveal the... geography of a people's agaga/psyche; maps used to perpetuate fictions/myths about ourselves. (60)

Wendt's discussion on maps and fictions is resonant of Rotuman scholar and filmmaker Vilsoni Hereniko's article on "truth" in academia entitled, "Indigenous Knowledge and Academic Imperialism." Hereniko says, "the written word encourages that there is but *one* truth, and this truth can be discovered through rigorous research" (Hereniko 2000, 85). An immediate reaction that I had to his assertion and discussion is that truth and fact are two different things. Western scholarship is obsessed with fact, something it has also confused with the *one* truth. Truth is fluid because truth is subjective, whereas fact is objective, and should not be confused with truth (though it often is). Wendt's "maps" are the lenses through which we read reality (our own reality). In merging the two themes of Wendt and Hereniko's discussions, maps become "proposed truths." A map that is true for one person may be someone else's fiction. What becomes dangerous (as Wendt notes in his explanation of the history of outside representation of the region through fiction) is that certain maps, or "truths," are presented as fact when these maps may not be true of the realities of a people or a place.

Wendt and Hereniko's discussions on maps, fictions, and truths, are intimately bound to representations of Pacific Islander cultures and identities. Foreign representations are indigenous Oceanic fictions that silence Pacific Islander voices which are struggling to articulate fluid and multiple identities that reflect the lived realities of contemporary experiences. In another essay entitled "Representations of Cultural Identities," Hereniko (1994) asserts that,

...identity for Pacific Islanders has never been a clear "black and white" issue, as evident in the words *contested*, *transformed*, and *negotiable*. Who we are is

always in process, constituted within, yet continually being modified or affected by external factors such as other people's prejudices, negative or positive. (161)

Hereniko's words ring true for peoples of all cultures, yet this understanding is particularly significant for Pacific Islanders who face the challenges of navigating identity within the constraints of an "imposed oppressive system," negotiating identities across cultural and national boundaries, across time and space (1994, 160). As we will see in chapter three, contemporary Pasifika poets are using the concept of *vā* to contest the notion that Pacific Islander identities are static.

Language

Within Pacific literature and poetry, writing in both colonial and indigenous languages has been integral for Pacific Islanders in articulating agency, developing individual and collective critical thinking, and navigating stages of healing and processes of decolonization – of the mind, body, spirit, and collective. Indigenous languages play a significant role in the works of indigenous Pacific poets. Albert Wendt explains the postcolonial dynamic of writing in the colonial language, "We have indigenised and enriched the language of the colonisers and used it to declare our independence and uniqueness; to analyse colonialism itself and its effects upon us; to free ourselves of the mythologies created about us in colonial literature" (Wendt 1995, 2). While writing in an indigenous language similarly adds to the postcolonial dimensions within Pacific literature, it goes beyond and carries greater significance than that which a colonial language can express. Incorporating one's indigenous language into her work serves to address specific audiences and set specific boundaries, to explore issues of inclusivity and exclusivity within insider and outsider relationships. Furthermore, it is an active way of "decolonizing the mind," a

way of engaging critical thinking in her own language with the themes that drive Pacific literature (Simanu-Klutz, 2014).

The poetry of Konai Helu Thaman is woven through with the Tongan language, and is therefore framed in a Pacific cultural context that is specific to Tonga. In her essay “Of Daffodils and *Heilala*: Understanding (Cultural) Context in Pacific Literature,” Thaman illustrates the importance of understanding context when engaging with Pacific literature by relating an important experience in her own life and writing:

As a school student, I never fully appreciated the significance of Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” until, many years later, I visited London for the first time and went with some friends to Kew Gardens. There in front of my very eyes, was “a sea of golden daffodils”: I said the poem to myself, a different poem this time because I moved closer to imagining what the poet must have felt when he wrote the poem. (Thaman 2000, 43)

With no knowledge of what a daffodil was or looked like, Thaman – as a reader approaching Wordsworth’s poem from a different cultural context – was unable to grasp the significance of the poem to the poet (or other readers from his cultural background). After sharing her poem “*Heilala*,” Thaman explains how understanding what *heilala* is and its significance in Tongan culture is necessary for appreciating the poem. “As a flower with a cultural status in mythology, it provides the cultural context in which the poem is fashioned. Reading it without understanding this context would be to miss a significant part of the meaning of the poem” (Thaman 2000, 44).

“Of Daffodils and *Heilala*” is an important essay that illustrates the role of language in understanding the cultural context of a particular poem. Throughout her collection *Kakala*, Thaman turns to Tongan words, phrases, and images to explore the nuances and boundaries of

insider/outsider relationships, as well themes relevant to Pacific literature, through a predominantly Tongan cultural lens. Her poem “*Kakala Folau* (a gift of love),” provides a cultural framework for viewing this collection, “take this *kakala* my friend / *kulukona langakali heilala* / symbols of times / when love and life / were one” (l. 1-5). *Kakala* are sacred or fragrant plants that are commonly referred to in Tongan legends, songs, poetry, and dance as symbols for respect and love; *kulukona*, *langakali*, and *heilala* are the plants used in a *kakala folau*, a special garland for a loved one as s/he embarks upon an important journey (Thaman 1993, 91). Through her use of *kakala* as a metaphor for her collection, Thaman delves into situations of cultural contact and relationships of power through a (s)Pacificaly Tongan lens.

Mana Wahine

A concept found within cultures throughout Oceania, *mana wahine*, or “female empowerment,” is an integral component to female indigenous identity in the Pacific, and is a concept that permeates modern Pacific women’s poetry both as a major theme and as a guiding force within the writers themselves. The term “*mana wahine*,” gained increasing popularity throughout the region as a result of the *Mana Wahine* movement in Aotearoa, which Selina Tusitala Marsh describes as “a Maori-based theorized feminism” (1999, 338). In her essay “*Mana Wahine: Feminism and Nationalism in Hawaiian Literature*,” Native Hawaiian scholar and poet ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui highlights the dangers of associating *mana wahine* with western notions of feminism, explaining that although *mana wahine* “... embodies feminist ideas, ... this term is problematic because *mana wahine* ‘predates western concepts of feminism’” (27–28). Calling upon Native Hawaiian activist, poet, and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask, ho‘omanawanui further explains, “western ideas of feminism react against, resist or seek equality with patriarchy. *Mana*

wahine does neither,' as native women's issues differ from haole (white) women's: our struggle is against colonialism as we fight for self-determination as a people, not a gender" (28).

Divorced from associations with western feminism, mana wahine in its Pacific context speaks to a female empowerment that is rooted in indigenous traditional values such as genealogy, nurturing the land, and cultural responsibility. Poets throughout the region evoke mana wahine in a number of ways, ranging from calling upon the power of culturally specific deities, to speaking out on various forms of abuse, to critiquing structures of power, to simply describing the amazing capabilities of Pacific women in their day-to-day journeys. Though at times deeply personal in their writing, female Pasifika writers have an ability to speak to the experiences and the power of other Pasifika women, and to indigenous women across the globe, navigating a multiplicity of spheres, identities, and spaces.

Pacific Literature & Critical Theory

A number of Pacific Islander scholars, educators, and writers advocate for a conscious, critical, and interdisciplinary weaving of theory with indigenous epistemologies in efforts to develop a uniquely Pacific studies theoretical fluency and philosophy of scholarship (see, for example, Kauvaka 2016; Teaiwa 2010; Thaman 2003). In her essay "Theory 'Versus' Pacific Islands Writing" Selina Tusitala Marsh proposes a feminized indigenous critical framework, mana tama'ita'i, upon which to explore the writings of Pacific Islander women "with defiant paradigms, alternative perspectives and ways of reading by considering these texts alongside [a] gendered and culturally based paradigm..." (352). Weaving together elements of postcolonial and feminist theory situated within cultural, political, and historical contexts, Marsh emphasizes the importance of self-criticism. Citing Konai Helu Thaman's poem "Langakali," she explains,

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.” (341)

Marsh asserts that, while theory may seem Eurocentric in nature, its purpose as an abstract lens with which to view the world renders it malleable in definition to culturally specific “centers” across the globe (341).

Introducing ideas from postcolonial thought, Marsh refers to Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s powerful concept of “decolonising the mind.” Integral to Thiongo’s theory is the first step of realizing that the mind is colonized and the effects of colonialism. Drawing attention to the dynamics this creates for women of color, Marsh states,

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. (343)

Here, Marsh introduces Andre’e McLaughlin’s “multiple jeopardies,” or the complexities of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and regional differences that inform the daily lives of women of color universally (343).

In drawing from critical theoretical fields, my work is most appropriately informed by thinkers from postcolonial, postmodern, poststructural, and anticolonial studies. Among an expansive genealogy of critical thinkers, this work engages with the theories of thinkers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and bell hooks. Mikhail Bakhtin focuses on the plural quality of meaning in literary analysis. According to

Bakhtin, meaning is always contested and negotiated within society. “There is no fixed meaning to any narrative, therefore, and it is always open to multiple interpretations.” Bakhtin also sees literary texts as “intertextual,” meaning that novels are not independent creations, but rather a product of “references to an entire complex web of past and present discourses within their culture...Heteroglossia works against the unifying tendencies within a culture, as generally advocated by the ruling establishment.” The bulk of my thesis work focuses on contemporary Pacific literature, and a number of writers have shown to reflect Bakhtin’s ideas of intertextuality and heteroglossia. In Bakhtin’s work we see some of the prelude thoughts to poststructuralism — which emphasizes difference as a subversive and powerful force rather than the unity associated with hegemonic structures in society. Foucault’s work also stresses difference in the face of hegemony. Hegemony works to eradicate difference because difference can work to subvert the ideological norm that benefits a certain group.

Understanding and drawing attention to the significance of difference has been an important feature of Pacific studies over the last few years. In a region expansive and blooming in social and cultural diversity, celebrating difference has helped to work against colonial representation of the region and push against colonially established boundaries. Homi Bhabha, who has had considerable influence in postcolonial discourse, presents the interesting idea of poststructuralist hybridity. His “notion of ‘*something else besides*,’” has anti-essentialist overtones. He suggests that the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation of elements to contest the terms and territories of both two things in opposition. I critically engage with Bhabha’s postcolonial hybridity and argue that the theory, while ultimately helpful as a starting point for exploring Pacific Islander identities and a space between, is ultimately insufficient for describing them. Here I turn from ideas of hybridity to plurality and

multiplicities. Black feminist bell hooks makes use of postmodernist and poststructuralist thought in her call for a “‘politics of difference’ in which ‘multiple black identities’ can be allowed to express themselves.” Contemporary Pacific Islander writers often express a multiplicity of identities that complicate and contest colonial notions of authenticity and tradition. Identities of Islanders and peoples of the region (indeed of all peoples perhaps) are fluid as they navigate and negotiate through the waters of modernizing and globalizing societies.

Conclusion

Postcolonial literature has been, and continues to be, engaging in a process of “writing back” to the colonial center in an effort to decolonize and reclaim representations of cultural identities overwritten by colonial powers (Ashcroft et al. 2002; Fresno-Calleja 2012; Wendt 1983; Winduo 2000). Pacific literature has been inspired by and grown alongside postcolonial literatures in other regions such as Africa and the Caribbean (DeLoughrey 1999, 2007; Thiong’o 1986). Writers engage with a number of concepts and themes as they resist and respond to colonization and express the lived realities of themselves and their communities. Some of these include knowledge, power, representation, identity, the use of indigenous languages, and an embodiment of a culturally specific female empowerment. In the next chapter I turn to Pacific concepts of space as explored through Tongan and Samoan culture, returning to exploration of its use in creative writing in the final chapter.

CHAPTER TWO. SPATIAL REPRESENTATION IN OCEANIA

Finding Space in Language

Language and culture are inseparable; intimately woven together in the finest fibers of what constitutes our identities — what informs our actions, behaviors, thoughts, ideas, how we engage with things and with others — our very understandings of ‘being’ in the world and being human. Native Hawaiian educator and scholar Sarah Keahi asserts, “As indigenous educators, we know that a culture and its language are inseparable for the language is the vehicle by which the culture is transmitted. Language is a priority...In language, we find our identity and the very essence of our existence” (2000, 58). Similarly, the concept of space is fundamental to language and cognition and is uniquely organized within and across different cultures of the world.

Language, culture, and cognition cyclically influence each other in that culture and cognition support the existence of certain linguistic structures while language simultaneously “maintains and stabilizes important cultural and cognitive structures or even (re)produces culture” (Völkel 2010, 3). Space is conceptualized and organized as part of sociocultural systems and as such filters into multiple domains of cultural cognition and knowledge. Exploring concepts of space through linguistic structures helps to reveal other cognitive domains that encode space in culturally specific ways. In other words, exploring space through language helps us to understand how space is conceptualized in other domains of cognition and culture and to investigate how these concepts of space may govern cultural behaviors.

In this chapter I explore the relationships between linguistic perceptions and encodings of space and spatial cognition in Oceania, particularly Samoa and Tonga with brief comparisons to other island groups in Polynesia. I delve into the spatialization of culture by taking significant works on Tongan and Samoan concepts of *vā* (space, the space between) and *tauhi vā* and *teu le*

vā (nurturing social space) and placing them into conversation with current linguistic and cognitive spatial models for these cultures. In doing so, I flesh out some ideas about the relationships between linguistic perceptions of space and cognitive perceptions of social space and argue that understanding major themes at the intersection of language, culture, and cognition contextualizes and illuminates Tongan and Samoan concepts of the space between, social space, and the nurturing of sociospatial relations.

Language & Spatial Representation in Oceania

In his 2009 essay, “Linguistic Encounter and Responses in the South Pacific,” Darrell Tryon writes, “In terms of encounters, what characterises the Pacific is the multiplicity and variety of its indigenous languages, perhaps the highest language density in the world” (37). Oceania is vast, expansive, and incredibly diverse, and this is perhaps best reflected in the variation and distribution of languages in the region. Divided into two major families, Papuan and Austronesian, languages spoken in Oceania amount to nearly 25 percent (1,500) of the approximately 6,000 languages spoken today throughout the globe (Tryon 2009, 37). I will be focusing on the Tongan and Samoan languages with occasional comparisons to Marquesan, Tahitian, Māori, and Hawaiian. These six languages belong to the Proto Polynesian group in the Oceanic subgroup of the Austronesian language family (Bennardo 2009, 28; Volkel 2010, 21). Svenja Völkel (2010) highlights that in contrast to Indo-European languages, the Oceanic language family systematically uses an absolute frame of reference that is based on geocentric coordinates such as a ‘land-sea’ axis, an axis orthogonal to it, and a vertical ‘up-down’ axis motivated by the trade winds in navigational use (112).

Space, Culture, & Cognition

Space has always been a topic of concern for the field of anthropology and has significantly contributed to discourses on human understanding of experience and being. Recent years have seen an “explosion” of works engaging space and spatiality at the intersection of language, culture, and cognition (Mawyer and Feinberg 2014, 243). Over the past few decades, the concept has taken on particular cultural significance as scholarly explorations investigate and propose more formal cognitive spatial models (Bennardo 2009; Shore 1996; Volkel 2010). Illuminating the significance of these works, Mawyer and Feinberg assert, “it is now obvious that language and culture are unimaginable without an element of spatial consciousness” (245). Among the growing pieces engaging space, culture, and cognition, a number of scholars have devoted significant attention to Oceania, a region vast and flowing with spatial cultures.

Given the linguistic and cultural diversity in the region, it is not surprising to find a multiplicity of mental models for the organization of space in language and cognition. Mawyer and Feinberg draw attention to scholars who have documented a variety of patterns for spatial orientation at multiple levels of attention, experience, and action (2014). These models permeate the “analysis of topics ranging from space and the social body (Duranti 1992, 1994), space and personal orientation, and the organization of the human artefacted material world (Low and Chambers 1989), to classic issues of wayfinding” (245). Attention to these multiple models, they argue, “allows anthropologists to address issues of ambiguity, ambivalence, and multiple and potentially conflicting encoding of spatial being or relations” (249). The notion that spatial concepts in general can be ambiguous, various, and potentially in conflict suggests a general understanding of space in Oceania as negotiable, flexible, and dynamic. Any ambiguity, ambivalence, or conflict aside, space is intimately woven into the cognitive fabric of human

‘being’ and experience – for which the region of Oceania provides a plethora of examples and support.

There are two major themes at the intersection of space, language, and cognition: those of linguistic relativity and of frames of reference. Cognitive anthropologists and linguists often engage with spatial descriptions in terms of universalistic or relativistic schools of thought. The assumption behind a universalist approach is that all human cultures and languages share underlying regulations for the way that space is perceived cognitively and linguistically (Völkel 2010, 2). While this approach dominated the discourse for quite some time, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity caused a profound shift in the way scholars approach language and cognition. Linguistic relativity proposes that the structure of a given language affects its speaker’s worldview (Völkel 2010, 105). In other words, language so shapes us that it structures our unconscious behavior – the way we see, engage with, and inhabit the world on micro and macro scales. It is through language that we are able to experience and articulate different aspects of the human condition. While linguistic expression may not be able to account for every experience, it serves as a significantly useful tool in which anthropology and cognitive science have been able to explore culture and cognition. Discussions and descriptions of space, language, and cognition are therefore relative to cultural contexts and need to be contextualized as such.

Space is encoded in various cultures by the use of frames of reference – a set of coordinates (three intersecting axes; vertical, sagittal, and transversal) for spatial encoding in language and cognition (Bennardo 2009; Feinberg 2014, 2016; Levinson 2003; Völkel 2010). While universalists have previously assumed that cultures use the same frame of reference, the shift in discourse toward linguistic relativism established that frames of reference are language and culture specific. The literature on spatial cognition distinguishes three major frames of

reference: relative, intrinsic, and absolute (Bennardo 2009; Feinberg 2014, 2016; Levinson 2003; Senft 1997; Völkel 2010). A relative frame is centered on a speaker and remains fixed upon the speaker as she moves. An intrinsic frame is centered on an object and remains fixed upon the object as it moves. An absolute frame is centered neither on the speaker or an object, but employs fixed points of reference. Two familiar examples for the absolute frame is the Indo-European system that uses the cardinal points and one that uses land-sea directionals that is common in many Oceanic languages (Bennardo 2009, 61).

Recent studies undertaken by a number of scholars (Bennardo 2009; Cablitz 2006; Senft 1997; Völkel 2010) reveal that some culturally defined speech communities show cognitive and linguistic preferences for certain frames of reference in describing spatial relationships. Related studies have also shown a systematic correlation between language and cognition in that the frame of reference used in linguistic descriptions of spatial orientation for a given language and culture corresponds to the cognitive spatial orientation of its speakers (Völkel 2010, 2). There are exceptions to this correlation however, as Völkel points out in her comprehensive work on space, social structure, and possession in Tongan language and culture (2010). Though the frames of reference used for cognitive and linguistic spatial orientation and encoding may not directly correspond in a language, there still exists potential for each to inform and influence the other. Bennardo (2009) also explains how in small-scale spaces and interactions, the Tongan language expresses spatial relationships by predominantly using the relative frame of reference. When it comes to larger-scale space and interactions, however, the absolute frame of reference (including seaward and landward, for example) is preferred (Bennardo 2009, 17). Gabriele Cablitz (2006) provides a similar example and conclusion in her exploration of space in Marquesan.

Spatial Orientation in Tonga

Bennardo identifies three sets of lexical items used in Tongan linguistic spatial descriptions.

These are spatial prepositions (locatives), directionals, and spatial nouns. Directionals and spatial nouns are most relevant to my discussion here.³ There are five Tongan directionals expressing spatial relationships: hake (up), hifo (down), mai (towards center), atu (away from center), ange (away from center 2) (Bennardo 2009, 50; Ka'ili 2008; Völkel 2010, 116-117).⁴ Bennardo divides these into two subsets on the basis of the exclusive association of hake/hifo with the vertical axis. The other three directionals are not specifically associated with any particular axis, but are most often used in reference to the horizontal one (52).

Bennardo's third set of lexical items consists of what he calls spatial nouns. He defines a spatial noun as a noun that is either "associated with one of the three frames of reference, or that is preposed to another noun in a structural context that see PP headed by one of the three Tongan spatial prepositions (or lexicalizes *vaha'a*)" (56). Bennardo identifies the parenthetical specification of *vaha'a* (*vā*) as a result of its existence in a structural context of its own. Here, Bennardo offers a general linguistic understanding of the term *vaha'a*, "*Vaha'a* describes the space between two Objects as if it were an Object itself, and as a consequence of this, the structure in which it appears has to elucidate what these two Objects are" (56, n. 25). A number of terms appear in Bennardo's list of spatial nouns, including the four cardinal directions: hahake (east), hihifo (west), tokelau (north), and tonga (south), in addition to those describing sea (*tahi*), inland (*'uta*), left (*to'ohema*), right (*to'omata'u*), front (*mua'i*), back (*mui'i*), above (*'olunga*),

³ In regards to prepositions Völkel writes, "In Tongan, verbs of emotion and perception (such as *'ofa* 'to love' and *sai'ia* 'to like') and verbs of ability and knowledge (such as *poto* 'to be able/to know', *lava* 'to achieve', and *ngalo* 'to forget') demand the locative" (2010, 115). This point, and its significance, will be further discussed in section five.

⁴ The lexical items *mai* and *atu* are also directionals in Tahitian.

below (lalo), and vaha‘a (the space between) (2009, 52).⁵ The cardinal directions, the land-sea axis, and the above-below axis all represent three subtypes of the absolute frame of reference. Tongan spatial nouns allow for the linguistic realization of all three frames of reference currently described in spatial literature. Bennardo notes however, that these can be grouped by the predominant linguistic uses of these frames of reference in certain environments: small-scale and large-scale environments (2009, 85-86). Within large-scale spaces, Bennardo describes the use of a number of single-axis subtypes of the absolute frame of reference. In analyzing his linguistic data, he realized the lexical frequency of the directionals mai (towards center) and atu (away from center). This discovery, lead Bennardo to propose a new subtype for the absolute frame of reference, that which he terms “radial.” He writes, “The linguistic data point unequivocally toward a basic radial organization in the mental representations of social relationships expressed linguistically” (2009, 19). This linguistic data, in addition to a metaphor analysis and a discourse structure analysis, inspired Bennardo to develop radially as a foundational cultural model. While radially is clearly evident in the domain of linguistic cognition, Bennardo’s proposal of the model being foundational “requires that a number of Tongan knowledge domains be organized in a similar way, i.e., that relationships within the domain are expressed as oriented towards or away from a point rather than oneself” (2008, 194). This very brief overview of Bennardo’s model as it has been linguistically developed illustrates that language is an invaluable aspect of exploring mental representations of knowledge and cognition. Bennardo (2008) notes a number of scholars whose works already support his model of radially within various knowledge domains and has himself demonstrated this within the domain of social relationships in his metaphorical analysis of key terms used in Tongan speech about social relations (2008, 2009).

⁵ The lexical items tahi and uta (seaward, inland) are also the same in Tahitian. In addition, the Tahitian terms for front, back, above, and below are: mua, muri, ni’a, and raro, respectively.

Spatial Orientation in Samoa

Bennardo's analysis of space in Tongan language proposes that spatial cognition in Tonga is governed by two dominant spatial models, a relative FoR and an absolute FoR. Works on space and cognition in Tonga have tended to employ linguistic analysis in their examinations of cultural spatial schemas and models. Scholarly examination of these models takes a slightly different form in Samoa, where architecture and village space has long piqued the interest of anthropologists. As Van der Ryn explains, "Samoaan villages make an instructive focus for examining culture-based spatial schemas and orientations in the broader dimensions of culture because of the extent to which Samoa's spatial culture is directly tied to social organization and maintenance of social hierarchy" (Van der Ryn 2016, 114).

In their explorations of space and cognition in Samoa, a number of scholars have drawn similar conclusions (Duranti 1992, 1994; Shore 1996, 2014; Van der Ryn 2007, 2016). Bradd Shore (1996), for example, draws upon Levi-Strauss' work on dual structures in describing two alternative spatial models as informing Samoaan village shapes. The first model is a linear, or binary, model called diametric dualism that is based on the land-sea axis (*tai-uta*) and which can also be conceptualized in terms of an egocentric model or a relative FoR. Shore describes this model as informing linear village shapes along the coastline. "In this linear model, villages are conceived of as having front (*luma*) and back (*tua*) regions. The front of the village is the sea side (*tai*), while the back of the village is the bush side (*uta*)" (Shore 1996, 269). Here, Shore inextricably links the front-back model and sea-inland orientation. The second model Shore identifies is a radial model called concentric dualism that represents a graded relationship between center and periphery (Levi-Strauss 1967; Shore 1996). The reference points for this center-periphery model are not sea-bush, but rather the village *malae* (defined as the center) and

the village outskirts (edge or periphery). The gradual relationship of the center-periphery model “defines a symbolic space in terms of a central viewpoint that looks out at a world defined by gradually diminishing dignity and order” (Shore 1996, 270).

In terms of their “distinct logical and geometric properties, with different implications for their status and symbolic forms,” these two alternative spatial models are viewed by Shore to be in conflict with one another (1996, 273). An important aspect to consider of a binary model is the way it is perceived in terms of classical categories: static, bounded, restricted; it represents the discontinuities in bounded categories. Concentric dualism on the other hand, is open, unbounded, and dynamic; because of its graded and radial nature, it represents a continuum. Shore explains, “Graded structures can better convey the shape of experience, yet they are incapable of formulating the discrete categories through which mutual orientation and reference are made possible” (Shore 1996, 274).

Pointing to the ontological implications of spatial orientation, Shore explains the semiotic associations of each spatial model for Samoan sociality. Spatial models for Samoans do not just serve as tools for physical orientation, but for social, political, and relational orientation as well. The ‘back’ for Samoans, and indeed many other Polynesian cultures, is associated with low rank, antisocial and uncivil behavior, and po — the realm of darkness (night). The ‘front,’ by stark contrast, represents light, civility and organized human life, and the preservation of chiefly rule. Because Shore links the front-back model with the sea-inland model, he concludes that the sea-bush dichotomy carries the same moral implications as front and back.

The sea-inland model, in which geographic features are used for mapping social, kinesthetic, and moral attributes, appears to be a fundamental orientational framework for Polynesians. A set of concrete geographic features is encoded

culturally in binary fashion. The eye is swept back and forth across a diameter that defines opposing sides of a landscape which has at once physical, social, and moral implications. (1996, 272)

Similarly, the center-periphery model is bound up in notions of tapu (sacred, bound, restricted) and noa (profane, unbound, unrestricted), where the center and periphery provide distinct physical coordinates for the relations of these two concepts in social, political, and religious life. Shore's description of Samoan semiotic and moral associations with front and back may be more or less accurate, but Van der Ryn (2016), disputes his linkage of the front-back and sea-inland orientations.

Fepulea'i Micah Van der Ryn (2016) provides a number of critical insights into Shore's work on space and cognition in Samoa. While Shore argues that two alternate spatial models inform Samoan village shapes, Van der Ryn proposes that all villages, regardless of shape (and there are more than just two), are generally informed by the radial model with its concentric-periphery axis. Van der Ryn critically disputes Shore's inextricable linking of the front-back model and the sea-inland orientation. Rather, he argues that the front-back spatial orientation is actually part of the radial schema. The linguistic correlations between tai-uta as sea-inland and luma-tua as front-back lead Shore to propose the binary model as an explicit cultural model. The concentric model, which according to Shore is not linguistically marked for Samoans, represents more of a tacit cultural model. Van der Ryn, however, drawing upon Allen's work (1993), explains that the center-periphery schema is indeed linguistically encoded. Furthermore, the distinction between center and periphery is linguistically realized for Samoans through spatial terms expressing front and back (luma-tua), providing quite convincing evidence that the front-back orientation is linked to the radial model, as opposed to a binary model. The Samoan terms

for the concentric-periphery axes are ‘i luma and ‘i tua, “toward the front,” and “toward the back.” Van der Ryn explains, “Facing inward, or moving inward toward the center is ‘i luma. The inverse, moving to the periphery is ‘i tua (toward the back),” and the graded quality of the radial schema is realized in Samoan linguistic expression “through emphasis on the last vowel. Thus, ‘further to the front’ is *lumā*, ‘further to the back’ is *tuā*” (Van der Ryn 2016, 120).

In his earlier work on *vā* and Samoan architecture, Van der Ryn (2007) describes the concept of *vā* as “a key Samoan concept that connects the tangible and intangible aspects of Samoan culture, principally the architecture, and a system of social relations into a single cultural order” (2). While I will discuss the vast, meaningful nature of the concept in more depth in the next chapter, Van der Ryn’s work on *vā* and architecture is significant to introduce here in relation to the concept as a spatial schema that is visualized in terms of conceptual axis points, boundaries, and vectors. He writes,

The *vā* conceptualization of space perceives space as points and their inter-relationships (known as the point-vector model) rather than an area contained by a boundary (the container model), which Herdrich states is the dominant mode of modeling space in Western society (Lehman, F.K. and D. Herdrich, 2002: 80). We employ this container model when we talk about “enough space” or “space used up.” In the Samoan *vā* (point vector) system, boundaries are culturally understood and/or negotiated through and after the establishment of the *vā*. (Van der Ryn 2007, 3)

Van der Ryn’s explanation of *vā* illustrates the radial and circular nature of such a space, both physically and conceptually. He argues that the most outstanding feature of Samoan architecture is its openness, which has an explicit relationship to *vā*. This openness is in direct support of his

argument that Samoan architecture provides a stage upon which *vā* operates. “The cultural and phenomenological significance of openness is that the highly enhanced interior/exterior visual flow helps put *vā* at the forefront of one’s consciousness” (2007, 10). The concept of openness is also in consonance with the unbounded and negotiable nature of *vā* spaces.

So, what do space and spatial concepts have to do with sociality and social relationship? To quote Shore, “social relations are always located in space,” and the exciting work that is being produced in the field of cognitive anthropology and linguistics give us further insights into cultural expressions of space and socio-spatial relationships. Understanding how space is conceptualized in models along axis point and frames of reference gives us a grounding point for understanding how the spaces between people are similarly understood and expressed. In the next section, I explore the Tongan practice of *tauhi vā*, the nurturing of socio-spatial relationships, as described by Tevita O. Ka‘ili in his PhD dissertation.

Tauhi Vā & Māhina’s Tā-Vā Theory of Reality

Ka‘ili defines *tauhi vā* as the Tongan cultural practice of creating and maintaining beautiful sociospatial relations (2009, 33). He describes its prominence in the Tongan cultural worldview by accounting for its inclusion in a number of writers’ and scholars’ descriptions of core Tongan values. The practice of *tauhi vā* is intimately linked to the mutual performance of social duties (*fatongia*) (Ka‘ili 2008, 2, 31). This is reflected in the Tongan proverb “‘*takitaha tauhi hono vaha‘angatae,*’ each one tends his space (portion) of *ngatae* trees...(Māhina 2004b:141)” (Ka‘ili 2008, 31). In his 2008 doctoral dissertation, “*Tauhi Vā: Creating Beauty through the Art of Sociospatial Relations,*” Ka‘ili explains the centrality of *vā* and *tauhi vā* to Tongan culture and highlights the importance of including *vā*’s often forgot companion, *tā* (time). In Oceanic world-

views and languages, concepts of time and space are often interwoven and distinctions between the two are not always made. Ka‘ili calls attention to notable Hawaiian scholars and activists Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa and Haunani-Kay Trask in their descriptions of time-space conceptualization in Hawaiian culture where the past is the time in front and the future is the time that comes behind (26). This notion of space and time is also echoed by Epeli Hau‘ofa (2008) in his groundbreaking works on the reimagining of space and relationships in Oceania.⁶

While the spatial dimension (vā) of tauhi vā is most often given attention in studies on sociospatial relations, Ka‘ili asserts that full comprehension of the practice is not attainable without including time (tā). He explains,

This omission is significant because tauhi vā is a spatiotemporal concept and practice. For instance, tauhi means to create and maintain a particular rhythm (time), and vā is a social expression of space. Put simply, tauhi vā is a form of tā-vā, time-space. (2008, 34)

To illustrate this argument he refers extensively to the works of Tongan anthropologist and historian ‘Okusitino Māhina and his tā-vā (time-space) theory of reality, arguing that this theory contributes to our understandings of why tauhi vā is relational as well as aesthetic in its practice as a performing art. I will be discussing this theory as it is explored through Ka‘ili’s dissertation. Ka‘ili specifically weaves into his argument for tauhi vā the epistemological and ontological principles associated with this theory. On this he explains, “One of the main epistemological tenets claims that, for Tongans, time intersects (intertwines) in space, and that the intersections of time in space is communal (collective) and circular” (3). This quote reveals

⁶ Bennardo (2008) also highlights this overarching of time in space, particularly in linguistic expression of spatial relationships.

how Bennardo's theory of radially saturates multiple domains of Tongan knowledge, including perceptions of space and time.

Investigating Māhina's tā-vā theory of reality helps us to realize how Tongans conceptualize time and space ontologically and epistemologically — and how this informs sociospatial relations. Similar to Māhina's ontological explorations through a philosophical theory, Bennardo's work illustrates these same understandings, though through linguistic and cognitive analysis. Māhina's theory compartmentalizes reality into three major divisions: nature, mind, and society (Ka'ili 2008, 36). A theory that is ultimately philosophical in nature, it is based upon Tongan ontological and epistemological principles.

Ontologically, tā and vā are the common medium of all things — natural, mental, and social — that exist within a single level of reality. This means that all things exist within time and space and nothing is above or beyond the realm of time and space. Furthermore, all things in nature, mind, and society have four-sided dimensions: three spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension. The three spatial dimensions are height/depth, width/breadth, and length, and the one temporal dimension is form (Māhina 2004b:89). (Ka'ili 2008, 36–37)

While Māhina gives separate terms for the spatial dimensions, they also correspond to Bennardo's spatial nouns: 'olunga/lalo (above/below), mata'u/hema (left/right), and mui/mu'a (forward backward) (Bennardo 2009, 52; Ka'ili 2008, 37 fn. 40). Here, the relatedness of lexical items between Māhina's spatial dimensions of reality and Bennardo's spatial nouns explicitly reveals the connections between the role of space in language and cognition. Epistemologically, Māhina's theory simply asserts that time and space are arranged differently both within and across cultures (Ka'ili 2008, 39). In Tongan language and culture, these concepts are circular,

cyclical – or radial, as Bennardo might call it. Ka‘ili calls upon Māhina and Hau‘ofa in asserting the circular nature of time and space, writing, “Not only is tā-vā collective and communal but it is also arranged in a circular fashion” (2008, 41).

The ontological principle in particular demonstrates the collectivist and circular arrangement of tā and vā.⁷ The purpose of ontologically organizing these concepts in a cyclical fashion is to bring multiple entities into harmonious relations with one another (Ka‘ili 2008, 41). This is made visible in the practice of tauhi vā, especially among closely related persons in a ‘aiga or kin group. Māhina, whose scholarly writings are devoted predominantly to developing his theory of reality, does not write extensively on the practice of tauhi vā. His main contribution is to explain how tā and vā are socially significant:

The social importance of tā and vā is reflected in a number of Tongan cultural practices such as *tauhivā*, the preserving of relationships but literally meaning ‘beating space’. As a practice, it involves the maintenance of exchange relations between social groups by way of performing their reciprocal functions. These social relations of economic and political exchange can be a source of either harmony or conflict, dependent on either the symmetry or the asymmetry of the human arrangement (Māhina 2004c:195). (quoted in Ka‘ili 2008, 42)⁸

It is rather through Ka‘ili’s engagement with Māhina that the tā-vā theory of reality is made essential to tauhi vā – specifically as Ka‘ili defines it as a performing art of sociospatial relations.

⁷ The circular nature of the tā-vā theory of reality further supports Bennardo’s hypothesis of radially.

⁸ Māhina’s reference to “economic and political exchange” further illustrates the central role of language in social cognition and behavior.

Tauhi Vā as an Art of Performance

Ka‘ili argues that the tā-vā theory of reality provides the needed spatiotemporal perspective of tauhi vā in addition to giving us a theoretical basis for explaining the purpose of the practice: creating sociospatial harmony and beauty (Ka‘ili 2008, 43). Describing tauhi vā as an art is useful because the desired outcome of both Tongan arts and the nurturing of sociospatial relationships is to create beauty. According to Tongan scholar, Futa Helu, the basis of beauty is symmetry (Ka‘il 2008, 43). The notions of tufunga (Tongan material arts) and faiva (Tongan performing arts) are most relevant to our discussion here.

The names tufunga and faiva, point to the spatiotemporal nature of Tongan art. Tufunga, according to Māhina, means ‘the temporal production of form in space’ and faiva means, “to do time in space” (2002:5, 2003b:98). Tufunga is the symmetrical arrangement of materials, and faiva is the rhythmic movement of the body in space. Both arts aim at creating harmony and beauty through the rhythmic or symmetrical arrangement of time (tā) in space (vā). (Ka‘ili 2008, 43)

Ka‘ili continuously demonstrates the qualities of tauhi vā as art by referring to various tufuga and faiva arts. In doing so, he also reaffirms the centrality of the tā-vā theory of reality to the practice of tauhi vā. For example, the art of lalava — the decorative lashing of two posts in a fale (house) — involves the criss-crossing of sennit cordages to mark time (tā) in an intersecting, circular, and cyclical pattern (Ka‘ili 2008, 42).⁹ Ka‘ili relates this to tauhi vā by giving visibility to this pattern through language, “This arrangement is also expressed in the Tongan prefix fe — a prefix that indicates mutual or intersecting actions. For example, fetokoni‘aki, mutual support, is the act of helping one another through mutual actions” (2008, 42).

⁹ Here we also see how radially permeates Tongan artistic domain of knowledge.

The notion of faiva, or performance is particularly central to tauhi vā. Ka‘ili describes a special relationship between tufunga and faiva arts by where faiva can be, in some cases, the performance of a tufunga art (2008, 44). This he illustrates in an example of speech making and speech performing. However what is most striking is his description of this relationship in terms of tufunga fonua and tauhi fonua (a form of tauhi vā). “Tufunga fonua,” he writes, “is the *art of creating and organizing* social duties (fatongia) related to the land (fonua), and tauhi fonua is the *art of performing* social duties (fatongia) related to the land (fonua). Hence, tauhi is a performing art” (Ka‘ili 2008, 45; emphasis mine). It is here that Ka‘ili draws explicit attention to tauhi vā as the performance of nurturing or caring for sociospatial relations.

In recent years a number of scholars and artists have devoted attention to the concept of performance and have attempted to separate it from its traditional associations within its traditional artistic domains. In his well-known article “Verbal Art as Performance,” Richard Bauman (1975) writes,

We view the act of performance as situated behavior, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts. Such contexts may be identified at a variety of levels — in terms of settings, for example, the culturally-defined places where performance occurs. (298)

In Bauman’s words we find another understanding of tauhi vā as performance, one that is rather pragmatic in that its definition is broad and can be applied to a number of practices and behaviors. Tauhi vā it is patterned behavior that is “situated” and only rendered relevant as performance in the Tongan cultural milieu.

Continuing to explicate the relationship between Tongan arts and tauhi vā, Ka‘ili turns to the Tongan fine art of ngatu (barkcloth – tapa, kapa) making. Since symmetry is a valued quality

of beauty, elaborate geometrical patterns are also valued in ngatu making. These patterns are called kupesi in ngatu making and go by either the same name or sīpinga in the performance of tauhi vā. Similarly, when tauhi vā is performed correctly it leads to tā sīpinga, the formation of beautiful social patterns (equated with setting a social example) (Ka‘ili 2008, 46–47).

The association of tauhi vā with art involves the requirement of skill in its performance and either correct or incorrect results (and a skilled or inept performer). Ka‘ili writes, “In the performing art of tauhi vā, the correct performance of fatongia creates synchrony (tonu). In other words, synchrony (tonu) is the performance of fatongia with exactness and correctness. In contrast to synchrony, the incorrect performance of fatongia creates a lack of synchrony (hala, fehālaki)” 2008, 48–49). Bauman also speaks to the notion of competence in performance.

Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption and responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and the ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. (1975, 293)

Though Bauman writes in explicit reference to verbal communication as performance, the idea of communicative competence is particularly important to our discussion here. The performance of tauhi vā requires the competence and skills of being able to behave in socially appropriate ways, and this too includes the act of speech. Since it is the correct performance of fatongia that creates the desired outcome of synchrony, one must be versed in Tongan social duties and their associated cultural values in order to effectively engage in tauhi vā as performance.

Synchrony, similar to symmetry, involves mutual performance and understanding. This notion of mutuality or collectivity is absolutely essential to tauhi vā and creating harmonious social relations. “In tauhi vā, synchronization is based on feongio‘i‘aki — being in-tune with the

feeling and actions of others. By sensing the feelings and actions of others, tauhi vā performers are able to synchronize their performance to meet the needs of other” (Ka‘ili 2008, 49).

Feongo‘i‘aki is essentially a cultural expression of social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory is used in the disciplines of psychology, education, and communication and proposes that observing other individuals within the contexts of social interactions, experiences, and media influences can directly shape aspects of an individual’s knowledge acquisition and behavior.

R.I.M. Dunbar (2004) explains that theory of the mind and intentional stance are advanced forms of social cognition that appear to be unique to humans and related to our use of language. Social cognition between humans, therefore, “is based on the hierarchical phenomenon of mind reading” (101) — or the ability to interpret behavior “in terms of the belief states of the mind that is behind the behavior” (100), an ability that is made possible only through language (“*I suppose that you believe that I want you to think that X is the case.*” [101]). Dunbar asserts that the particularly advanced phenomena of social cognition are integral to the success of human interaction and sociality. While the notion of feongo‘i‘aki refers to the ability to intuitively sense others emotional or cognitive states (Ka‘ili 2008, 49), it is very similar to “mind-reading” and cannot be accomplished without the use of language. The part that intuition plays is in assessing the combination of linguistic and non-linguistic utterances — but this would be near impossible without the use of language. In drawing these connections between social cognitive theory and feongo‘i‘aki we see how the use of language can come to play a central role in the performance of tauhi vā. Contextualizing feongo‘i‘aki in terms of performance as discussed above also demonstrates how this concept is integral in the ability to correctly perform fatongia in the performing art of tauhi vā.

Ka‘ili asserts that, like all performing arts, tauhi vā can be understood in terms of form, content, medium, and function (2009, 54). In his explication of these four concepts, Ka‘ili further illustrates the centrality of tauhi vā in Tongan ontology and its significance to Tongan society. They also help us to further understand how a variety of the concepts discussed thus far are organized in the performance of tauhi vā. Ka‘ili explains,

The form of tauhi vā is symmetry (or symmetrical relations) and the content (uho) is one’s share of social duty (fatongia, vaha‘angatae). People are the main performers of tauhi vā. Therefore the human body is the medium of tauhi vā. The two main functions of tauhi vā are to ease life’s burdens (ma‘ama‘a e kavenga) and to generate social stability and cohesion (ma‘uma‘uluta). (2008, 54)

When tauhi vā is performed correctly, it facilitates a number of emotions shared by those involved that Ka‘ili describes in Tongan terms. This is achieved by the mutual performance of fatongia within the symmetrical form of tauhi vā.

In tauhi vā, the mutual performance of fatongia creates symmetrical relations (vā), and symmetry of the social relations gives rise to mālie, harmonious beauty. In Tongan, mālie denotes beauty, harmony, pleasantness, and gentleness. It is a form of beauty that arises from the rhythmic and symmetrical arrangement of tā in vā. (Ka‘ili 2008, 49–50).

Māfana, or inner warmth, is another emotion associated with the correct performance of tauhi vā (Ka‘ili 2008, 50). Ka‘ili illustrates how these emotions are related to symmetry in his comparisons to Tongan arts. Mālie is the effect where correct performance of fatongia is the cause. In the art of tauhi vā, correct performance in symmetrical form gives rise to mālie, which

in turn evokes a number of emotions such as māfana (warmth), vela (burning), and tauēlangi (jubilation) (Ka‘ili 2008, 51–52).

The two functions of tauhi vā have implicit ontological connections in their relation to social organization and sociospatial relations. The emotions of mālie, māfana, and tauēlangi create and maintain these two functions: easing life’s burdens and creating social cohesion and stability. Ka‘ili’s descriptions of these emotions help to illustrate the significance of both form and function to the performance of tauhi vā. On this Ka‘ili explains, “according to the tā-vā theory of reality, when tauhi vā creates harmony and beauty (form), it becomes immensely useful in holding together (function) social and kinship groups. For instance, people remain in social groups that are harmonious and beautiful” (2008, 54). Similar to the notion of symmetry and beauty is the concept of radially.

Vā & Radiality

In a 2008 essay entitled, “Metaphors, Source Domains, and Key Words in Tongan Speech about Social Relationships: ‘Ofa ‘Love’ Is Giving,” Bennardo analyzes a number of Tongan metaphors associated with social relationships and reveals that the organizational structure of radiality is present in the knowledge domain of social relationships. He writes,

The domain of space and spatial relationships is also very frequently used as a source for metaphor construction. The axis that Tongans privilege is the vertical axis, as might be expected in a stratified society such as the kingdom of Tonga... The salience of the domain of space as a source for Tongan metaphors about social relationships takes on greater meaning in light of... the Tongan

preference for representing spatial relationships radially, both mentally and linguistically... (Bennardo 2008, 191).

Bennardo essentializes this metaphor construction in social space as reflected in the sentence, “‘ofa is giving, either giving help (from higher to lower) or giving duty or respect (from higher to lower)” (196). Similarly, in her work Völkel asserts that the use of emotive verbs such as ‘ofa also require use of the Tongan spatial prepositions (locatives). Further explicating the spatial nature of ‘ofa, Bennardo explains,

The directionality of the action (from agent to patient) is seen as essential in determining the type of action envisaged, either help from higher to lower or duty or respect from lower to higher. Furthermore, the preferred agent for the action is an individual other than ego — ego is kept as uninvolved as possible. (2008, 196)

This latter point about the lack of involvement on behalf of the ego demonstrates and further supports the model of radially as it informs social relationships. Actions are carried out either *mai*, away from a specified center other than ego, or *atu*, towards a specific center other than ego. Echoing my discussion of *vā* above, all of these points in conjunction illustrate that space is essential to Tongan perceptions of social relations.

‘Ofa (love) is a Tongan value that is intricately linked to the performance of *tauhi vā*. Ka‘ili argues that the primary aim of the art of *tauhi vā* (and *teu le vā*) is to create harmony and beauty (*mālie*, *faka‘ofa‘ofa*) (2008, 3). The feelings of *mālie*, *māfana*, and *tauēlangi* that result from the correct performance of *tauhi vā* are both accompanied by ‘ofa, as well as a result of *faka‘ofa‘ofa* (causing or giving love) as a method in the practice of *tauhi vā*. Almost mirroring *tauhi vā*, which involves the mutual performance of social duties (*fatongia*), Bennardo reveals that ‘ofa is characterized as giving help, duty, or respect. In this vein, we could similarly use the

notion of tauhi vā as a metaphorical construction to explore relationships between space and cognition and to support the fundamental cultural model of radially.

Bennardo explains that knowledge supporting the model of radially can be sorted into three major groups: space, possession, and time; traditional navigation and religious beliefs; and kinship and ritual action (2008, 195). The first group is most relevant to the themes that have been discussed in this chapter, particularly as they include fundamental ontological aspects. In support of Oceanic notions of time and space, Bennardo affirms, “The domains of space and time are typically related...For example, it is typical that in any given language there is considerable overlap between linguistic expression realizing spatial relationships and those realizing temporal relationships” (2008, 195). Here we see links to Ka‘ili’s work on tauhi vā and his assertion that understanding relationships as spatiotemporal is an essential aspect of tauhi vā. In performance of tauhi vā the domains of space and time are essentially related as Ka‘ili demonstrates through his engagement with Māhina’s tā-vā theory of reality. Radially in the context of tauhi vā, thus similarly connotes the interweaving of time and space.

In Van der Ryn’s work we likewise see convincing evidence of Bennardo’s argument that radially is a potentially foundational cultural model for Polynesia. The arguments in his works explored in this chapter give visibility to radially as it filters into two cognitive domains, those of architecture and village spatial organization. According to Van der Ryn, Samoan architecture provides a “modus operandi” for vā (2007, 2). He likewise describes the vā space as based on a point-vector model, one that is unbounded and radial. In linking the concepts of vā and radially and reading Van der Ryn’s work alongside Bennardo’s, I argue that the close relationship between these two concepts connotes the vā space as a similarly dominant and foundational model for these cultures.

In Bennardo's discussion of Tongan metaphors in speech about social relationships, the author gives evidence for his hypothesized Tongan foundational cultural model of radially. He does this by describing the role of the mai-atu axis in the expression of emotion in social relationships. In light of the connections made between 'ofa — and related emotive verbs — and tauhi vā, we can conclude that tauhi vā is also carried out in the radial subtype of the absolute frame of reference. In tauhi vā, in other words, the mutual performance of fatongia (social duties) is enacted either mai or atu. The “other-than-ego” nature of the radial subtype, in which radially is seen as “the generative mental engine behind various forms of collectivism,” (Bennardo 2009, xvii) is closely aligned with the communal, collectivist, and circular function of tauhi vā.

In hinting to the ontological implications of space and cognition, Bennardo explains, “Radiality, a Tongan foundational cultural model, is generated by the social networks that are characteristic of the Tongan village milieu while at the same time it contributes to generate the behavior that creates those networks” (2009, 19). In this quote he asserts that the model of radiality is itself one that is created within, and informed by, social networks in Tongan cultural environments while it also simultaneously creates and informs those very social networks (and is perpetuated within them). Thus Bennardo illustrates that,

radiality is a cultural model because it is replicated across individuals, and thus shared by a culturally uniform population. It is a foundational model because it is at the root of various domains of knowledge. In short, radiality represents an internal model for knowledge construction, storage, and retrieval, and, at the same time, an external model shared and taken for granted by a culturally homogenous group. (2008, 196; see also Bennardo 2009)

Bennardo argues that radially is culturally foundational, and as such should become an integral aspect of ongoing processes that attempt to describe and understand Tongan culture (2008, 197). This is precisely what I have endeavored to do in my discussion here. By placing Ka‘ili in conversation with Bennardo, Shore, and Van der Ryn, my goal has been to illustrate that linguistic and cognitive models for encoding space, while they may not be interchangeable on all levels, significantly influence and inform one another in ways that are essential to understanding cultural concepts and practices. Furthermore, this foundational cultural model has profound implications for other Polynesian cultures in Oceania, particularly those of Samoan, Marquesan, and Tahitian. While further research needs to be conducted to project the model onto the whole of Polynesia, we can already draw connections between and across cultures that are unique and yet familial in relation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the relationships between linguistic perceptions and encodings of space and spatial cognition in sociospatial relations through the works of a number of significant writers and their respective contributions to distinct yet overarching literatures, discourses, and concepts. I have demonstrated the significance of space to linguistic and cognitive functions by engaging with Bennardo’s foundational cultural model for radially. I investigated Ka‘ili’s understandings of the Tongan practice of tauhi vā in conjunction with Māhina’s tā-vā theory of reality to similarly illustrate the centrality of space and the nurturing of social space to Tongan ontology and epistemology. Finally, by placing spatial models into conversation with the notion of tauhi vā as defined by Ka‘ili and Van der Ryn’s work on Samoan architecture, I have given comprehensive attention to major themes at the intersection of language, space, and cognition —

illustrating that the relationships between linguistic perceptions of space and cognitive perceptions of social space contextualize and illuminate Tongan/Samoan concepts of the space between, social space, and the nurturing of sociospatial relations. In the following chapter I continue an engagement with space by exploring how the concept of *vā* is understood in current scholarly and creative writing in the region.

CHAPTER THREE. “I AM THE VA:” CULTURAL SPATIALITY IN PASIFIKA POETRY

In the previous chapter I discussed spatial concepts and schemas in Oceania, particularly Tongan and Samoan concepts of space, the notion of *vā*, and the associated practice of *tauhi vā* (*teu le vā* in Samoan). In this chapter I examine and open-up Pacific poetry in new ways by applying these concepts of space in the explication of creative writing. I begin by continuing the engagement with space in an overview of *vā* as understood and applied by a number of creative writers and scholars throughout the region. I then explore the use of cultural spatialities and relational space in the poetry of three female Pasifika poets based in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Selina Tusitala Marsh, Karlo Mila, and Grace Teuila Taylor. While the concept of *vā* is an aspect of being for persons of both genders in Samoan and Tongan culture, I believe that these women are writing about *vā* in distinct ways, particularly in an engagement of the *vā* with notions of identity and belonging. Analyzing the text itself in two to three poems from each poet in addition to its physical arrangement on the page, I investigate how the nature of space and cultured spatialities are present in these women’s writings. The concept of *vā* and other cultural spatialities as explored within these poems points to spatial and relational awareness, to complexities and ambivalence in relationships, and elucidates space made present and active in Pasifika creative writing. A theme on the rise within contemporary Pasifika poetry, *vā* represents the space between relationships — from the relationships between people, the relationships between people and nature, to politicized concepts such as insider/outsider, colonized/colonizer, and authentic/inauthentic.

For each of the examples in this chapter, I first employed a method of open coding to identify and pull into visibility any spatial concepts, terms, and metaphors. I then went back

through the poems using a two-category coding system to draw attention to both *vā* and relational space, which I have termed “explicit spatial expression,” (identified with bold text) and to other spatial concepts, which I have termed “implicit spatial expression.” (identified with underlined text). Explicit spatial expressions are identified through the poet’s use of terms and phrases such as *vā*, space, between, the space between. Examples are also defined as explicit when the language and imagery, or a certain poetic device, clearly illustrates and alludes to relational spaces or the nurturing of relational space as, for instance, a poet’s explicit use of *vā* in her writing. Implicit expressions of space are identified through the poet’s use of general spatial metaphors or other spatially figurative language. In brief interpretation of these metaphors I call attention to the more general spatial concepts and schemas discussed in the previous chapter as a significant feature of Pasifika poetic practice.

The Space Between: Contemporary Understandings of *Vā*

Over the past few decades a number of scholars and creative writers of Oceania have grappled with the concept of *vā* in addition to writing about other indigenous concepts of space. This particular topic grows in resonance as academic discourse moves towards embracing indigenous voices and epistemologies. Indigenous epistemology is seen here to be in-line with Gegeo’s prescription for the terms as “a cultural group’s way of thinking and of creating and formulating knowledge” (2001, 493). A majority of the socio-spatial literature thus far has centered on Polynesian understandings of space (*vā* in Samoan and Tongan; *wā* in Hawaiian and Maori), particularly those coming out of Tongan and Samoan cultural contexts, and focuses primarily on social space or social relations. Scholars and creatives such as Albert Wendt (1999), Konai Helu Thaman (2008), Sa’iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor (2004), Tēvita O. Ka’ili (2005, 2008), Caroline

Sinavaiana-Gabbard (2001), ‘Okusitino Māhina, I’uogafa Tuagalu (2008), and Fepulea’i Micah Van der Ryn (2007, 2016) have all contributed significantly to contemporary understandings of vā by teasing out a broad conversation about the potential centrality of vā in critical scholarship for and of the region.

In his often-cited essay “Tatauing the Postcolonial Body” Samoan scholar and author Albert Wendt, sometimes referred to as the “grandfather” of Pacific literature, contextualizes vā in terms of its centrality to the Sāmoan worldview.

Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. Meanings change as the relationships and the contexts change. A well-known Sāmoan expression is ‘Ia teu le va’ – cherish, nurture, care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or things in terms of groups, in terms of va or relationships. (1999, 402)

In a related vein, Samoan poet Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard also engages with the notion of vā on multiple levels in her creative writing. In the introduction to her collection of poems, *Alchemies of Distance*, she provides an apt metaphorical description of vā as a shared garden — particularly as it relates to the Samoan expression “Ia teu le va.”

In Samoan epistemology, the *space between* things is called the ‘vā.’

Relationships are vā, the space between I and thou. In friendship we cultivate the vā like a shared garden, that patch of ground between us we planted with bananas

and strawberries. Teu le vā. Cultivate the space between us, our relationship.
(2001, 20)

Sinavaiana-Gabbard's "shared garden" helps us to understand the intrinsic nature of vā as relational. In essence, vā *is* relationship — space that relates — a foundational aspect of understanding tauhi vā and teu le vā as cultural practices that emphasize the nurturing of sociospatial relations.

Tongan educator and poet Konai Helu Thaman writes about the importance vā as the basis for Tongan social interaction and reflects upon contemporary understandings of its use. In her 2008 paper, "Nurturing Relationships and Understanding Responsibilities: A Pacific Perspective," Thaman explains that "vaa is used to describe interpersonal relationships" in contemporary contexts and as such there are "behavioural expectations involved. The basis for these relationships may be kin related, work related or friendship related. Nevertheless, the persons involved understand their roles in the relationships, which are generally contextual, and act appropriately" (464). Thaman also extends the practice of vā as a methodological foundation for peace and intercultural understanding. In this vein she describes vaha'a (vaa, vā) as "the figurative space between two persons or groups and what it implies," and "is the foundation for appropriate behaviour and performance and the neglect and/or harming of such a space usually results in misunderstanding and conflict" (Thaman 2004, 32 cited in Ka'ili 2008, 23).

Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor and Tēvita O. Kā'ili have drawn explicit links between cultural migration, vā, and transnational relations in their works. Both scholars point to ideas of mutual respect and the nurturing of relationships that are inherent within the notion of vā and reflected in the Tongan and Samoan phrases tauhi vā and teu le vā, or nurturing the space between, respectively. Lilomaiava-Doktor identifies vā as a core concept tied to malaga

(migration). She defines *vā* as social space that “connotes mutual respect in sociopolitical arrangement that nurtures the relationships between people, places, and social environments” (2004, 200). She also expands upon Wendt’s ideas of *vā* and the centrality of the concept to Samoan culture by describing various forms of *vā* in everyday social interactions and the way it governs multiple aspect of everyday life:

The concept of *va* is a way of thinking about space, specifically ‘social space’. In Samoan epistemology, *va* is a highly complex phenomenon influencing interactions in everyday life. *Va* governs and guides individuals and ‘*aiga*’ behavior, inflected by factors such as gender, cultural status, age, and marital status. In both public and private spaces, food division, and distribution, sleeping and sitting arrangements, and language usage are all conceived through *va*. (2004, 200)

Lilomaiava-Doktor echoes Thaman in illustrating that *vā* governs interactions and behaviors in all aspects of Samoan culture. In regards to Samoan migration, her major contribution is what she terms the “geography of *vā*” (2004, 218), arguing that the concept needs to be understood in order to understand migration – the patterns of movement and maintenance of relationships across distances. On this she writes,

Distance does not separate ‘*aiga*’, but only provides further interconnecting social pathways. Nor does the greater distance translate into diminishing commitment to families, because social connections constitute a significant part of their identity and self-esteem. It is therefore, the *va*, social connections rather than geographical boundaries that are central to the Samoan conception of movement. (2004, 357)

In identifying *vā* as a core concept of *malaga*, Lilomaiava-Doktor demonstrates a significant way in which the concept of *vā*, of sociospatial relations, permeates the realities of everyday life in Samoan culture.

In his essay *Tauhi Vā: Nurturing Tongan Sociospatial Ties in Maui and Beyond*, Tēvita O Ka‘ili explains, “The Moanan idea of space, *vā*, emphasizes space in between. This is fundamentally different from the popular western notion of space as an expanse or an open area” (2005, 89). Here Ka‘ili throws into light the significance of definitions of *vā* as “space that relates,” rather than space that separates, and how this is a markedly different from western notions of space. He argues that understanding the meanings of *vā* is a fundamental prerequisite in order to grasp the complexities of *tauhi vā*, nurturing sociospatial ties (89). In this particular essay, Ka‘ili also draws attention to Tongan historian and anthropologist ‘Okusitino Māhina as one of the most notable scholars who is giving in-depth critical attention to *vā* (space), in addition to the interrelated concept of *tā* (time). Māhina categorizes *vā* into four main dimensions: physical, social, intellectual, and symbolic (Māhina 2002 cited in Ka‘ili 2005, 90). In the practice of *tauhi vā*, *vā* is connected to all four dimensions but is primarily associated with the social, as the practice implies the nurturing or caring of social relations. On this specific engagement with Māhina, Ka‘ili asserts that sociality and spatiality are linked together in Tongan social ontology.

Tongans experience social relations spatially and come to know space socially. Thus, for Tongans, human relationships are both socially and spatially constituted. Since *vā* is the social space between individuals or groups, it also relates and connects individuals and groups to one another. (2005, 90)

The works of Lilomaiava-Doktor and Ka‘ili both demonstrate Bennardo’s foundational cultural model of radially as it permeates multiple domains of knowledge – migration and transnationalism (mobility).

In his paper “Heuristics of the Vā,” Samoan educator I’uogafa Tuagalu (2008) analyzes the concept of vā, specifically focusing on the differentiation between vā fealoaloa’i (social space) and vā tapua’i (worship space). He analyzes these practices as developed in the Samoan village context and goes on to examine how they have changed in the course of their practice in the New Zealand context. Before delving into the respective distinctions between the social and spiritual dimensions of the vā, Tuagalu offers a brief mapping of its vast conceptual domain. Throughout the course of the research for his paper, he counted at least 37 different vā spatial relationships. A few of these are vā feailoa’i (protocols of meeting), vā fealofani (brotherly and sisterly love), vā fealoaloa’i (respectful space), and vā tapua’i (worshipful space) (Tuagalu 2008, 110).

Throughout his explorations of the social and spiritual dimensions of vā, Tuagalu continuously illustrates the integral nature of vā to Samoan ontology and society. Samoan social structure is understood as divided into five categories: the matai (chiefs), the faletua ma tausii (wives of matai), the aumaga (untitled men), the tama’ita’i (unmarried women), and the fanau lalovaoa (children of all) (Shore 1982; Tuagalu 2008). Each of the divisions within society is accompanied by a specific set of roles and obligations that govern the relationships in which peoples engage. Tuagalu explains the role of vā in Samoan social structure as “determined by the interplay of the social roles and functions of the individuals engaging in va relationships. It is in a village context that people imbibe their *fa’asinomaga*, learn about va relationships” (2008, 112). *Fa’asinomaga* is the Samoan term for identity. For Samoan persons, individual identity is

intimately linked to social structure, to kinship and community relationships. The implication in Tuagalu's statement above is that Samoan identity is woven together with the understanding and navigation of *vā* relationships.

Tuagalu also writes on the negotiable and flexible characteristics of *vā*. He does so by comparing social boundaries and land boundaries. The understanding of boundaries is very important to notions of relational space. Though not necessarily clearly defined, traditional land boundaries (*tuao'i*) are dependent upon and maintained by village sanction. Social *tuao'i* are similarly maintained, however they are ultimately subject to individual interpretation. Tuagalu intimates, "Far from being written in stone, *the vā...is a negotiated, interpretative and shifting space*" (2008, 114; emphasis in original). The literature thus far has supported this argument, and it is put into action and applied in the creative writing that is examined in the next sections.

In his intriguing work on *vā* and Samoan architecture, Van der Ryn (2007) defines *vā* as the Samoan word for space generally, but points out that it also denotes social relations and their accompanying behavioral expectations and obligations. In his interviews conducted on the concept for his research, Van der Ryn identifies three basic categories: 1) The *vā* between people and God, also defined by Tuagalu as *vā tapua'i*, the worshipful space, 2) the *vā* of people between one another, and 3) the *vā* between people and the natural environment (2–3). Much in-line with other authors and works on the concept, Van der Ryn highlights the significance of *vā* to the Samoan worldview,

One's existence and well being at the individual, social, and environmental levels are all rooted to recognizing one's *vā* relationships. Social order is based on cultural assumptions about the nature of different *vā* relations; for example, such as between brother and sister, husband and wife, parents and children, extended

family group and *matai*, *matai* and village council, and what types of behaviors and actions those relationships require. (2007, 3)

Here Van der Ryn illustrates that much of existence and daily life is based upon the recognition and negotiation of various *vā* relationships and spaces. Echoing Wendt and Sinavaiana-Gabbard, Van der Ryn also goes on to reference the expression and practice *teu le va*, the nurturing of and tending to relational spaces. In the previous chapter, I examined his argument that Samoan architecture operates as a stage upon which *vā* is made active and visibly expressed. A Samoan style *fale* (house; building) has been historically and traditionally designed to be open, lack boundaries, and increase visibility. This design enhances and nurtures the *vā* space in the small acts of everyday life, such as inviting a passer by to sit and enjoy a meal. As he describes architectural change in Samoa, particularly in the aftermath of World War II, Van der Ryn explains how social interaction and Samoan custom have been affected by the increase in *fale palagi*, of western style houses. He writes, "...while the understandings about *va* and *vā fealoaloa'i* may exist, the phenomenological experience of the *va* has been largely disrupted" (Van der Ryn 2007, 24). This is true for Samoan persons who live in diasporic communities in places like New Zealand as well. I would argue that in addition to (or perhaps in lieu of) being "disrupted," these understandings, like the *vā* space itself, are being negotiated and transformed across time and space, something that is made visible in both scholarly and creative writing of the region.

This brief overview of some of the foundational literature has attempted to illuminate the vast conceptual domain of *vā*. While generally a Samoan and Tongan term for space, it holds within its letters a world of meaning and potential. *Vā* is the space between, a relational space between peoples and things. In traditional cultural and village contexts, the concept is understood

as a space integral to social structure — entailing certain expectations, behaviors, and obligations — and that binds the cohesiveness of community. Though the relationships and meanings shift shape, form, and function across space, *vā* remains an important aspect of maintaining relationships through distance and time and in the formulation of Samoan and Tongan identity. In exploring contemporary understandings of *vā*, we find that it is a space negotiated, interpretive, and shifting shape and function. I now turn to analyzing the works of three female Pasifika poets in terms of contemporary understandings of *vā* discussed here and other spatial concepts and schemas explored in the previous chapter.

Selina Tusitala Marsh

Selina Tusitala Marsh is a poet and scholar of Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, and French descent. She was the first Pacific Islander to graduate with her PhD from the University of Auckland. In 2009 she published her first collection of poetry, *Fast Talking PI*, which won the NZSA Jesse Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry the following year. Marsh's creative writing and critical essays have been published in a number of anthologies and journals including *Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poetry in English*, *Mauri Ola: Contemporary Polynesian Poetry in English (Whetu Moana II)*, *BlackMail Press*, and *The Contemporary Pacific* and she is the editor of the anthology *Niu Voices: Contemporary Pacific Fiction I*. In 2013, she published her second collection of poetry, *Dark Sparring*. She currently teaches Pacific Literature and Creative Writing at Auckland University. Marsh's creative writing is often subversive, discussing controversial issues within culture, politics, and identity. Though speaking to a number of regional and global issues, her poetry is also deeply personal. Often performing her poetry as spoken word, Marsh brings her poems to life with lyrical and oratorical qualities,

qualities that can be felt in the rhythm of her written works as well. I will be exploring the use of space in her first collection, *Fast Talking PI*.

Poem 1 “Afakasi”

“Afakasi” is a poem about living the spaces between in relation to Afakasi identity. Permeated with imagery, figurative language, cultural allusion, and utilizing terms and phrases from five different languages (English and French; Samoan, Māori, and Tongan), Marsh discusses a concept that is hard to define against its very real and palpable existence. The title of her poem, “Afakasi,” is a Samoan term that denotes a person of Samoan and Palagi (European) descent. In this poem, Marsh draws upon concepts of space, particularly *vā*, to describe her experience of being Afakasi. She describes various kinds of spaces in relating experience and emotion. In the first stanza, she immediately links the concepts of identity and space. The poem begins,

Half moons ago
people were hollowed-out tablets of stone
spaces were given them
according to spaces they left (5)

Marsh uses cultural allusion and metaphor in an implicit spatial expression that gives reference to pre-destined roles that people once filled, and continue to fill, based on genealogy or kinship; important roles played in the political, religious, and social structures of community or international life. She uses the spatial term “hollowed-out” to emphasize the filling of empty spaces — here deployed as a metaphor for the concept of succession.

As Marsh goes on we see her use more explicit spatial expression,

other spaces were filled with *va*
these were warmed with the breath of others
the thrum of *matua tausi*
even if she was just another mirage (6)

Here, Marsh explicitly employs the term *vā* and directly references social and kinship relationships. Spaces that “were warmed with the breath of others / the thrum of Matua tausi / even if she was just another mirage” (l. 22–25) illustrate the nurturing of the *vā* with one’s ancestors. Matua tausi is a Samoan phrase that denotes a respected and beloved elder (Simanu-Klutz, 2014). Her use of tactile imagery illustrates that, although *vā* is sometimes a space “filled with darkness,” (l. 17) it is also a space that is alive, warm, and filled with the “thrum” of loved ones. It is a relational space that is warmed with the breath of many people. Here Marsh also speaks to the instability of *vā*. Her use of “mirage” illustrates that *vā* is a space frequently shifting shape, form, and function.

To add to her illustration of *vā*, Marsh draws parallels with the Samoan and Māori concepts of *pouliuli* and *te kore*, “darkness,” or the “void.”

in other spaces hovered pouliuli
te kore, a nothingness, a yawning galaxy
into these spaces the young would dip their forefingers
rubbing the blackness on their lips
a moko mapping where they had been
and where they were to go (6)

Te kore as a common noun can also be translated to mean “chaos,” and within this poem serves as an allusion to *Te Kore*, a sort of character or actor that represents the void or the chaos that precedes creation in the histories of many *iwi* (tribes) of Aotearoa (Royal, 2012). Marsh then delves into metaphor to explain this idea of chaos before creation: “into these spaces the young would dip their forefingers / rubbing the blackness on their lips / a moko mapping where they had been / and where they were to go” (l. 31–34). *Moko* is the common Māori term for various forms of traditional tattoo/tattooing (Higgins, 2013). The tactile imagery and metaphor here speak to the young who explore the chaos of *vā* and from it gain understanding, birth creativity, and explore the potentiality of creating new networks and relationships.

As the poem draws to a close, Marsh uses implicit spatial expression to remap identity through *vā* as she metaphorically becomes the space between. Employing a blend of figurative language with Samoan and French phrases, Marsh brings the poem directly home and back to its title, “Afakasi.”

some spaces are brown
some are blue
o lo ‘u igoa Tusitala
je m’appelle Marchant
flow in and out
turning space sinopia. (7)

These lines include within them direct illustrations of *vā* within the self. The visual imagery here speaks of the space between land and sea. “My name is Tusitala,” written in Samoan, and “My name is Marchant,” in French are a direct reference to the relationship, the *vā*, between the Samoan and French blood that run through her veins. The juxtaposition of these two language in combination with the line “flow in and out” represent the relationship between insider and outsider, as well as gives reference to the sea. “Sinopia” from the last line is a natural earth pigment that is usually dark, reddish-brown in color. Marsh’s use of this term reflects the *vā* of being neither wholly Samoan nor wholly Palagi. It is a space between, in this case a space created by the melding of two other spaces. The last lines also indicates that the author herself becomes the space between, a thought that carries with it a positive connotation of being “whole” in light of how *vā* is articulated and understood in the current literature.

Poem 2 “Fast Talking PI”

Selina Tusitala Marsh’s poem, “Fast Talking PI,” is an anthem to the fluid and dynamic nature of identity for Pacific Islanders in the world today. The structure of Marsh’s poem reflects *su’ifefiloi*, a traditional Sāmoan method of storytelling that holistically incorporates linked

vignettes. In each stanza, Marsh declares different aspects of Pacific Islander identity, ranging from identities imposed by outside forces, to identities in flux — determined by certain contexts, to identities created from within Pacific Islanders themselves. This structure of *su'ifefiloi* forcefully illustrates the all-encompassing nature of *vā* in navigating a multiplicity of identities. Throughout the poem, Marsh expresses identity in relation to peoples, ideas, and objects, illustrating how Pacific Islander identities are formed largely through collective identity and experience. Employing a blend of repetition, powerful figurative language, and strong rhythm in her poem “Fast Talking PI,” Marsh intricately maps a variety of contemporary “PI” identities into the *vā*. A poignant representation of cultural identities finds itself in the following two stanzas,

I'm a fale PI
I'm a marae PI
I'm a **living breathing dwelling of my ancestors** PI

...

I'm a land-based PI
I'm a fanua PI
I'm a village is the centre of my world PI (58–59)

Marsh uses a blend of implicit and explicit spatial expression to work herself into intimately cultural and place-based identities. Between the ideas put forth in both sets we can pull out a number of spatial concepts described in chapter two and in the previous section. The first stanza alludes to the architectural structures of a *fale* and a *marae*. As Marsh metaphorically inhabits these spaces, we can draw upon Van der Ryn's work on Samoan architecture as a stage upon which *vā* operates. This is clear in the explicitly read line, “I'm a living breathing dwelling of my ancestors PI,” where Marsh invokes *vā* through a metaphor of genealogy. This line also echoes to the ideas put forth in Albert Wendt's famous poem, “Inside Us the Dead,” — the idea that one

carries their ancestors within them, physically and spiritually. In the second stanza, Bennardo's model of radially and Shore's center-periphery notion of space are made visible in the phrase "village is the centre of my world." Incorporating specifically place-based imagery, Marsh uses these stanzas to illustrate the significance of genealogy (a form of relational space), land, and village to Samoan culture.

Continuing to portray intimately cultural identities, Marsh explicitly embodies a space between within the following stanza,

I'm a talanoa PI
I'm a **ta/va** PI
I'm **the space, the time, the tune, the transcending** PI (61)

Here Marsh speaks to Wendt's understanding that the *vā* is "...space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All" (1999, 402). A regionally recognized word denoting a teller of stories, or to converse without concealment (Halapua 2008),¹⁰ talanoa here can be seen to metaphorically illustrate the role of *vā* within the storyteller (Marsh) as a person who relates separate entities and gives them meaning. Connoting the transcendence of space and time, Marsh poetically illustrates Sina Va'ai's description of "the spiral of the va, moving back through the past to the visions of an imagined and hoped for future which encircle us in the now of the present" (Va'ai 1999, 57).

Marsh uses many stanzas in her long poem to provocatively and playfully explore contemporary Pacific Islander identities in the navigation of modern spaces. In the following example we see her engage with a modern object (car) and traditional notions of wayfinding as she calls attention to the space between tradition and modernity and subverts notions of authenticity.

¹⁰ To specify, regionally recognized in the languages of Austronesian-speaking peoples. Tala: talking or telling stories; noa: without concealment. See Sitiveni Halapua's paper, *The Talanoa Process: The Case of Fiji*, (Honolulu: East-West Centre, 2008).

I'm a vaka PI
I'm a star-chanting PI
I'm a navigating by nissan navara PI (63)

In this example, Marsh questions and subverts the spaces between tradition and modernity by drawing upon metaphors for wayfinding and navigation. “Vaka,” (canoe) and “nissan navara” are both vessels – one of the past and one of the present. The phrase “navigating by nissan navara” paints an image of Pacific Islanders successfully navigating the spaces between tradition and modernity, between the labels of “authentic” and “inauthentic.”

Karlo Mila

Karlo Mila is a poet and scholar of Samoan, Tongan, and European descent. She holds a PhD in Sociology from Massey University in which she researched the identities and values of Pasifika youth born in New Zealand. Her PhD work led her to develop Mana Moana, an indigenous approach to wellbeing and intervention that is designed to build cultural knowledge, resiliency, connectedness, strengthen relationships, and enhance wellbeing and mana. Her first collection of poetry, *Dream Fish Floating* (2005), won the NZSA Jesse Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry in 2006. Mila’s second book of poetry, *A Well Written Body* (2008), was written in collaboration with artist Delicia Sampero and presents a stunning blend of written poetry and painted images. In addition to her books, Mila is widely anthologized, contributing to volumes such as *Whetu Moana* and *Niu Voices*. Mila’s poetry largely explores social and psychological issues affecting Pasifika communities in New Zealand. Her writing similarly investigates and reflects upon politics and culture in Tonga and New Zealand. I will be exploring the use of space in her second collection, *A Well Written Body*.

Poem 3 “Inside Us the Dead [the New Zealand-born version]”

Karlo Mila’s “Inside Us the Dead” was written for Albert Wendt and alludes heavily to his poem of the same name. The phrase itself metaphorically describes the relationship that Pasifika persons have with their ancestors and the significance of genealogy in social and cultural life. Mila’s poem draws upon a number of spatial and sociospatial expressions, both explicit and implicit, to describe feelings of disconnect and isolation from her cultural roots. She explains this disconnect as arising from being raised in a colonial system that emphasizes individuality and mind over community and bodily experience or emotion. Mila begins the poem by referencing Wendt’s famous phrase and describing the loneliness she feels at her inability to recall the connections the phrase encompasses. She goes on to explain a break in her *vā* with the past,

I am
bound
this place
time and space
the va with the past is broken.

This stanza carries both explicit and implicit spatialities within its lines. Mila uses explicit spatial terms such as “bound,” “place,” “space,” and “va.” Here she explores feelings of disconnect from her ancestors and with the past. She uses the term “bound” to convey the experience of being stuck or restricted. The notion of being bound to a place by time and space can also be viewed as antithetical to culturally dominant expressions of space and social space as described in Chapter Two. In his work on tauhi *vā*, Ka‘ili draws attention to the interwoven nature of time and space in Oceanic cultures. For Tongans in particular, “the intersection of time in space is communal (collective) and circular” (Ka‘ili 2008, 3). This perception of space and time connotes an open and dynamic quality that is at odds with the notion of bounded-ness. In the poem, Mila explores the idea of being bound to the spatial and temporal qualities of a certain place and time

to illustrate that the sociospatial relationship of vā with the past is interrupted, disconnected, “broken.”

She builds upon this idea of “brokenness” or disconnection by pulling upon space and spatiality in an oceanic metaphor of connection.

I am not capable of thinking
this blood is a ripple
in an ocean
of our blood / I am
the next wave
of a tide that has been coming
for a long time / this vein
leads back to my bones.

Here Mila continues to pull upon space and spatiality to describe feelings of disconnect and interruption of the vā. This example, which I have read as implicit, is read as metaphorically expressing a cyclical or radial sociospatial relationship with the past and her ancestors. Mila uses spatial terms such as “ripple,” “next,” “coming,” and “leads back,” in a general metaphor for genealogical connection. She employs an oceanic metaphor — something in itself that connotes space, motion, movement — to illustrate that she cannot presently imagine the vā with her ancestors, she cannot conceive of the dead inside her.

As the poem draws to a close, Mila explains that the disconnection and interruption of the vā is a result of what she has “learned from books.” She goes on to suggest that bodily experience supersedes logic as she explains how her body remembers the dead inside her, even if there is only silence in her mind.

This is what I have learned from books.
I am an individual.

But I suspect my body remembers you all.
...
yes, every limb,
every bend

**every bone
is a recollection of
who has been before.**

**A memory
of all the bodies that have been
the making of me.**

Inside us the dead. (11)

Raised in the western educational system of New Zealand, Mila was taught to value the concept of the individual over the collective. This emphasis on individuality is also accompanied by the promotion of a clinical quality of knowledge — one in which rationality and logic are held to be more valid than emotion and experience. These stanzas bring the poem explicitly back to *vā* and sociospatial relationships through potent imagery and figurative language of physical and emotional experience. While she does use spatial terms such as “bend,” “before,” “making,” and “inside,” these stanzas are read as explicit for the vivid relational metaphor of “inside us the dead.” The phrase connotes the existence of one’s ancestors, of “all the bodies that have been / the making of me,” as being present in the physicality of one’s body as well as mind and spirit. The idea invoked in these stanzas is quite explicitly relational space, *vā*.

Poem 4 “Poem for Luamanuvao Winnie Laban”

Mila’s “Poem for Luamanuvao Winnie Laban” is a celebration of the accomplishment of the first Pacific female Member of Parliament in New Zealand. Mila uses multiple spatial expressions to illustrate the honor, respect, and strength that Laban inspires among Pasifika women in New Zealand and abroad. Overall, the poem speaks to the importance of Pasifika women in leadership roles, in bringing their respective communities into the future in their own terms, and in spearheading social and political action.

In the beginning of the poem, Mila describes Laban’s presence through the beauty and mana that she carries within her. She goes on to illustrate her prestige through implicit spatial expression that draws upon traditional behaviors of bodies in social spaces.

ancients clear your path
you hold your head high
for every bowed head

As an indigenous woman having navigated the political waters of New Zealand and earned a government title, Laban carries chiefly presence that calls for traditional signs of respect in social interaction. Mila uses spatial terms such as “path,” “hold,” “high,” and “bowed.” These spatial descriptions of posture illustrate bodies in social space as they behave and engage along traditional hierarchical lines. In Samoan culture, respect is expressed in many ways including through the use of special language and in actions of the body (Duranti 1992).

Mila moves from the more technical spatial expression in the previous example to explicit and implicit spatial expression through metaphor. The following stanzas describe the connectedness among Pasifika women through metaphors of genealogy,

**it is a conversation
between ocean and history
genealogy and bone**

it is a thin
umbilical line
through time

**that pulls us
reaching between
destiny and memory**

These stanzas call upon the vā to discuss connectivity through time and space, both through the genealogies of individual persons and through a collective genealogy as Pasifika women. Mila uses the spaces between “ocean and history,” “genealogy and bone,” and “destiny and memory,”

to hint at a new path for Pasifika women inspired by the negotiation of past and present. It is the vā with genealogy, with history, with the ocean, with female mana, that pulls these women together into the future as empowered and influential.

Themes of connectivity and forging new pathways intensify as the poem wraps up. IN the final stanzas, Mila uses metaphors of wayfinding and mapping to illustrate Laban’s role as a leader among Pasifika women.

we are navigating
a new constellation
mapped deep in your bones

an ocean
of islands
united

you dream us
a sea of stars
at our feet (18)

In many Polynesian cultures, women held important political titles in their communities and were often in positions of great power and influence. Today, women continue to be at the forefront of social change and activism in Oceania. The metaphors of navigation and mapping serve to convey the new pathways being forged by Pasifika women leaders and the inspiration they spark among women in their communities and the region of Oceania more broadly. The spatial language and imagery in these stanzas profoundly illustrate the integral role of women leaders to the forging of new paths for Pasifika communities and persons.

Poem 5 “www.TONGA-NOW.to”

“www.TONGA-NOW.to” is a long sequence of poetic stanzas that reflect upon Tonga in a variety of ways. Similar to Marsh’s “Fast Talking PI,” this poem also reflects the structure of

su'ifefiloi, or linked vignettes. Though most sets of stanzas appear to be unrelated, they are woven through with references to each other and with other common elements such as reflections upon family, land, history, memory, and colonialism.

The first set of stanzas in Mila's long poem engage with ideas of vā and connectivity through land and kinship.

I learned
in Tonga
I am kainga

inclusive, open
familiar
connected to
a nation of relatives (51)

Though Mila does not employ the term vā here, I read this example as an explicit expression of vā and tauhi vā. The notion of vā is invoked in this example through the terms “kainga,” “inclusive,” “open,” “familiar,” “connected,” and “relatives,” a few of which are also read as general spatial terms. “Kainga” is the Tongan term for family or relative, encompassing one's immediate and extended kinship relations. The place-based specificity of being “in Tonga” relates to Tuagalu's exploration of vā as it is practiced in Samoan village contexts and in the New Zealand context. Being “in Tonga,” holds the connotation that, while still active and present in the daily lives of Pasifika communities in New Zealand, vā is experienced and practiced differently in the local/village context.

In another set of stanzas, Mila counters her affirmation of connectedness through land and kinship by drawing upon the concept of a space between to convey an ambivalence and precariousness to her identity as a woman of Tongan and Palagi decent.

Just another insider/outsider
walking the thin limestone line
in between

so many keepers
holding keys to the gates

**an ocean between
this home
and the other (52)**

Explicitly illustrating vā in these stanzas with the phrases “in between,” Mila reflects upon being in Tonga as an indigenous woman born and raised in New Zealand through the concept of a space between as it relates to identity. In the first stanza, she speaks to the precariousness of her heritage in general and relational spatial terms. The relationship between insider and outsider is saturated with social, political, and cultural complexities that can convolute the realization and assertion of one’s identity. The last stanza refers both to the physical ocean between Tonga and New Zealand and to the vā between homeland and diaspora, including within it all of the changes and differences between the two.

In the spirit of accepting the differences between the homeland and the diaspora, Mila illustrates what each can offer the other in terms of self-reflection and change. In the following stanzas, she draws upon the spatial concepts of wayfinding and cartography and the practice of navigation to inspire the idea of forging new and creative pathways for Tongan persons and communities in contemporary societies.

let us be navigators
composing
new cognitive maps
locating past
finding future

**let us be keys
opening doors
to each other**

willing to excavate
our own selves

in the spirit of ‘Ahiohio (52–53)

Mila’s repetition of the phrase “let us” hints at the concept of self-determination, encouraging indigenous persons to take the navigation and composition of new frameworks, relationships, and ways of being into their own hands. “Locating past / finding future,” speaks to the conceptualization of time and space in many Polynesian cultures, where the past is conceived of as the time located “in front” with the future as the time located “behind.” These lines suggest that the future is found in part by locating the past. The path ahead is in-between, found through a new way existing with the past and the present or future side-by-side as opposed to a dichotomy of traditional versus modern. The second stanza in this vignette is defined as explicit due to the sociospatial imagery and language. “Opening new doors / to each other” alludes to the nurturing of existing relationships and the forging of new ones. The last lines employ a metaphor of excavation in the encouragement of self-reflection, reflexivity, and critical thinking. ‘Ahiohio is a trickster character alluded to in another set of stanzas. Mila’s allusion to ‘Ahiohio in combination with the spatial metaphor of excavation challenges one to be subversive and to question oneself and dominant hegemonic structures.

Grace Teuila Taylor

Grace Teuila Taylor is a spoken word artist, performer, and youth educator of Samoan and European descent. She holds an M.A. in Youth Development from Auckland University of Technology. In 2008, she won the New Zealand Poetry Idol Award for her performance and youth development workshops. Taylor is the co-founder of the South Auckland Poets Collective (SAPC), an organization that promotes spoken word poetry as a tool for social change, particularly among New Zealand’s Pasifika youth. Her first collection of poetry, *Afakasi Speaks*,

was published in 2013. In 2015, she debuted her one-woman show, *My Own Darling*, with the Auckland Theatre Company. Taylor is currently working on her second collection of poetry. Predominantly a spoken word poet, her written poetry continues to carry the rhythmic and powerful qualities of her performances. As the title of her first collection elucidates, much of Taylor's poetry navigates and reclaims the spaces of her Afakasi identity. In her process of reclaiming a contested term, space, and identity and giving it power and voice, she has become an inspiration to many Pasifika persons of mixed heritages.

Poem 6 "I am the Va"

"I am the Va" is explicitly a poem about the space between. Taylor reflects upon her Afakasi identity through contemporary understandings of vā. She introduces the poem with Wendt's often-cited description of the vā. The quote is significant in its appearance here as Wendt's definition emphasizes meaning and substance over the idea of empty space. Vā is the "Unity-that-is-All," which becomes particularly important as the concept relates to the realization and remapping of identity. The remapping of Afakasi identity is the main function of this poem. Taylor takes negative and stereotypical perspectives of hybridity and reworks them by mapping herself into the space between.

The poem begins with an explicit reference to the vā in a metaphor that compares the author's own being to the concept of the space between.

I am the va
so cut me up
scatter me among yourselves
and taste the bitter sweetness
of the space between (26)

Taylor immediately offers herself up to the reader, inviting them to experience and understand the vā as she does. The line, "so cut me up," connotes being split in many different parts,

creating the spaces between that Taylor inhabits. Though the imagery is jarring, we see the positive understandings of being whole from many parts as the poem progresses. “Scatter me among yourselves,” demonstrates the relational nature of vā space.

Towards the middle of the poem, we see Taylor’s holistic identity through vā starting to take shape. She writes,

watered down cultures
create a va
between knowing and being unknown.
My va
is neither here
nor there
not brown
nor white
it belongs to nothing
and exists in everything. (28)

Much of the first portion of Taylor’s poem explores both colonial and indigenous views of Afakasi identity, illustrating the condemnation felt from either side for not being “pure,” “whole,” or “authentic,” and the accompanying pressure to choose only one identity. “You want me to choose / to condemn and stone the other side of me / making me believe / one half is a victim” (ln. 24–27). In the explicit stanza above, Taylor transitions towards inhabiting the vā space and giving strength and power to Afakasi identity through her understanding of vā. She remaps identity through vā to illustrate its holistic and encompassing nature. The idea of existing as the space between becomes not a battle between identity labels, a need to be only “one thing,” or a lack of belonging, but an identity that “exists in everything.”

As Taylor ends the poem, her new Afakasi identity is realized and offered back to the reader.

I am the space
between ignorance and acceptance.
So cut me up

**scatter me among yourselves
and use me
to fill the gaps (29)**

In this final stanza, we see the repetition of the lines “So cut me up / scatter me among yourselves,” that she opened with at the start. Here the line, “scatter me among yourselves,” conjures potent spatial imagery that relates to the idea of *vā* as a space that is considered to be an object itself. She completes the idea of being split into many parts, intimating that the space between is not empty space, but a space that can “fill the gaps” with substance and meaning. Being “the space between ignorance and acceptance,” signifies that an identity within the *vā* is not found by ignoring one’s blended heritage, or by accepting what others declare one should be, but by accepting the spaces between all genealogies. By the end, she has successfully crafted a new Afakasi identity through the *vā*.

Poem 7 “Gift”

This poem is the last in Taylor’s collection and is written for her son, Darae. She explores the physical and emotional impact that her relationship with him has had upon her, drawing upon multiple spatial concepts to do so. In particular, Taylor calls upon the concept of *vā* as relational space. In this poem, she speaks intimately to the space between mother and child and the nurturing of that special relationship. Taylor begins this dedication to her son by employing spatial imagery to describe the experience of being pregnant, the physical affects of the *vā* with her son.

He scarred her before he was even born
stretched her belly into a universe
until there was no elasticity left
carving pink shiny valleys (49)

She paints the growth of her belly with spatial terms such as “stretched,” “universe,” and “elasticity.” She further expands upon the idea of scarring by comparing stretch marks to the “carving of pink shiny valleys.” The imagery and metaphors of scarring and bodily distortion serve to illustrate the physical impact that her relationship with her son has had on her. It is a physical illustration of the *vā* between mother and son, one that leaves its mark on the body before and after birth.

In the following lines, Taylor explicitly uses the term “*va*” and draws a comparison between this concept and the concept of the void.

he sings into the void
to the young *va* inside her
an empty echo once hiding
a sacred scarring
but he cuddled that empty echo
and swallowed it whole (50)

Many cultures in Oceania understand the void to be a concept of potential as opposed to absence. Here Taylor speaks to the concept of potential, both the potential of her son as a new life force and of their new relationship. The implicit lines, “an empty echo once hiding / a sacred scarring,” imply a loneliness that Taylor felt before her son was born – a loneliness she didn’t know existed, a loneliness in hiding. She explicitly invokes the relational aspects of *vā* in the lines, “cuddled that empty echo / and swallowed it whole.” The nurturing of relationships, especially one as significant and intimate and mother and child, can be seen in the imagery of her son “swallowing” the emptiness inside her.

This last stanza is not actually a part of the poem, “Gift,” but rather serves as an epilogue of sorts for Taylor’s whole collection. Here she comes full circle, remapping her identity into being through poetry.

I have always lived

whole in many parts
spoke myself into existence
shouted
fought
danced these words
till there were none left
till I existed
into just
being (51)

The first three lines are particularly poignant in relating the *vā* as a holistic and encompassing space. The idea of *vā* as the space between two things, one that is cyclical and dynamic, connotes an idea of wholeness out of many parts. This brief epilogue speaks to Taylor's main goal and theme for her book, the remapping and recreation of Afakasi identity through finding the space between. The terms "being," and "existence" in conjunction with the idea of wholeness relates back to Wendt's description of the *vā* as the space that gives meaning in the Unity-that-is-All.

Summative Analysis

In the poetry of the three women above, we can see concepts of space and cultured spatialities made visible in a variety of ways. While each woman inhabits a distinct writing style and has particular trends in themes, they are brought together in the ways they engage with concepts of space, especially the concept of *vā* and social relations. Connections are also drawn between the overlapping of certain topics such as culture, identity, belonging, connectedness, and womanhood/motherhood. Using a blend of figurative language, imagery, repetition, and rhythm, these poets write from, around, about, and as, a space between.

While these poets illustrate *vā* with figurative language, powerful imagery, and other poetic devices, the space between is also activated structurally in the arrangement of text on the page. In "Fast Talking PI," for example, the alternation in theme of each stanza is a way in

which Marsh structurally represents the spaces between in her poem. Taylor's "I am the Va" brings into view the concept of *vā* structurally by spacing each line opposite from the one above and below (see Appendix). Their uses of indigenous Pacific languages such as Samoan, Māori, and Tongan, in juxtaposition with the colonial languages, English and French, is a common thread throughout the poetry of each woman and serves to illustrate a space between. Marsh's "Fast Talking PI," and Mila's "www.TONGA-NOW.to," both reflect *su'ifefiloi*, a traditional Samoan method of storytelling that holistically incorporates linked vignettes. This structure relates to the concept of *vā* as we have seen it explored in the examples above in that *vā* connotes a holistic relationship between multiple parties/parts.

Perhaps one of the most interesting ways in which these poets engage with *vā* is in their use of the concept to explore, describe, and map new identities for themselves and for Pasifika persons in contemporary society. As Pasifika women with richly blended heritages, these poets intimately write themselves into the *vā*, the concept of a space between. Their poetry also strongly resonates with Afakasi voice, a contested place of being against its very real and palpable existence. Applicable to writers and literary works throughout the region, yet particularly illustrated within the poems explored in this chapter, Sina Va'ai remarks:

The spaces in-between, the *va*, operates not only at a physical and relational level but also metaphorically to describe post-colonial situations where Pacific island peoples, especially creative writers who work within the realm of the imagination, find themselves negotiating spaces between and across different cultural worlds, redefining and repositioning themselves in the process. (Va'ai 1999, 47)

Similarly, Bernida Webb-Binder draws upon a lecture given by Wendt entitled "Pacific Maps and Fiction(s)," in explaining that, "The *vā* constitutes a realm where personal and cultural

stories of identity through space and time are imparted... the vā represents a space in which identity can be mapped” (2009, 27).¹¹ In this description of vā, Webb-Binder clearly explains the relationship between vā and identity, explaining its potential as a space for the exploration of identities and/or the creation of new ones. In a related vein, Leanne Clayton draws directly upon Wendt’s description of vā in her thesis for her Master of Art & Design as she explicates of the concept as consisting:

of relationships between people and things, unspoken expectations and obligations: the inherent and changeable patterns, of obligations and expectations between people and their environment. The va space can be viewed as the stage upon which all patterns and motifs carry meaning. How the patterns and motifs change meanings are subject to other elements in the va. (Clayton 2007, 6)

Clayton’s expanded illustration of vā helps us to see the concept as one that holds potential and meaning. Rather than being fixed in stone, the vā space is ever shifting and negotiable.

All three poets illustrate changing identities and meanings within and of the vā. Their identity work with vā serves to strongly affirm, “there is nothing shameful about having two or more identities, or an identity that is composite of multiple cultural backgrounds” (Hereniko 1994, 150), a concept antithetical to the colonial racialization of indigenous identities through terms such as “half-caste.” In the process of exploring and mapping identity through vā, these women relay an encouraging message to other peoples of the Pacific, one that echoes Hereniko’s assertion that embodying dynamic identities that are in a state of flux is not something to feel unnatural or shameful about. On the contrary, in a world increasingly globalized by the confluences of multiple cultures, peoples, and ideas, traversing contemporary spaces from a

¹¹ See Wendt’s essay “Pacific Maps and Fiction(s): A Personal Journey,” in *Asian and Pacific Inscriptions: Identities, Ethnicities, Nationalities*, ed. Suvendrini Perera (Ann Arbor: Meridian, 1995).

holistic perspective of the *vā* gives Pasifika persons distinct advantages in negotiating spaces, places, and identities within a spiral of continuously changing contexts and meanings.

In their engagement with spatial concepts, particularly *vā* and the practice of *tauhi vā/teu le vā*, these poets contribute to the “unwriting” of Oceania. Writing serves as a method of “unwriting,” or un-doing, what has been over-written about Oceania during historical and ongoing processes of colonialism. In addition to its function as an aid to processing thought and emotions, the written word has long been used as a tool for social and political resistance. Writing is expression; it is being able to critically examine self and other in a process that works through trauma and enables self-determination. The overwriting of Oceania has everything to do with space. In order to write over an Oceania already in existence and flourishing within itself, imperial powers created the region as *tabula rasa* – a blank slate with which the powers could inscribe their own colonial stories (Winduo 2000). In order to “unwrite,” Oceania’s creative and scholarly minds must build an arsenal of their own tools in addition to understanding how to use the tools of the colonizer. This includes a weaving together of indigenous and colonial languages and of indigenous and foreign epistemologies and ontologies. Placing centrality on the use of indigenous languages and epistemologies enables Oceanic persons to write and read about experiences of being in the world in their own cultural terms.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a trans-disciplinary analysis of space and the concept of *vā* in the works of three female Pasifika creative writers. The examples explored within have demonstrated that Pasifika creative writing is woven through with spatial concepts, allusions, and metaphors that bring new meanings to their poets’ works and subject matter. Writers and poets

are increasingly engaging with vā and drawing upon sociospatiality in various ways to touch upon major themes and issues facing Oceanic persons today. In exploring contemporary understandings of vā, we find that it is a space negotiated, interpretive, and shifting shape and function. The concept of vā and other cultural spatialities as explored within these poems points to spatial and relational awareness, to complexities and ambivalence in relationships, and elucidates space made present and active in Pasifika creative writing.

CONCLUSION. COMING FULL CIRCLE

The concept of space is foundational to human understanding of being and experience in the world. In Oceania, space and spatiality are understood and expressed in a number of ways. Recent years have seen an explosion in scholarly works on spatial concepts in the region. Similarly, literary and creative works have been increasingly drawing upon space to express and relate emotion and experience in addition to subverting entrenched colonial spatial structures and notions of space. The Samoan and Tongan concept of *vā*, which denotes a space between, has become a central focus in the exploration of relational space and socio-spatial relations in Polynesia. In these writers' various uses of space, they reclaim indigenous spatial concepts, expressions, and cultural spatialities, giving other Oceanic writers and readers new ways to engage with their works in cultural terms.

As we saw in chapter one, foreign and colonial representations of Oceanic places and peoples have long dominated colonial literature, scholarly conversation, and popular global understandings of the region. When Europeans and Americans entered the region, they saw a blank slate in which they could inscribe their own colonial stories, fantasies, and dynamics of power. Spatially, the region has been conceived of as empty and isolated, a scatter of small islands flung across a great expanse of Ocean. Literature and creative writing have served as powerful tools in the Pacific for the resistance of colonial and neocolonial structures and the reclamation of indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and identities.

The significant relationship between language and cognition enables the conceptual and cognitive exploration of space as well as provides a tool with which to analyze a number of other general spatial models for physical space. In other words, exploring space through language helps us to understand how space is conceptualized in other domains of cognition and culture

and to investigate how these concepts of space may govern cultural behaviors. The study of village spatial layout and architectural structures has similarly allowed for the examination and description of cultural spatial models and spatialities. As we saw through Bennardo and Van der Ryn's arguments in particular, general spatial schemas in Tongan and Samoan culture point to a dominantly radial organization of space, both conceptually and physically. Contrary to western understandings of space as bounded and restricted, the radial nature of space in Tonga and Samoa centers on openness and visibility.

While generally a Samoan and Tongan term for space, *vā* holds within its letters a world of meaning and potential. *Vā* is the space between, a relational space between peoples and things. In traditional cultural and village contexts, the concept is understood as a space integral to social structure — entailing certain expectations, behaviors, and obligations — and that binds the cohesiveness of community. In light of an ever-globalizing world, where migration and diaspora have become the norm for many contemporary Pasifika persons, concepts of space, place, and *vā* find creative (re)articulations in the context of a new Oceanic mobility. Though the relationships and meanings shift shape, form, and function across space, *vā* remains an important aspect of maintaining relationships through distance and time and in the formulation of Samoan and Tongan identity. In exploring contemporary understandings of *vā*, we find that it is a space negotiated, interpretive, and shifting shape and function. It is understood as cyclical and radial, emphasizes a contextually changing meaning and substance to relationships.

I have shown that *vā* can be used as a culturally grounded framework for doing critical scholarship with Pasifika poetry — scholarship that helps us read space, place, and identity. More than being prominent in writings throughout the region, *vā* can be applied as a methodological approach to reading Tongan and Samoan literature in ways that reveal the

significance of spatial concepts and cultured spatialities in writings that embody these concepts but do not explicitly refer to them. While this work as it stands thus far is quite poly-centric due to the intensity of spatial topics being explored out of this region, I believe further comparative work with similar notions of space will find the concept of *vā* useful for thinking across the region as a whole.

Given the vast nature of *vā* and spatial concepts in general, the potential for further development and work with the concept is seemingly endless. This particular work can be built upon in a number of ways as the concept is explored through writing. One topic of interest is the exploration of *vā* and spatial culture in the traditional poetic arts of these cultures, such as in Samoan oratory, Tahitian *'ōrero*, or Tongan *punake*. The concept can be further expanded on and applied in the fields of anthropology, sociology, social work, psychology, and potentially political science and law.

Pacific poetry is a wonderful avenue for illustrating how Pacific Islanders have been agentive in the reclaiming of self-representation and for exploring how contentious concepts such as culture and identity in the contemporary Pacific are navigated, articulated, and expressed in a variety of ways, including the ways in which concepts of space and a space between figure into these explorations. In drawing upon concepts of space, particularly *vā*, writers are contributing to the unwriting of Oceania by reclaiming indigenous and culturally situated spatialities. The connection between representation and discourses of knowledge and power potentially amplify the significance of Oceanic self-representation, reclamation, and self-determination through writing.

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